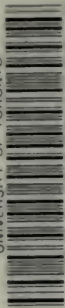


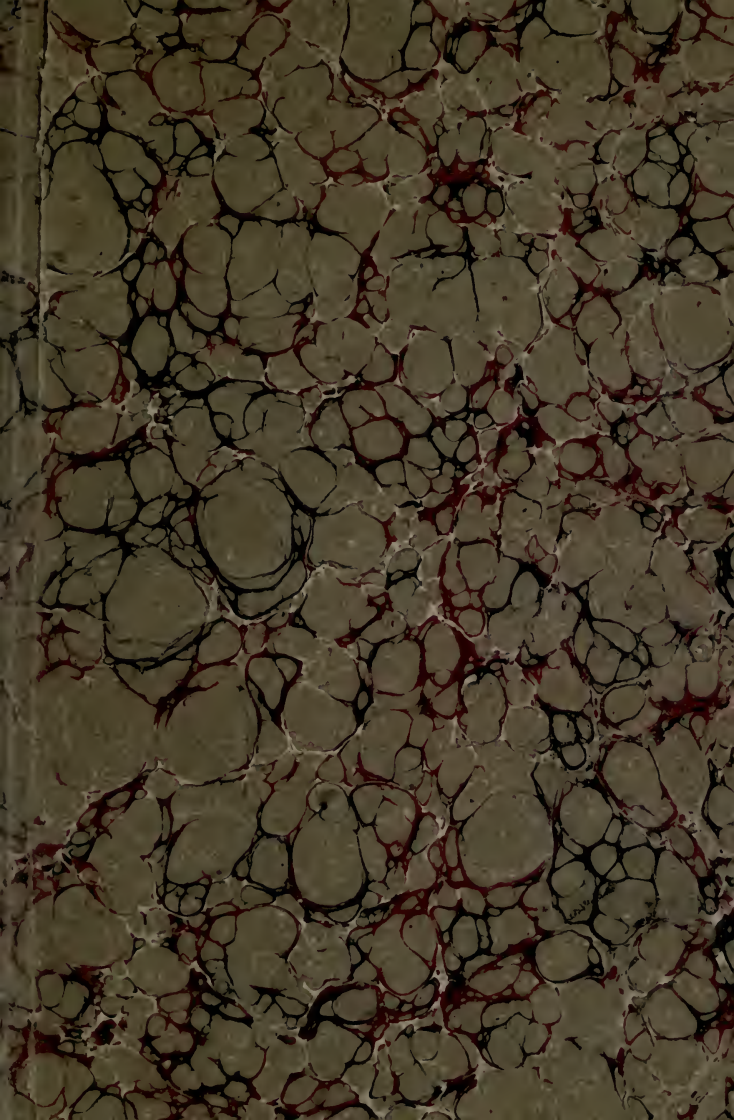
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Newton

THE BERTRAMS.

A NOVEL.

BY

ANTHONY TROLLOPE,

AUTHOR OF "DOCTOR THORNE," ETC. ETC.

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IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

LEIPZIG

BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

1859.

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THE BERTRAMS.

VOL. II.

CHAPTER I.

Three Letters.

GEORGE BERTRAM, as we have seen, returned to town after his interview with Miss Waddington without seeing his father. Neither to his mind nor to hers was any comfort brought by that grammatical rule in which Miss Baker had found so much consolation. For both of them the separation was now a thing completed. Each knew enough of the other to feel that that other's pride was too high to admit of his or her making any first fresh advancement.

George endeavoured to persuade himself that he was glad of what he had done; but he failed utterly. He had loved her, did love her dearly, and found that he never valued her as he did now. She had behaved shamefully to him. He said that to himself over and over again. But what had that to do with love? He did not love her the less because she had made public his letter, the secrets of his heart, that which should have been as private as the passion of her own bosom. He could not love her less because she talked over these with another man, however much he might feel himself bound to cast her off for doing so. So he shut

himself up in his chambers; wrote pages for his new book that were moody, misanthropical, and unbelieving; and on the whole was very unhappy.

Nor was Caroline much better able to bear the shock; though with her there was more propriety of demeanour under the blow, and a better mental control. That was of course, for she was a woman — and being a woman, she had to take care that the world knew nothing of what was going on within her heart.

For two days she remained perfectly calm. She allowed herself no vent whatever for her feelings. She made the breakfast; sat close at her tambour frame, or more frequently close at her book; read aloud to her aunt; went out and made calls; and attended minutely to all the ordinary occupations of her life. Her aunt never once caught her with a tear in her eye, never saw her sitting thoughtful, unoccupied, with her head leaning on her arm. Had she done so, she would have spoken to her about George. As it was, she did not dare to do so. There was during these days, and indeed outwardly for many days afterwards, an iron stubbornness about Caroline which frightened Miss Baker and altogether prevented her from alluding to the possibility of a reconciliation. Nothing could be more gentle, nay, more obedient, than Caroline's manner and way with her aunt at this time; she yielded to her in everything; but her aunt perceived that all utterance as to the one subject which was nearest to both their hearts was effectually forbidden.

Caroline allowed two whole days to pass before she would allow herself to think of what had taken place. She read through half the nights so as to secure sleep

for herself when she lay down. But on the third morning she opened her desk in her own room, and sat down and wrote to Adela Gauntlet.

“Littlebath, Friday.

“Dearest Adela,

“An occurrence has taken place of which I have not yet allowed myself to think, and which I shall first realize and bring home to myself in writing to you; and yet before it happened I had thought of it very often — even talked of it with aunt Mary; and sometimes thought of it and talked of it as though it were almost desirable. I wish I may teach myself so to think of it now.

“All is over between me and Mr. Bertram. He came down here on Tuesday and told me so. I do not blame him. Nor can I blame him; not at least for what he has done, though his manner in doing it was very harsh.

“I would tell you all if I could, but it is so hard in a letter. I wish you were here. But no; you would drive me mad by advice which I could not, would not take. Last summer, when I was so unhappy in London, aunt and I had some conversation about our affairs with a person there. Mr. Bertram heard of this while he was in Paris. He did not approve of it; and he wrote me, oh! such a letter. I should have thought it impossible for him to have written such words to me. I was mad with grief, and I showed this letter to the same person. There, Adela, I must tell you all. It was Mr. Harcourt, George’s intimate friend. George particularly begged me in that letter not to talk to him any more; and yet I did this. But I was half frenzied with grief; and why was I to obey one who had no right to command me,

and who made his commands so harsh? His request would have been a law to me.

"But I know I was wrong, Adela. I have known it every minute since I showed the letter. I was sure I was wrong, because I could not tell him that I had done so. It made me afraid of him, and I never before was afraid of any one. Well; I did not tell him, and now he has found it out. I would not condescend to ask him how; but I think I know. This at least I know, that he did so in no ignoble way, by no mean little suspicions. He did not seek to discover it. It had come upon him like a great blow, and he came at once to me to learn the truth. I told him the truth, and this has been the end of it.

"Now you know it all; all except his look, his tone, his manner. These I cannot tell you — cannot describe. I seem now to know him better, understand him more thoroughly than ever I did. He is a man for a tender-hearted woman to love to madness. And I — Ah! never mind, dearest; I think — nay, I am sure I can get over it. You never could. Yes; he is a man for a woman to worship; but yet he is so rough, so stern, so harsh in his anger. He does not measure his words at all. I don't think he knows the kind of things he says. And yet the while his heart is so tender, so soft; I could see it all. But he gives one no time to acknowledge it — at least, he gave me none. Were you ever scolded, upbraided, scorned by a man you loved? and did you ever feel that you loved him the better for all his scorn? I felt so. I could so feel, though it was impossible to confess it. But he was wrong there. He should not have upbraided me unless he intended to forgive. I think I have read that it is not kingly for a king to receive a

suppliant for pardon unless he intends to forgive. I can understand that. If his mind was made up to condemn me altogether, he should have written and so have convicted me. But in such matters he considers nothing. He acts altogether from the heart.

"I am, however, sure of this, dear Adela, that it is all better as it is. There; with you, I will scorn all falsehood. For once, and, if possible, only for once, the truth shall stand out plainly. I love him as I never, never can love another man. I love him as I never thought to love any man. I feel at this moment as though I could be content to serve him as his menial. But she who is his wife must so serve him — and how long should I be content to do so?

"But yet I wrong him in this. He is most imperious, absolutely imperious — must be altogether master in all things; that is what I mean. But to one who loved him well, and would permit this, he would be the tenderest, gentlest, most loving of masters. He would not permit the wind to blow too harshly on his slave. I have loved him well, but I could not permit this. I could not permit it for a whole lifetime; and therefore it is well that we have parted.

"You will hardly believe this of him, for he seems in general company to be so good-humoured. With people that are indifferent to him, no man is less exacting; but with those near to him in life he never bends, not an inch. It is this that has estranged his uncle from him. But yet how noble, how grand a man he is! To all pecuniary considerations he is absolutely indifferent. A falsehood, even a concealment is impossible with him. Who that either of us know is equal to or approaches him in talent? He is brave, generous, simple-hearted

beyond all that I have ever known. Who is like him? And yet —. To you, once for all, I say all this. But, Adela, do not take advantage of me. You ought to know that were it not all over, I should not say it.

“I wish that you had been betrothed to him. Oh, how I wish it! You are not worldly, as I am; not stubborn, nor proud of heart. Not that you have not pride, a truer, better pride. You could have brought yourself to submit, to be guided, to be a secondary portion of himself — and then how he would have loved you!

“I have often wondered that he should have thought of me. No two persons were ever less suited for each other. I knew that when I accepted him, foolishly accepted him because I liked him, and now I am rightly punished. But, ah! that he should be punished too! for he is punished. I know he loves me; though I know nothing would now induce him to take me. And I know this also, that nothing — nothing — nothing would induce me to be so taken. Not if he were begging — as he never will beg to any woman. I would be too true to him, too true to what I now know to be his happiness.

“As for me, I dare say I shall marry yet. I have some little money, and that sort of manner which many men think most becoming for the top of their tables and the management of their drawing-rooms. If I do, there shall be no deceit. I certainly shall not marry for love. Indeed, from early years I never thought it possible that I should do so. I have floundered unawares into the pitfall, and now I must flounder out. I have always thought that there was much in the world well worth the living for besides love. Ambition needs not be a closed book for women, unless they choose to close it.

I do not see but that a statesman's wife may stand nearly as high in the world as the statesman stands himself. Money, position, rank are worth the having; at any rate, the world thinks so, or why else do they so scramble for them? I will not scramble for them; but if they come in my way, why, I may probably pick them up.

"This will be odious to you. I know it will. A potato-paring and a true heart is your beau-ideal for this world. I am made of viler stuff. I have had the true heart, and see what I have made of it!

"You will answer me, of course. I could find it in my heart to beg you not to do so, only now I could not afford to think that you were cold to me. I know you will write to me; but, pray, pray do not advise me to submit myself to him under the idea that a reconciliation is possible. A reconciliation is not possible, and I will not submit myself to him. I know I speak the truth when I say that our marriage is not to be desired. I acknowledge his merits; I confess his superiority: but these very merits, this great superiority, make it impossible that I should suit him as a wife.

"On that matter I have made up my mind. I will never marry him. I only say this to deter you from wasting your energy in endeavouring to bring us again together. I know very well that I shall not be asked — that his mind is equally firm.

"And now, good-bye. You know all my heart, and, as far as I can tell them, all my feelings. A long letter from you will give me much delight if you will comply with my earnest request.

"This letter has been a very selfish one, for it is all

about myself. But you will forgive that now. God bless you.

“Your affectionate friend,

“CAROLINE.

“P. S. I have said nothing to aunt Mary, except to tell her that the match is broken off; and she has kindly — so kindly, abstained from any questions.”

Adela Gauntlet was all alone when she received this letter at West Putford. In these days she generally was all alone. That she should answer it, answer it at once, was of course certain. But how should she answer it? Her mind was soon made up, with many tears, partly for her friend and partly for herself. Caroline's happiness had been, nay, probably still was, in her own hands, and she was going to throw it away. For herself, happiness had never been within her own reach. “Be his menial servant!” she repeated to herself, as she read and re-read the letter. “Yes; of course she should if he required it. It would be for her to make him know that she could be something better to him!”

Her judgment was soon formed. She condemned Caroline altogether on Caroline's own showing. In such matters one woman almost always condemns another. She took no notice of the allusion to Bertram's harshness; she almost overlooked the generosity with which her friend had written of the lover who had rejected her. She only saw Caroline's great fault. How could she have brought herself to talk with Mr. Harcourt — with a young unmarried man — on such a subject? And, oh! how was it possible that she could have brought herself to show him such a letter? She wrote her answer that same night, as follows: —

"West Putford, Saturday night.

"Dearest Caroline,

"Your letter has made me most unhappy. I almost think that I have suffered more in reading it than you did in writing it. You have made a request to me with which I cannot, will not comply. I can only write to you the truth, as I think it. What else can I write? How can I frame my letter in any other way?

"But I will acknowledge this, that it is useless for me to suggest anything to you as to your own happiness. But there is more than that to be thought of. There is that which you are bound to think of before that. Whether you have broken with Mr. Bertram or not, there has been that between you which makes it your duty in this matter to regard his happiness as your first consideration.

"Dearest, dearest Caroline, I fear that you have been wrong throughout in this affair. I do not dread your being angry with me for saying so. In spite of what you say, I know your heart is so warm that you would be angry with me if I blamed him. You were wrong in talking to Mr. Harcourt; doubly wrong in showing to him that letter. If so, is it not your business to put that wrong right? to remedy if you can the evil that has come of it?

"I feel quite sure that Mr. Bertram loves you with all his heart, and that he is one who will be wretched to his heart's core at losing what he loves. It is nothing to say that it is he who has rejected you. You understand his moods; even I understand them well enough to know in what temper that last visit was made. Answer this to yourself. Had you then asked his pardon, do you not know that he would have given it you with

a rapture of joy? Do you not feel that he was then at that moment only too anxious to forgive? And are you, you who have sinned against him, are you to let him break his heart against a rock because you are too proud to own to him the fault which you acknowledge to yourself? Is that your return for the love which he has borne you?

"You wish that he had loved me, you say. Do not wish away the sweetest gift which God can give to a woman in this world. It was not possible that I should have loved him. It is quite impossible now that you should not do so.

"Try to think in this affair with severity towards yourself, and ask yourself what justice requires of you. My advice to you is to write to him. Tell him, with frank humility and frank affection, that you ask his pardon for the injury that you had done him. Say no more than that. If it shall still please him to consider that the engagement between you is at an end, such an acknowledgment from you will in no way constrain him to violate that resolve. But if he relent — and I know that this other 'if' will be the true one — the first train that runs will bring him back to you; and he, who I am sure is now wretched, will again be happy; ah! happier than he has been for so long.

"I implore you to do this, not for your own sake, but for his. You have done wrong, and it is he that should be considered. You will think what will be your sufferings if he does not notice your letter; should he not be softened by your humility. But you have no right to think of that. You have done him wrong, and you owe him reparation. You cannot expect that you should do wrong and not suffer.

"I fear I have written savagely. Dear, dear Caroline, come to me here, and I will not talk savagely. I too am not happy. I have not my happiness so much in my own hands as you have. Do come to me. Papa will be delighted to see you. I am sure Miss Baker could spare you for a fortnight. Do, do come to

"Your true friend,

"ADELA."

There was much of craft in Adela Gauntlet's letter; but if craft could ever be pardonable, then was hers pardonable in this case. She had written as though her sole thought was for Mr. Bertram. She had felt that in this way only could she move her friend. In her mind — Adela's mind — it was a settled conviction, firm as rocks, that as Caroline and Mr. Bertram loved each other, neither of them could be happy unless they were brought together. How could she best aid in doing this? That had been her main thought, and so thinking, she had written this letter, filled to overflowing with womanly craft.

And her craft was nearly successful; but only nearly; that was all. Caroline sat in her solitude and cried over this letter till her eyes were weary with tears. She strove, strove, valiantly to take her friend's advice; strove to do so in spite of all her former protestations. She got pen and ink and sat herself down to write the letter of humiliation; but the letter would not be written; it was impossible to her; the words would not form themselves: for two days she strove, and then she abandoned the task as for ever hopeless. And thus this third short epistle must be laid before the reader.

"I cannot do it, Adela. It is not in my nature. You

could do it, because you are good, and high, and pure. Do not judge others by yourself. I cannot do it, and will not madden myself by thinking of it again. Good-bye, God bless you. If I could cure your grief I would come to you; but I am not fit. God in his own time will cure yours, because you are so pure. I could not help you, nor you me; I had better, therefore, remain where I am. A thousand thousand kisses. I love you so now, because you and you only know my secret. Oh, if you should not keep it! But I know you will; you are so true."

This was all. There was no more; no signature. "May God help them both!" said Adela as she read it.

CHAPTER II.

Bidding High.

I HOPE to press all the necessary records of the next three or four months into a few pages. A few pages will be needed in order that we may know how old Mr. Bertram behaved when he heard of this rupture between his nephew and his granddaughter.

George, when he found himself back in town, shut himself up in his chambers and went to work upon his manuscript. He, too, recognized the necessity of labour, in order that the sorrow within his heart might thus become dull and deadened.

But it was deep, true sorrow — to him at some periods almost overwhelming: he would get up from his desk during the night, and throwing himself on the sofa, lie there writhing in his agony. While he had known that Caroline was his own, he had borne his love more patiently than does many a man of less intensity of

feeling. He had been much absent from her; had not abridged those periods of absence as he might have done; had, indeed, been but an indifferent lover if eagerness and *empressement* are necessary to a lover's character. But this had arisen from two causes, and lukewarmness in his love had not been either of them. He had been compelled to feel that he must wait for the fruition of his love; and therefore had waited. And then he had been utterly devoid of any feeling of doubt in her he loved. She had decided that they should wait. And so he had waited as secure away from her as he could have been with her.

But his idea of a woman's love, of the purity and sanctity of her feelings, had been too high. He had left his betrothed to live without him, frequently without seeing him for months, and yet he had thought it utterly impossible that she should hold confidential intercourse with another man. We have seen how things fell out with him. The story need not be repeated. He was shocked, outraged, torn to the heart's core; but he loved as warmly, perhaps more warmly than ever.

What he now expected it is impossible to describe; but during that first fortnight of seclusion in the midst of London, he did half expect, half hope that something would turn up. He waited and waited, still assuring himself that his resolve was inviolable, and that nothing should make him renew his engagement: and yet he hoped for something. There was a weight on his heart which then might have been removed.

But no sign was made. We have seen how Adela, who felt for him, had striven in vain. No sign was made, and at the end of the fortnight he roused himself, shook his mane, and asked himself what he should do.

In the first place, there should be no mystery. There were those among his friends to whom he had felt himself bound to speak of his engagement when it was made, and to them he felt himself bound to communicate the fact now that it was unmade. He wrote accordingly to Arthur Wilkinson; he wrote to Harcourt, and determined to go down to Hadley. He would have written also to his uncle, but he had never done so, and hardly knew how to commence a correspondence.

His letter to Harcourt had been a difficult task to him, but at last it was finished in a very few words. He did not at all refer to what had taken place at Richmond, or allude in any way to the nature of the cause which had produced this sudden disruption. He merely said that his engagement with Miss Waddington was broken off by mutual consent, and that he thought it best to let his friend know this in order that mistakes and consequent annoyance might be spared. This was very short; but, nevertheless, it required no little effort in its accomplishment.

On the very next day Harcourt came to him at his chambers. This surprised him much. For though he had no intention of absolutely quarrelling with the rising legal luminary, he had taught himself to look upon any renewal of their real intimacy as out of the question. They were sailing on essentially different tacks in their life's voyages. They had become men of different views in everything. Their hours, their habits, their friends, their ways were in all things unlike. And then, moreover, Bertram no longer liked the successful barrister. It may be said that he had learned positively to dislike him. It was not that Harcourt had caused this wound which was tearing his heart to pieces; at least, he thought

that it was not that. He declared to himself a dozen times that he did not blame Harcourt. He blamed no one but Caroline — her and himself. Nor was it because the man was so successful. Bertram certainly did not envy him. But the one as he advanced in manhood became worldly, false, laborious, exact, polished, rich, and agreeable among casual acquaintances. The other was the very reverse. He was generous and true; but idle — idle at any rate for any good; he was thoughtful, but cloudy in his thoughts, indifferent as to society, poor, much poorer than he had been as a lad at college, and was by no means gifted with the knack of making pretty conversation for the world at large. Of late whenever they had met, Harcourt had said something which grated painfully on the other's inner sensibilities, and hence had arisen this dislike.

But the dislike seemed to be all on one side. Harcourt now was a man whose name was frequent in other men's mouths. Great changes were impending in the political world, and Harcourt was one of the men whom the world regarded as sure to be found swimming on the top of the troubled waters. The people of the Battersea Hamlets were proud of him, the House of Commons listened to him, writers employed him, and men potent in the Treasury chambers, and men also who hoped to be potent there, courted and flattered him.

All this made him busy; but, nevertheless, he found time to come to his dear friend.

"I am sorry for this; very sorry," he said, as he put out his hand in a manner that seemed to his friend to be almost patronizing. "Can nothing be done?"

"Nothing at all," said Bertram, rather curtly.

"Can I do nothing?" said the cunning legal man.

"Nothing at all," said Bertram, very curtly.

"Ah, I wish I could. I should be so happy to rearrange matters if it be at all possible." There are some men who are so specially good at rearranging the domestic disarrangements of others.

"It is an affair," said Bertram, "which admits of no interference. Perhaps it is unnecessary that I should have troubled you on the matter at all, for I know that you are very busy; but —"

"My dear fellow — busy, indeed! What business could be more important to me than my friend's happiness?"

"But," continued George, "as the affair had been talked over so often between you and me, I thought it right to tell you."

"Of course — of course; and so nothing can be done. Ah, well! it is very sad, very. But I suppose you know best. She is a charming girl. Perhaps rather —"

"Harcourt, I had rather not hear a word spoken about her in any way; but certainly not a word in her dispraise."

"Dispraise; no, certainly not. It would be much easier to praise her. I always admired her very much; very much indeed."

"Well, there's an end of it."

"So be it. But I am sorry, very sorry; heartily sorry. You are a little rough now, Bertram. Of course I see that you are so. Every touch goes against the hair with you; every little blow hits you on the raw. I can understand that; and therefore I do not mind your roughness. But we are old friends, you know. Each is perhaps the other's oldest friend; and I don't mean to

lose such a friend because you have a shade of the misanthrope on you just now. You'll throw the bile off in another essay, rather more bitter than the last, and then you'll be all right."

"I'm right enough now, thank you. Only a man can't always be in high spirits. At least, some men cannot."

"Well, God bless you, old fellow. I know you want me gone; so I'll go now. But never talk to me about my business. I do get through a good deal of business, but it shall never stand between you and me."

And so the cunning legal man went his way.

And then there remained the journey to Hadley. After that it was his purpose to go abroad again, to go to Paris, and live in dingy lodgings there *au cinquième*, to read French free-thinking books, to study the wild side of politics, to learn if he could, among French theatres and French morals, French freedom of action, and freedom of speech, and freedom of thought — France was a blessed country for freedom in those days, under the paternal monarchy of that monarch, Louis Philippe — to learn to forget, among these sources of inspiration, all that he had known of the sweets of English life.

But there remained the journey to Hadley. It had always been his custom to go to Mr. Pritchett in the city before he went to his uncle's house, and he did so now. Everybody who wished to see Mr. Bertram always went to Mr. Pritchett first, and Mr. Pritchett would usually send some *avant-courier* to warn his patron of the invasion.

"Ah, Mr. George," said Pritchett, weazing with his most melancholy sigh. "You shouldn't have left the old gentleman so long, sir. Indeed you shouldn't."

"But he does not want to see me," said George.

"Think what a sight of money that is!" continued Pritchett. "One would really think, Mr. George, that you objected to money. There is that gentleman, your particular friend, you know, the member of Parliament. He is down there constantly, paying his respects, as he calls it."

"What, Mr. Harcourt?"

"Yes, Mr. Harcourt. And he sends grapes in spring, and turkeys in summer, and green peas in winter."

"Green peas in winter! they must cost something."

"Of course they do; sprats to catch fly-fish with, Mr. George. And then the old gentleman has got a new lawyer; some sharp new light of Mr. Harcourt's recommending. Oh, Mr. George, Mr. George! do be careful, do now! Could not you go and buy a few ducks, or pigeons, and take them in a basket? The old gentleman does seem to like that kind of thing, though ten years since he was so different. Half a million of money, Mr. George! It's worth a few grapes and turkeys." And Mr. Pritchett shook his head and wrung his hands; for he saw that nothing he said produced any effect.

George went to Hadley at last without ducks or pigeons, grapes or turkeys. He was very much amused however with the perpetual industry of his friend. "*Labor omnia vincit improbus*," said he to himself. "It is possible that Harcourt will find my uncle's blind side at last."

He found the old gentleman considerably changed. There were, occasionally, flashes of his former customary, sarcastic pungency; now and again he would rouse himself to be ill-natured, antagonistic, and self-willed. But old age and illness had sadly told upon him; and he was

content for the most part to express his humour by little shrugs, shakes of the head, and an irritable manner he had lately acquired of rubbing his hands quickly together.

"Well, George," he said, when his nephew shook hands with him and asked after his health.

"I hope you are better than you were, sir. I was sorry to hear that you had been again suffering."

"Suffer, yes; a man looks to suffer when he gets to my age. He's a fool if he doesn't, at least. Don't trouble yourself to be sorry about it, George."

"I believe you saw my father not long since." Bertram said this, not quite knowing how to set the conversation going, so that he might bring in the tidings he had come there to communicate.

"Yes, I did," said Mr. Bertram senior; and his hands went to work as he sat in the arm-chair.

"Did you find him much altered since you last met? It was a great many years since, I believe?"

"Not in the least altered. Your father will never alter."

George now knew enough of his father's character to understand the point of this; so he changed the subject, and did that which a man who has anything to tell should always do at once; he commenced the telling of it forthwith.

"I have come down here, to-day, sir, because I think it right to let you know at once that Miss Waddington and I have agreed that our engagement shall be at an end."

Mr. Bertram turned sharp round in his chair. "What!" said he. "What!"

"Our engagement is at an end. We are both aware that it is better for us it should be so."

"What do you mean? Better for you! How can it be better for you? You are two fools."

"Very likely, sir, we have been two fools; or at any rate, I have been one."

Mr. Bertram sat still in his chair, silent for a few moments. He still kept rubbing his hands, but in meditation rather than in anger. Though his back reached to the back of his chair, his head was brought forward and leaned almost on his chest. His cheeks had fallen in since George had seen him, and his jaw hung low, and gave a sad, thoughtful look to his face, in which also there was an expression of considerable pain. His nephew saw that what he had said had grieved him, and was sorry for it.

"George," he said, in a softer voice than had ever been usual with him. "I wish you to marry Caroline. Go back to her, and make it up. Tell her that I wish it, if it be necessary to tell her anything."

"Ah, sir, I cannot do that. I should not have come to you now if there had been any room for doubt."

"There must be no room for doubt. This is nonsense; sheer nonsense. I shall send to Mary." George had never before heard him call Miss Baker by her Christian name.

"It cannot be helped, sir. Miss Baker can do nothing in the matter now; nor can any one else. We both know that the marriage would not suit us."

"Not suit you! nonsense. Two babies; two fools! I tell you it will suit you; it will suit me."

Now had George Bertram junior not been an absolute ass, or a mole rather with no eyesight whatever for things above ground, he would have seen from this that he might not only have got back his love, but have

made sure of being his uncle's heir into the bargain. At any rate, there was sufficient in what he said to insure him a very respectable share of those money-bags. How would Pritchett have rejoiced had he heard the old man speak so! and then how would he have sighed and weazed when he saw the young man's indifference!

But George would not take the hint. He must have been blind and dull, and dead and senseless. Who before had ever heard Mr. Bertram senior speak out in that way? "It will suit *me*!" And that from an old bachelor with uncountable money-bags to his only nephew! and such a request, too, as it conveyed — that he would again make himself agreeable to a beautiful girl whom he thoroughly loved, and by whom also he was thoroughly loved! But George was an ass, as we have said; and a mole, a blind mole; and a mule, a stiff-necked, stubborn mule. He would not yield an inch to his uncle; nor an inch to his own feelings.

"I am sorry to vex you, sir," he said, coldly, "but it is impossible."

"Oh, very well," said the uncle, as he compressed his lips, and moved his hands. "Very well." And so they parted.

George went back to town and commenced his preparations for Paris. But on the following day he received the unwonted honour of a visit from Mr. Pritchett, and the honour was very pointed; in this wise. Mr. Pritchett, not finding him at home, had gone to a neighbouring tavern "to get a bit of dinner," as he told the woman at the chambers; and stated, that he should go on calling till he did find Mr. George. And in this way, on his third or fourth visit, Mr. George was found.

Mr. Pritchett was dressed in his best, and was very sad and solemn. "Mr. George," said he, "your uncle wishes to see you at Hadley, particular."

"Why, I was there yesterday."

"I know you was, Mr. George; and that's just it. Your uncle, Mr. George, is an old man, and it will be only dutiful you should be with him a good deal now. You'd wish to be a comfort to your uncle in his last days. I know that, Mr. George. He's been good to you; and you've your duty to do by him now, Mr. George; and you'll do it." So said Mr. Pritchett, having thoroughly argued the matter in his own mind, and resolved, that as Mr. George was a wilful young horse, who would not be driven in one kind of bridle, another must be tried with him.

"But has my uncle sent to say that he wants to see me again at once?"

"He has, Mr. George; sent to say that he wants to see you again at once, particular."

There was nothing of course for Mr. George to do but to obey, seeing that the order was so particular. On that same evening, therefore, he put his dressing-things into a bag, and again went down to Hadley.

On this first arrival his uncle shook hands with him with much more than ordinary kindness, and even joked with him.

"So Pritchett came to you, did he? and sent you down at a moment's notice? ha! ha! He's a solemn old prig, is Pritchett, but a good servant; a very good servant. When I am gone, he'll have enough to live on; but he'll want some one to say a word to him now and again. Don't forget what I say about him. It's not so easy to find a good servant."

George declared that he always had had, and would have, a regard for Mr. Pritchett; "though I wish he were not quite so sad."

"Poor Pritchett! well; yes, he is sad," said the uncle, laughing; and then George went upstairs to get ready for dinner.

The dinner, considering the house in which it was spread, was quite *recherché*. George said to himself that the fat fowls which he saw must have come from Harcourt's larder. Roast mutton and boiled beef — not together, but one on one day and the other on the next — generally constituted the fare at Mr. Bertram's house when he did not sit down to dinner alone. But now there was quite a little banquet. During dinner, he made sundry efforts to be agreeable; pressed his nephew to eat, and drank wine with him in the old-fashioned affectionate manner of past days. "Your health, George," he said. "You'll find that sherry good, I think. It ought to be, if years can make it so."

It was good; and George was very sorry to find that the good wine had been brought out for him. He felt that something would be required in return, and that he could not give that something.

After dinner that something was soon asked for. "George," said the old man, "I have been thinking much since you went away the other day about you and Caroline. I have taken it into my stupid old head to wish that you two should be married."

"Ah, sir!"

"Now listen to me. I do wish it, and what you have said has disturbed me. Now I do believe this of you, that you are an honest lad; and though you are so

fond of your own way, I don't think you'd wish to grieve me if you could help it."

"Not if I could help it, sir; not if I could help it, certainly."

"You can help it. Now listen to me. An old man has no right to have his fancies unless he chooses to pay for them. I know that well enough. I don't want to ask you why you have quarrelled with Caroline. It's about money, very likely?"

"No, sir, no; not in the least."

"Well, I don't want to inquire. A small limited income is very likely to lead to misunderstandings. You have at any rate been honest and true to me. You are not a bit like your father."

"Sir! sir!"

"And, and — I'll tell you what I'll do. Caroline is to have six thousand pounds, isn't she?"

"Pray believe me, sir, that money has nothing whatever to do with this matter."

"Yes, six," continued Mr. Bertram; "four of her own, and two from me. Now I'll tell you what I'll do. Let me see. You have two hundred a year; that's settled on you. And you had a thousand pounds the other day. Is that all gone yet?"

"I am in no want of money, uncle; none whatever."

"No, not as a bachelor; but as a married man you would be. Now do tell me; how much of that thousand pounds did the colonel get out of you?"

"Dear uncle, do remember that he is my father."

"Well, well; two hundred a year, and two thousand pounds, and one, and Pritchett's account. I'll tell you what, George, I should like to see you comfortable; and

if you and Caroline are married before next October, I'll give you —"

"I can't tell you how you pain me, sir."

"I'll give you — I wonder how much income you think you'll want?"

"None, sir; none. As our marriage is out of the question, we shall want no income. As I am, and am likely to remain unmarried, my present income is sufficient for me."

"I'll give you — let me see." And the old miser — for though capable of generosity to a great extent, as he had certainly shown with reference to his nephew's early years, he certainly was a miser — the old miser again recapitulated to himself all that he had already done, and tried to calculate at what smallest figure, at what lowest amount of ready money to be paid down, he could purchase the object which he now desired. "I'll give you four thousand pounds on the day you are married. There, that will be ten thousand beside your own income, and whatever your profession will bring you."

"What am I to say, sir? I know how generous you are; but this is not an affair of money."

"What is it then?"

"We should not be happy together."

"Not happy together! You shall be happy, I tell you; you will be happy if you have enough to live on. Remember, I may leave you something more than that when I die; that is, I may do so if you please me. You will understand, however, that I make no promise."

"Dear uncle," said George, and as he spoke he rose from his seat, and crossing over to his uncle, took the old man's hand in his own. "You shall be asked for no

promise; you shall be asked for nothing. You have been most liberal, most kind to me; too kind, I know, for I have not returned it by that attention which you deserved from me. But, believe me, I cannot do as you ask me. If you will speak to Miss Waddington, she will tell you the same."

"Miss Waddington! Pshaw!"

"Caroline, I mean. It is impossible, sir. And it adds greatly to my own suffering — for I have suffered in all this — that you also should be grieved."

"Why, you were so much in love with her the other day! Mary told me that you were dying for her."

"I cannot explain it all. But she — Caroline — doubtless will. However, pray, pray take this for granted: the engagement between us cannot be renewed."

Old Mr. Bertram still kept his nephew's hand, and it seemed as though he liked to hold it. He continued to look up into George's face as though striving to read there something different from the words which he heard, something which might yet give him some consolation. He had said that George was honest, and he believed it, as far as he could believe in honesty. But, nevertheless, he was still meditating at what price he could buy over his nephew to his purpose. After such a struggle as that of his whole lifetime, could he have any other faith but that money were omnipotent? No; this of course, this necessarily was his belief. As to the sufficient quantity — on that point it was possible for him to doubt. His nephew's manner to him was very touching; the tone of his voice, the look of his countenance, the grief which sat on his brow, did touch him. But they touched him in this manner; they made him

feel that a few thousands were not sufficient. He had at last a desire at his heart, a family domestic warm desire; and he began to feel that if he were not prepared to give up his desire, he must bid high for its fulfilment.

"George," said he, "after all, you and Caroline are the nearest relatives I have; the nearest and the dearest."

"Caroline is your own child's child, sir,"

"She is but a girl; and it would all go to some spendthrift, whose very name would be different. And, I don't know, but I think I like you better than her. Look here now. According to my present will, nine-tenths of my property will go to build a hospital that shall bear my name. You'll not repeat that to anybody, will you?"

"No, sir; I will not."

"If you'll do as I would have you about this marriage, I'll make a new will, and you and your children shall have — I'll let you say yourself how much you shall have; there — and you shall see the will yourself before the wedding takes place."

"What can I say to him? what can I say to him?" said George, turning away his face. "Sir, it is quite impossible. Is not that enough? Money has nothing to do with it; can have nothing to do with it."

"You don't think I'd deceive you, do you, and make another will afterwards? It shall be a deed of gift if you like, or a settlement — to take effect of course after my death." On hearing this George turned away his face. "You shall have half, George; there, by G — you shall have half; settled on you — there — half of it, settled on you." And then only did the uncle drop his nephew's

hand. He dropped it, and closing his eyes, began to meditate on the tremendous sacrifice he had made.

There was something terrible in this to young Bertram. He had almost ceased to think of himself in watching his uncle's struggles. It was dreadful to see how terribly anxious the old man was, and more dreadful still to witness the nature of the thoughts which were running through his mind. He was making lavish tenders of his heaven, his god, his blessings; he was offering to part with his paradise, seeing that nature would soon imperatively demand that he should part with it. But useless as it must soon be to him, he could not bring himself to believe that it was not still all-powerful with others.

"Mr. Bertram, it is clearly necessary that we should understand each other," said George, with a voice that he intended should be firm, but which in truth was stern as well as firm. "I thought it right to come and tell you that this match was broken off. But seeing that that has once been told, there is no longer room for further conversation on the matter. We have made up our minds to part; and, having done so, I can assure you that money can have no effect upon our resolution."

"Then you want it all — all!" said the uncle almost weeping.

"Not all, nor ten times all would move me one inch — not one inch," said George, in a voice that was now loud, and almost angry.

Mr. Bertram turned towards the table, and buried his face in his hands. He did not understand it. He did not know whence came all this opposition. He could not conceive what was the motive power which caused his nephew thus to thwart and throw him over,

standing forward as he did with thousands and tens of thousands in his hand. But he knew that his request was refused, and he felt himself degraded and powerless.

"Do not be angry with me, uncle," said the nephew.

"Go your own way, sir; go your own way," said the uncle. "I have done with you. I had thought — but never mind —" and he rang the bell violently. "Sarah, I will go to bed — are my things ready? Woman, is my room ready, I say?" and then he had himself led off, and George saw him no more that night.

Nor did he see him the next morning; nor for many a long day afterwards. When the morning came, he sent in his love, with a hope that his uncle was better. Sarah, coming out with a long face, told George that his uncle had only muttered between his teeth — "That it was nothing to him" — to his nephew, namely — "whether he were better or worse." And so, having received this last message, he went his way, and returned to town.

CHAPTER III.

Does he know it yet?

ALMOST immediately after this George Bertram did go to Paris; but before he went he received a letter from Arthur Wilkinson, begging him to go down to Hurst Staple. This was Arthur's answer to the letter in which Bertram had communicated the last news from Littlebath. There were not as many words in the letter as there had been in that from Adela to Caroline; but they were much to the same effect. "This is an important step, old fellow; very: pray — pray be careful; for your own sake and hers. I am not good at letter-

writing, as you know; but come down here and talk it over. I have other things of my own I want to talk about. The spare bedroom is empty." That was nearly the whole of it. In answer to this, Bertram had declared his intention of going to Paris, but had promised to go down to Hurst Staple as soon as he returned home.

At this time the popularity of Louis Philippe was on the wane. The grocers of Paris were becoming sick of their paternal citizen king, who, in spite of his quiet family costume and citizen umbrella, seemed to think as much as some other kings of crowds of soldiers, of fortifications, and war taxes; who seemed to think also that free-spoken deputies might be judiciously controlled, that a paternally-royal family might be judiciously enriched, and that a good many of the old crown tenets and maxims might again be judiciously brought to bear upon the common-wealth. Poor grocers! too much prosperity had made them over-nice. When Mr. Smith had been about six months gone from them, how gladly would they have had him back again!

But they are again satisfied. The grocer interest, which on the whole may perhaps be looked on as predominant in Paris, is once more swathed in rose-leaves. The swathings certainly are somewhat tight; and rose-leaves may be twisted till there is no breaking them. But there will still remain the fragrance, the *pot-pourri* odour which is so delectable to ancient house-wives, the only savour of plenteousness. If a king can so devise that chocolate shall be sold — and paid for — what more can a grocer interest need? What more than this, that having sold its daily quantum of chocolate, it shall have a theatre to go to, a spectacle to look at, ices, coffee, and *eau sucrée*! Since the world began to open

its young eyes and look about it with any understanding, what else has been desirable? What does a man and a grocer want? *Panem et circences*; soup that shall not be too maigre; and a seat at the Porte St. Martin that shall not be too dear. Is it not all written in that?

England a nation of shopkeepers! No, let us hope not; not as yet, at any rate. There have been nations to whom the buying and selling of bread and honey — especially of honey — has been everything; lost nations — people deadened, whose souls were ever sleeping, whose mouths only and gastric organs attested that life was in them. There were such people in the latter days of ancient Rome; there were such also in that of Eastern Rome upon the Bosphorus; rich and thriving people, with large mouths and copious bellies, wanting merely the salt of life. But let us hope that no English people will be such as long as the roads are open to Australia, to Canada, and New Zealand.

A young man whose life was to be spent in writing politico-religious pamphlets had much to learn in Paris in those days. Indeed, Paris has ever been a school for such writers since men began to find that something was wrong, even under the reign of the great Dubarry. Since those days it has been the laboratory of the political alchemist, in which everything hitherto held precious has been reduced to a residuum, in order that from the ashes might be created that great arcanum, a fitting constitution under which thinking men may live contented. The secret had been hardly solved in those latter days of poor Louis Philippe. Much had certainly been done when a citizen king was thought of and set agoing; but even a citizen king required to be wound up, and the alchemist was still at his crucibles.

Now, indeed, the work has been finished. The laboratory is closed. The philosopher, his task all done, has retired to his needed rest. Thinking men, even thinking Frenchmen, can live contented. Chocolate is sold — and paid for. And a score and a half of daily theatres are open at the most moderate of prices.

Intent on such things, and on his coming volume, our young broken-hearted philosopher stayed out three months at Paris. We need not follow him very closely in his doings there. His name was already sufficiently known to secure his admittance amongst those learned men who, if they had hitherto established little, had at any rate achieved the doubting of much. While he was here the British Ministry went out of office. Sir Robert, having repealed the corn laws, fell to the ground between two stools, and the number of the 'Times' newspaper which gave the first authentic list of the members of the new government, contained, among the few new names that were mentioned, that of Sir Henry Harcourt as Her Majesty's solicitor-general.

At the end of the three months Bertram returned to England, enriched by many new ideas as to the government of mankind in general. His volume was not yet finished. So he packed up his papers in his portmanteau and took them down with him to Hurst Staple. He saw no one as he passed through London. The season was then over, and his friend Sir Henry was refreshing himself with ten days' grouse-shooting after the successful campaign of the last session. But had he been in London, Bertram would not have seen him, for he saw no one. He asked no questions about Caroline, nor any about his uncle. He did not even call on his sincere friend Pritchett. Had he done so, he would have learned that

Miss Baker and her niece were both staying at Hadley. He might also have learned other news, which, however, was not long in following him.

He went down to Hurst Staple, merely writing a line the day before he started, to prepare his friend for his advent. But when he reached the vicarage, Arthur Wilkinson was not there. He was at Oxford; but had left word that he was to be summoned home as soon as Bertram arrived. The ladies, however, expected him, and there would have been nothing for him to remark in the state of the quiet household had there not been another visitor in the house. Adela Gauntlet was staying there, and she was dressed in the deepest mourning.

The story was soon told to him. Mr. Gauntlet had one morning been found dead in his dressing-room. The good old man had been full of years, and there was nothing frightful in his death but its suddenness. But sudden death is always frightful. Overnight he had been talking to his daughter with his usual quiet, very quiet, mirth; and in the morning she was woke with the news that his spirit had fled. His mirth for this world was over. His worldly duties were done. He had received his daughter's last kiss, had closed for the last time the book which had been his life's guide, had whispered to heaven his last prayer, and his soul was now at rest.

There was nothing in this that the world need regard as mournful. There was no pain, no mental pangs, no dire remorse. But for Adela the suddenness had been very dreadful.

Among her other miseries had been the great misery of having to seek a home. An Englishman's house is his castle. And a rector's parsonage is as much the rector's castle, his own freehold castle, as is the earl's

family mansion that of the earl. But it is so with this drawback, that the moment the rector's breath is out of his body, all right and claim to the castle as regards his estate and family ceases instantly. If the widow and children remain there one night, they remain there on sufferance.

Adela's future home would now necessarily be with her aunt, Miss Penelope Gauntlet; but it happened most unfortunately that at the moment of her brother's death, Miss Gauntlet was absent with other relatives in Italy. Nor was her address accurately known. Her party had been at Rome; but it was supposed that they had left the holy city before the end of May; and now, at the end of August, when her presence in England was so necessary, Adela had no more than a faint belief that her aunt was at the baths of Lucca. In the meantime it was absolutely necessary that she should somewhere find a resting-place for herself.

Both Caroline Waddington and Miss Baker wrote to her at once. Unfortunately they were at Hadley; but if Adela would come to them, they would return to Littlebath. They, or at any rate, one of them would do so. There was much that was really generous in this offer, as will be seen when we come in the next page or two to narrate what had lately occurred at Hadley. But Adela already knew what had occurred; and much as she then longed for a home, she knew that she could not allow either of them to go Littlebath.

Immediately that Mr. Gauntlet's death was known at Hurst Staple — and it was known there two hours after Adela knew it herself — Mrs. Wilkinson went over to bring her to the vicarage. The reader will know that there were reasons why Adela should be most unwilling

to choose that house as her temporary residence, She was most unwilling; and for a day or two, much to Mrs. Wilkinson's suspense, she refused to leave West Putford. But it was necessary that she should leave it. She could not remain alone in the house on the day that her father's body was carried to his grave; and so at last she submitted, and allowed herself to be taken over to Hurst Staple.

"It is provoking, dear," said Mrs. Wilkinson to her, "and I am sure you will think it very uncivil, but Arthur went off to Oxford yesterday. And it was uncivil. I am sure he needs not have gone at this very moment."

Then Adela felt very grateful to her neighbour, and acknowledged in her heart that he had been kind to her.

"But he must be back on Saturday," continued the widow, "for he could get no clergyman to take his duty. Indeed, he has to take the evening service at West Putford as well."

On the day following this, George Bertram arrived at the vicarage.

His first evening in the house was not very bright. Mrs. Wilkinson had never been a bright woman. She had certain motherly good qualities which had been exerted in George's favour in his earliest years; and on this account she was still able to speak to him in a motherly way. She could talk to him about his breakfasts and dinners, and ask after his buttons and linen, and allude to his bachelor habits. And in such conversation the first evening was chiefly passed. Adela said almost nothing. The Wilkinson girls, who were generally cheerful themselves, were depressed by Adela's sorrow — and depressed also somewhat by what they knew of Bertram's affairs. On this matter Mrs. Wilkinson was burn-

ing to speak; but she had made up her mind to leave it in silence for one evening. She confined herself, therefore, to the button question, and to certain allusions to her own griefs. It appeared that she was not quite so happy with reference to Arthur as one would have wished her to be. She did not absolutely speak against him; but she said little snubbing things of him, and seemed to think him by no means sufficiently grateful for all the care she took of him.

That night, in the privacy of Adela's own room, something was said about George Bertram. "I am sure he does not know it yet," said Sophia.

"Caroline told me she would write to him," said Adela; "she would be very wrong not to do so — very wrong."

"You may be sure he has not heard it," repeated the other. "Did you not observe the way he spoke of Mr. Harcourt?"

"Sir Henry Harcourt," said Mary.

"I did not hear it," said Adela.

"Oh, he did speak of him. He said something about his great good fortune. He never would have spoken in that way had he known it."

"Do you know," said Mary, "I do not think he would have come down here had he heard it — not yet, at least."

The next morning two letters were laid before George Bertram as they were sitting at breakfast. Then he did know it; then he did learn it; and not till then. It was now the end of August, and in the coming month of November — about the end of November — Sir Henry Harcourt, Her Majesty's solicitor-general, and member for the Battersea Hamlets, was to lead to the hymeneal altar

Miss Caroline Waddington, the granddaughter and presumed heiress of the great millionaire, Mr. Bertram. Who so high now on the ladder of fortune as the fortunate Sir Henry Harcourt? In love and politics and the realms of Plutus, he carried all before him. Yes, Sir Henry Harcourt was the coming man. Quidnuncs at the clubs began to say that he would give up the legal side of politics and devote himself to statesmanship. He would be the very man for a home secretary. Old Bertram, they observed, was known to be dying. Old Bertram, they also observed, had made a distinct promise to Sir Henry and his granddaughter. The marriage was to take place at Hadley, from the old man's house; the old man was delighted with the match, &c., &c., &c.; who so happy, who so great, who so fortunate as Sir Henry Harcourt?

That habit of bringing in letters at the breakfast-table has its good points, certainly. It is well that one should have one's letters before the work or pleasure of the day commences; it is well to be able to discuss the different little subjects of mutual interest as they are mentioned. "Eliza's baby has got her first tooth; it's all right. There's nothing like Daffy's Elixir after all." "My dear, the guano will be here to-day; so the horses will be wanted all the week — remember that." "What a bore, papa; for here's a letter to say that Kate Carnabie's coming; and we must go over to the Poldoodles. Frank Poldoodle is quite smitten with Kate." This is all very convenient; but the plan has its drawbacks. Some letters will be in their nature black and brow-compelling. Tidings will come from time to time at which men cannot smile. There will be news that ruffles the sweetest temper, and at receipt of which

clouds will darken the most kindly face. One would fain receive such letters in private.

Two such letters Bertram received that morning and read while the eyes of the parsonage breakfast-table were — not fixed on him, but which under such circumstances is much worse — were purposely turned away. He knew well the handwriting of each, and would fain have escaped with them from the room. But this he felt to be cowardly; and so he read them both, sitting there in the family circle. They were from Caroline and Sir Henry. We will give precedence to the lady; but Bertram did not so read them. The lady's letter was the most trying to his nerves, and was therefore taken the last. It can hardly be said that their contents surprised him. When they both came into his hands together, he seemed to feel by intuition what was the news which they contained. That from Caroline was very fairly written. But how many times had it been rewritten before that fair copy was prepared?

“Hadley, August, 184—.

“My dear Mr. Bertram,

“I do not know whether I am right in thinking that I ought myself to tell you of the step which I am going to take. If it is unnecessary, I know you will forgive me, and will be certain that I have intended to do what is right. Sir Henry Harcourt has proposed to me, and I have accepted him. I believe we shall be married some time before Christmas.

“We are staying here with grandpapa. I think he approves of what I am doing; but you know that he is not very communicative. At any rate, I shall be married from this house, and I think that

he likes Sir Henry. Aunt Mary is reconciled to all this now.

"I do not know that I need say any more, excepting that I shall always — always hope for your welfare; and be so happy if I can hear of your happiness. I pray you also to forgive me what injuries I may have done you.

"It may be that at some future time we shall meet as friends in London. I hope we may. It is a comfort to me that Sir Henry Harcourt knows exactly all that there has been between us.

"Believe me to be,

"Yours most sincerely,

"CAROLINE WADDINGTON."

Harcourt's letter was written in faster style, and a more running hand. Solicitors-general have hardly time to stop and pick their words. But though the manner of it was free and easy, it seemed to Bertram that the freedom and easiness were but affected.

"My dear Bertram,

"I hope and trust that the news I have to tell you will be no interruption to our friendship. I am sure that it should not be, seeing that I am doing you no injury. Caroline Waddington and I have agreed to put our fortunes into the same boat. We shall feel much more comfortable on the seas if you will be gracious enough to say, 'God save the bark.'

"Caroline has of course told me all that has occurred; as, indeed, you had done previously. As far as I am concerned, I must say she has behaved gloriously. I always admired her greatly, as you know; though of

course till lately I never thought it possible I should possess what I so much admired.

"Speaking plainly, I think that she will be happier with me than she would have been with you; and that I shall be happier with her than you would have been. We are better adapted to each other. There is a dash of worldliness about us both from which your more ethereal composition is happily free.

"God bless you, old fellow. Pray write a line in answer, saying as much to me. Of course, you will let us see you in London. Caroline wishes it particularly; and so do I.

"I believe I shall be turned off in December. Such a mill-horse as I am cannot choose my time. I am going to Scotland for ten days, and shall then be hard at work till our marriage. I must of course be back when the session commences. We talk of going to Nice, and thence to Genoa.

"The old gentleman is very civil; but there has been no word of money, nor will there be a word. However, thank God, I don't want it.

"Always your sincerest friend,

"HENRY HARCOURT."

"Reform Club — August, 184 —."

These letters did not take long in the reading. Within five minutes Bertram was spreading the butter on his toast; and within two minutes more he was asking what news there was from Arthur — when would he be home? He had received a great blow, a stunning blow; but he was able to postpone the faintness which would follow it till he should be where no eye could see him.

The breakfast passed away very silently. They all knew what those two letters contained. One of the girls had had them in her hand, and had known the handwriting of one and guessed that of the other. But even without this they would have known. Are not most of our innermost secrets known to all the world?

And then Bertram skulked off — or endeavoured rather to do so; for Mrs. Wilkinson detected him in the act, and stopped him. She had said nothing hitherto about his matrimonial or non-matrimonial affairs. She had abstained with wonderful discretion; and she now intended that her discretion should be rewarded.

"George, George," she said, as he turned from the breakfast-parlour door to the rack in the hall on which his hat was hanging, "I want you just for a minute." So George returned into the parlour as the girls passed across the hall into the drawing-room.

"I'm afraid you'll think me unkind because I've said nothing about this sad affair of yours."

"Not at all, aunt," he said; though she was no aunt of his, he had always called her so when he had been at Hurst Staple as a child. "There are some things which had, perhaps, better not be talked about." Mrs. Wilkinson, however, was not the woman to be deterred by such a faint repulse as this.

"Exactly so; except among intimate family friends. But I was very sorry to hear about your breaking off the affair with Caroline Waddington. I was, indeed; very. It would have been so suitable as regards the old gentleman — I know all about that you know —" and the lady nodded her head, as ladies will do some-

times when they flatter themselves that they know more about such things than their neighbours.

"It was necessary," said Bertram.

"Necessary — ah, yes: I dare say. I don't in the least mean to blame you, George. I am sure you would not behave badly to any girl — and, from what I have heard, I am quite sure — quite sure it was not your fault. Indeed, I know very well —" and in lieu of finishing her speech, Mrs. Wilkinson again nodded her head.

"Nobody was to blame, aunt; nobody, and it is much better to say nothing about it."

"That is very good of you, George; very. But I always shall say —"

"Dear aunt, pray say nothing. We had thought when we knew little of each other that it would suit us to live together. As we learnt each other's characters more thoroughly, we found that we had been wrong. It was better for us, therefore, to part; and we did part."

"And so now she is going to be Lady Harcourt?"

"Yes; it seems so."

"Well, at any rate, we must all say this: she hasn't lost any time. I don't know what Sir Henry may think of it; but it certainly does seem to me —"

"Dear aunt, pray do not talk to me about this. I think Miss Waddington quite right to accept Sir Henry Harcourt — that is, indeed, I think her right under the circumstances. He is a rising man, and she will grace any station in which he can place her. I do not at all blame her, not in the least; it would be monstrous if I did."

"Oh, of course — we all know that it was you

broke off the other match; all the world knows that. But what I want to speak about is this. The old gentleman's money, George! Now Sir Henry of course is looking to that."

"He has my permission."

"And of course he will get some of it. That's to be expected — she's his grandchild — of course I know that," and Mrs. Wilkinson again nodded her head. "But, George, you must look very close after the old gentleman. It won't at all do to let Harcourt cut you out altogether. I do hope you mean to be a good deal down at Hadley. It won't last for long, you know."

Bertram would not condescend to explain to Mrs. Wilkinson that he had no intention of going near his uncle again, and that he was sick of the very name of the old man's money. So he hummed and hawed, and changed the conversation by saying that he should be so glad to see Arthur on his return.

"Yes, I am sure you will. But you'll find Arthur much changed — very much." And it was clear from the tone of Mrs. Wilkinson's voice that she did not think that this change in her son was for the better.

"He is growing older, I suppose; like the rest of us," said Bertram, attempting to laugh.

"Oh, yes; he's growing older, of course. But people should grow better, George, and more contented; particularly when they have everything about them that they can possibly want."

"Is not Arthur contented? He should get married then. Look at Adela Gauntlet there!"

"Nonsense, George; pray don't put that into his head. What has he to marry on? And as for Adela, if

she has fifteen hundred pounds it will be every farthing. And what's that for a family?"

"But Arthur has a living."

"Now, George, don't you be talking in that way to him. In one sense he has a living; for, situated as things at present are, of course I cannot hold it in my own hands. But in real truth he has not a living — not of his own. Lord Stapledean, whom I shall always regard as the very first nobleman in the land, and a credit to the whole peerage, expressly gave the living to me."

"To you, aunt?"

"Yes, expressly to me. And now I fear Arthur is discontented because he knows that I choose to remain mistress of my own house. I have done everything I can to make the house pleasant to him. He has the same study his dear father always had; and he has his own separate horse in the stable, which is more than his father had."

"But Arthur has his fellowship."

"And where would his fellowship be if he married Adela Gauntlet? I do hope you'll say something to him to make him more contented. I say nothing about his conduct to me. I don't suppose he means to be undutiful."

And then Bertram did manage to escape; and taking his hat he walked away along the same river-path which led to West Putford — that same path which Arthur Wilkinson had used to take when he went fishing in those happy early days before promotion had come to him, and the glories of manhood.

But George was not thinking now of Arthur or of Adela. He had enough of sorrow in his own breast to

make his mind selfish for the present — Caroline Waddington was to be married! to be married so soon after getting quit of her former bondage; to be married to Henry Harcourt. There was no chance left now, no hope, no possibility that he might regain the rich prize which he had flung away.

And did he wish to regain it? Was it not now clear enough that she had never loved him? In May, while the fruits were filling, they had separated; and now before they were well ripe she had given herself to another! Love him! no, indeed. Was it possible that she should love any man? — that she, who could so redeem herself and so bestow herself, should have any heart, any true feeling of what love is?

And yet this was not the worst of it. Such love as she had to give, had she not given it to this Harcourt even before she had rescued herself from her former lover? Had she not given this man her preference, such preference as she had to give, then, then when she was discussing with him how best to delay her nuptials with her acknowledged suitor? This successful, noisy, pushing, worldly man had won her by his success and his worldliness. The glitter of the gold had caught her; and so she had been unhappy, and had pined, and worn herself with grief till she could break away from her honest troth, and bind herself to the horn of the golden calf.

'Twas thus that he now thought of her, thus that he spoke of her to himself out loud, now that he could wander alone, with no eye to watch him, no ear to hear him. And yet he loved her with a strong love, with a mad passion such as he had never felt before. Much as he blamed her, thoroughly as he despised her for being so venial; yet he blamed, nay, scorned, himself more

vehemently in that he had let this plausible knave with his silken words rob from him the only treasure worth his having. Why had he not toiled? Why had he not made a name for himself? Why had he not built a throne on which his lady-love might sit and shine before the world?

CHAPTER IV.

Hurst Staple.

THE next three or four days passed by heavily enough, and then Arthur Wilkinson returned. He returned on a Saturday evening; as clergymen always do, so as to be ready for their great day of work. There are no Sabbath-breakers to be compared, in the vehemence of their Sabbath-breaking, to hard worked parochial clergymen — unless, indeed, it be Sunday-school children, who are forced on that day to learn long dark collects, and stand in dread catechismal row before their spiritual pastors and masters.

In the first evening there was that flow of friendship which always exists for the few first hours of meeting between men who are really fond of each other. And these men were fond of each other; the fonder perhaps because each of them had now cause for sorrow. Very little was said between Arthur and Adela. There was not apparently much to alarm the widow in their mutual manner, or to make her think that Miss Gauntlet was to be put in her place. Adela sat among the other girls, taking even less share in the conversation than they did; and Arthur, though he talked as became the master of the house, talked but little to her.

On the following morning they all went to church, of

course. Who has courage to remain away from church when staying at the clergyman's house? No one ever; unless it be the clergyman's wife, or perhaps an independent self-willed daughter. At Hurst Staple, however, on this Sunday they all attended. Adela was in deepest mourning. Her thick black veil was down, so as to hide her tears. The last Sunday she had been at church her father had preached his last sermon.

Bertram, as he entered the door, could not but remember how long it was since he had joined in public worship. Months and months had passed over him since he had allowed himself to be told that the Scriptures moved him in sundry places to acknowledge and confess his sins. And yet there had been a time when he had earnestly poured forth his frequent prayers to heaven; a time not long removed. It was as yet hardly more than three years since he had sworn within himself on the brow of Olivet to devote himself to the service of his Saviour. Why had that oath been broken? A girl had ridiculed it; a young girl had dissipated all that by the sheen of her beauty, by the sparkle of her eye, by the laughter of her ruddy lip. He had promised himself to his God, but the rustling of silks had betrayed his heart. At her instance, at her first word, that promise had been whistled down the wind.

And to what had this brought him now? As for the bright eyes, and the flashing beauty, and the ruddy lips, they were already made over in fee-simple to another, who was ready to go further than he had gone in seeking this world's vanities. Even the price of his apostasy had vanished from him.

But was this all? was this nearly all? was this as anything to that further misery which had come upon

him? Where was his faith now, his true, youthful, ardent faith; the belief of his inner heart; the conviction of a God and a Saviour which had once been to him the source of joy? Had it all vanished when, under the walls of Jerusalem, over against that very Garden of Gethsemane, he had exchanged the aspirations of his soul for the pressure of a soft white hand?

No one becomes an infidel at once. A man who has really believed does not lose by a sudden blow the firm convictions of his soul. But when the work has been once commenced, when the first step has been taken, the pace becomes frightfully fast. Three years since his belief had been like the ardour of young love, and now what were his feelings? Men said that he was an infidel; but he would himself deny it with a frigid precision, with the stiffest accuracy of language; and then argue that his acknowledgment of a superhuman creative power was not infidelity. He had a God of his own, a cold, passionless, prudent God; the same God, he said, to whom others looked; with this only difference, that when others looked with fanatic enthusiasm, he looked with well-balanced reason. But it was the same God, he said. And as to the Saviour, he had a good deal also to say on that subject; a good deal which might show that he was not so far from others as others thought. And so he would prove that he was no infidel.

But could he thus satisfy himself now that he again heard the psalms of his youth? and remembered as he listened, that he had lost for ever that beauty which had cost him so dear? Did he not now begin to think — to feel perhaps rather than to think — that, after all, the sound of the church bells was cheering, that it was sweet to kneel there where others knelt, sweet to hear

the voices of those young children as they uttered together the responses of the service? Was he so much wiser than others that he could venture on his own judgment to set himself apart, and to throw over as useless all that was to others so precious?

Such were his feelings as he sat, and knelt, and stood there — mechanically, as it were, remembering the old habits. And then he tried to pray. But praying is by no means the easiest work to which a man can set himself. Kneeling is easy; the repetition of the well-known word is easy; the putting on of some solemnity of mind is perhaps not difficult. But to remember what you are asking, why you are asking, of whom you are asking; to feel sure that you want what you do ask, and that this asking is the best way to get it; that on the whole is not easy. On this occasion Bertram probably found it utterly beyond his capacity.

He declined to go to afternoon church. This is not held to be *de rigueur* even in a parson's house, unless it be among certain of the strictly low-church clergymen. A very high churchman may ask you to attend at four o'clock of a winter morning, but he will not be grievously offended if, on a Sunday afternoon, you prefer your arm-chair, and book — probably of sermons; but that is between you and your conscience.

They dined early, and in the evening, Bertram and his host walked out. Hitherto they had had but little opportunity of conversation, and Bertram longed to talk to some one of what was within his breast. On this occasion, however, he failed. Conversation will not always go exactly as one would have it.

"I was glad to see you at church to-day," said the

parson. "To tell you the truth, I did not expect it. I hope it was not intended as a compliment to me."

"I rather fear it was, Arthur."

"You mean that you went because you did not like to displease us by staying away?"

"Something like it," said Bertram, affecting to laugh. "I do not want your mother and sisters, or you either, to regard me as an ogre. In England, at any rate in the country in England, one is an ogre if one doesn't go to church. It does not much matter, I believe, what one does when one is there; so long as one is quiet, and lets the parson have his say."

"There is nothing so easy as ridicule, especially in matters of religion."

"Quite true. But then it is again true that it is very hard to laugh at anything that is not in some point ridiculous."

"And God's worship is ridiculous?"

"No; but any pretence of worshipping God is so. And as it is but a step from the ridiculous to the sublime, and as the true worship of God is probably the highest sublimity to which man can reach; so, perhaps, is he never so absolutely absurd, in such a bathos of the ridiculous, as when he pretends to do so."

"Every effort must sometimes fall short of success."

"I'll explain what I mean," said Bertram, attending more to himself than his companion. "What idea of man can be so magnificent as that which represents him with his hands closed, and his eyes turned to that heaven with which he holds communion? But imagine the man so placed, and holding no such communion! You will at once have run down the whole gamut of humanity from St. Paul to Pecsniiff."

"But that has nothing to do with belief. It is for the man to take care that he be, if possible, nearer to St. Paul than to Pecsniiff."

"No, it has nothing to do with belief; but it is only a gauge, the only gauge we have, of what belief a man has. How many of those who were sitting by silently while you preached really believed?"

"All, I hope; all, I trust. I firmly trust that they are all believers; all, including yourself."

"I wonder whether there was one; one believer in all that which you called on us to say that we believed? one, for instance, who believes in the communion of saints? one who believes in the resurrection of the body?"

"And why should they not believe in the communion of saints? What's the difficulty?"

"Very little, certainly; as their belief goes — what they and you call belief. Rumtunshid gara shushabad gerostophat. That is the shibboleth of some of the Caucasian tribes. Do you believe in Rumtunshid?"

"If you will talk gibberish when talking on such a matter, I had rather change the subject."

"Now you are unreasonable, and want to have all the gibberish to yourself. That you should have it all to yourself in your own pulpit we accede to you; but out here, on the heath, surely I may have my turn. You do not believe in Rumtunshid? Then why should farmer Buttercup be called on to believe in the communion of the saints? What does he believe about it? Or why should you make little Flora Buttercup tell such a huge fib as to say, that she believes in the resurrection of the body?"

"It is taught her as a necessary lesson, and will be explained to her at the proper age."

"No; there is no proper age for it. It will never be explained to her. Neither Flora nor her father will ever understand anything about it. But they will always believe it. Am I old enough to understand it? Explain it to me. No one yet has ever attempted to do so; and yet my education was not neglected."

Wilkinson had too great a fear of his friend's powers of ridicule to venture on an explanation; so he again suggested that they should change the subject.

"That is always the way," said Bertram. "I never knew a clergyman who did not want to change the subject when that subject is the one on which he should be ever willing to speak."

"If there be anything that you deem holy, you would not be willing to hear it ridiculed."

"There is much that I deem holy, and for that I fear no laughter. I am ready to defy ridicule. But if I talk to you of the asceticism of Stylites, and tell you that I admire it, and will imitate it, will you not then laugh at me? Of course we ridicule what we think is false. But ridicule will run off truth like water from a duck's back. Come, explain to me this about the resurrection of the body."

"Yet, in my flesh, can I see God," said Arthur, in a solemn tone.

"But I say, no. It is impossible."

"Nothing is impossible with God."

"Yes; it is impossible that his great laws should change. It is impossible that they should remain, and yet not remain. Your body — which we all call our body — that which Flora Buttercup believes to be her body (for in this matter she does believe) will turn itself, through the prolific chemistry of nature, into various pro-

ductive gases by which other bodies will be formed. With which body will you see Christ? with that which you now carry, or that you will carry when you die? For, of course, every atom of your body changes."

"It little matters which. It is sufficient for me to believe as the Scriptures teach me."

"Yes; if one could believe. A Jew, when he drags his dying limbs to the valley of Jehoshaphat, he can believe. He, in his darkness, knows nothing of these laws of nature. But we will go to people who are not in darkness. If I ask your mother what she means when she says—'Not by confusion of substance; but by unity of person,' what will she answer me?"

"It is a subject which it will take her some time to explain."

"Yes, I think so; and me some time longer to understand."

Wilkinson was determined not to be led into argument, and so he remained silent. Bertram was also silent for awhile, and they walked on, each content with his own thoughts. But yet not content. Wilkinson would have been contented to be let alone; to have his mind, and faith, and hopes left in the repose which nature and education had prepared for them. But it was not so with Bertram. He was angry with himself for not believing, and angry with others that they did believe. They went on in this way for some ten minutes, and then Bertram began again.

"Ah, that I could believe! If it were a thing to come at, as a man wishes, who would doubt? But you, you, the priest, the teacher of the people, you, who should make it all so easy, you will make it so difficult,

so impossible. Belief, at any rate, should be easy, though practice may be hard."

"You should look to the Bible, not to us."

"Yes; it is there that is our stumbling-block. A book is given to us, not over well translated from various languages, part of which is history hyperbolically told—for all Eastern language is hyperbolic; part of which is prophecy, the very meaning of which is lost to us by the loss of those things which are intended to be imaged out; and part of which is thanksgiving uttered in the language of men who knew nothing, and could understand nothing of those rules by which we are to be governed."

"You are talking of the Old Testament?"

"It is given to us as one whole. Then we have the story of a mystery which is above, or, at least, beyond the utmost stretch of man's comprehension; and the very purport of which is opposed to all our ideas of justice. In the jurisprudence of heaven can that be just which here, on earth, is manifestly unjust?"

"Is your faith in God so weak then, and your reliance on yourself so firm, that you can believe nothing beyond your own comprehension?"

"I believe much that I do not understand. I believe the distance of the earth from the sun. I believe that the seed of a man is carried in a woman, and then brought forth to light, a living being. I do not understand the principle of this wondrous growth. But yet I believe it, and know that it is from God. But I cannot believe that evil is good. I cannot believe that man placed here by God shall receive or not receive future happiness as he may chance to agree or not to agree with certain doctors who, somewhere about the fourth century, or perhaps

later, had themselves so much difficulty in coming to any agreement on the disputed subject."

"I think, Bertram, that you are going into matters which you know are not vital to faith in the Christian religion."

"What is vital, and what is not? If I could only learn that! But you always argue in a circle. I am to have faith because of the Bible; but I am to take the Bible through faith. Whence is the first spring of my faith to come? where shall I find the fountain-head?"

"In prayer to God."

"But can I pray without faith? Did any man ever kneel before a log, and ask the log that he might believe in the log? Had he no faith in the log, could it be possible that he should be seen there kneeling before it?"

"Has the Bible then for you no intrinsic evidence of its truth?"

"Yes, most irrefragable evidence; evidence that no thinking man can possibly reject. Christ's teaching, the words that I have there as coming from his mouth are irresistible evidence of his fitness to teach. But you will permit me to use no such evidence. I must take it all, from the beginning of my career, before I can look into its intrinsic truth. And it must be all true to me; the sun standing still upon Gibeon no less than the divine wisdom which showed that Cæsar's tribute should be paid to Cæsar."

"If every man and every child is to select, how shall we ever have a creed? and if no creed, how shall we have a church?"

"And if no church, how then parsons? Follow it on, and it comes to that. But, in truth, you require too much; and so you get — nothing. Your flocks do not

believe, do not pray, do not listen to you. They are not in earnest. In earnest! Heavens! if a man could believe all this, could be in earnest about it, how possibly could he care for other things? But no; you pride yourselves on faith; but you have no faith. There is no such thing left. In these days men do not know what faith is."

In the evening, when the ladies had gone to their rooms, they were again together; and Bertram thought that he would speak of Caroline. But he was again foiled. There had been some little bickering on the part of Mrs. Wilkinson. She had been querulous, and had not cared to hide it though George and Adela were sitting there as guests. This had made her son unhappy, and he now spoke of it.

"I am sorry you should hear my mother speak in that way, George. I hope I am not harsh to her. I try to refrain from answering her. But unless I go back to my round jackets, and take my food from her hand like a child, I cannot please her."

"Perhaps you are too careful to please her. I think you should let her know that to a certain extent, for you must be master in your own house."

"Ah! I have given that up long since. She has an idea that the house is hers. I do not care to thwart her in that. Perhaps I should have done it at first; but it is too late now. To-night she was angry with me because I would not read a sermon."

"And why then didn't you?"

"I have preached two to-day." And the young clergyman yawned somewhat wearily. "She used to read them herself. I did put a stop to that."

"Why so? why not let her read them?"

"The girls used to go to sleep always — and then

the servants slept also. I don't think she has a good voice for sermons. But I am sure of this, George; she has never forgiven me."

"And never will."

"Sometimes I almost think she would wish to take my place in the pulpit."

"The wish is not at all unnatural, my dear fellow."

"The truth is, that Lord Stapledean's message to her, and his conduct about the living has quite upset her. I cannot blame Lord Stapledean. What he did was certainly kind. But I do blame myself. I never should have accepted the living on those terms — never, never. I knew it when I did it, and I have never ceased to repent it since." And so saying he got up and walked quickly about the room. "Would you believe it now, my mother takes upon herself to tell me in what way I should read the absolution; and feels herself injured because I do not comply?"

"I can tell you but of one remedy, Arthur; but I can tell you of one."

"What remedy?"

"Take a wife to yourself; one who will not mind in what way you read the absolution to her."

"A wife!" said Wilkinson, and he uttered a long sigh as he continued his walk.

"Yes, a wife; why not? People say that a country clergyman should never be without a wife; and as for myself, I firmly think that they are right."

"Every curate is to marry, then?"

"But you are not a curate."

"I should only have the income of a curate. And where should I put a wife? The house is full of women already. Who would come to such a house as this?"

"There is Adela; would not she come if you asked her?"

"Adela!" said the young vicar. And now his walk had brought him to the further end of the table; and there he remained for a minute or two. "Adela!"

"Yes, Adela," said Bertram.

"What a life my mother would lead her. She is fond of her now; very. But in that case I know that she would hate her."

"If I were you, I would make my wife the mistress of my house, not my mother."

"Ah! you do not understand, George."

"But perhaps you do not like Adela — perhaps you could not teach yourself to love her."

"Perhaps not," said Wilkinson. "And perhaps she could not teach herself to like me. But, ah! that is out of the question."

"There is nothing between you and Adela then?" asked Bertram.

"Oh, no; nothing."

"On your honour, nothing?"

"Nothing at all. It is quite out of the question. My marrying, indeed!"

And then they took their bedroom candlesticks and went to their own rooms.

CHAPTER V.

The Wounded Doe.

It was a weary melancholy household just then, that of Hurst Staple, and one may almost wonder that Mr. Bertram should have remained there; but still he did remain. He had been there a fortnight, when he learnt

that in three days' time Adela was to go to Littlebath. She was to go down with Miss Baker; and was to remain there with her, or with Miss Todd if Miss Baker should go back to Hadley, 'till her own aunt should have returned.

"I don't know why you should be in such a hurry to get to Littlebath," said Mrs. Wilkinson. "We have been very glad to have you; and I hope we have shown it." As Arthur had evinced no symptoms of making love to Miss Gauntlet, the good lady had been satisfied, and now she felt somewhat slighted that her hospitality was not more valued.

But Adela explained in her own soft manner that it would be better for her to leave that neighbourhood; that her heart was sore there; that her sorrow for her father would be lighter if she were away. What hypocrites women are! Even Ophelia in her madness would pretend that she raved for her murdered father, when it was patent to all the world that she was mad for love for Hamlet. And now Adela must leave Hurst Staple because, forsooth, her poor old father lay buried at West Putford. Would not ten words have quieted that ghost for ever? But then, what is the use of a lady's speech but to conceal her thoughts?

Bertram had spoken to Arthur about Caroline's marriage, but he had as yet said no word on the subject to any one else. Mrs. Wilkinson had tried him once or twice, but in vain. He could not bare his bosom to Mrs. Wilkinson.

"So you are going, Adela?" he said the morning he had heard the news. They had all called her Adela in that house, and he had learned to do as others did. These intimacies will sometimes grow up in five days,

though an acquaintance of twenty years will often not produce them.

"Yes, Mr. Bertram. I have been a great trouble to them here, and it is time that I should be gone."

"Welcome the coming, speed the parting guest.' Had I a house, I should endeavour to act on that principle. I would never endeavour to keep a person who wished to go. But we shall all regret you. And then, Littlebath is not the place for you. You will never be happy at Littlebath."

"Why not?"

"Oh, it is a wretched place; full of horse-jockeys and hags — of card-tables and false hair."

"I shall have nothing to do with the card-tables, and I hope not with the false hair — nor yet much, I suppose, with the horse-jockeys."

"There will still remain the worst of the four curses."

"Mr. Bertram, how can you be so evil-minded? I have had many happy days at Littlebath." And then she paused, for she remembered that her happy days there had all been passed with Caroline Waddington.

"Yes, and I also have had happy days there," said he; "very happy. And I am sure of this; that they would have been happy still but for the influence of that wretched place."

Adela could make no answer to this at the moment, so she went on hemming at her collar. Then, after a pause, she said, "I hope it will have no evil influence on me."

"I hope not — I hope not. But you are beyond such influences. It seems to me, if I may say so, that you are beyond all influences."

"Yes; as a fool is," she said, laughing.

"No; but as a rock is. I will not say as ice, for ice will always melt."

"And do I never melt, Mr. Bertram? Has that which has made you so unhappy not moved me? Do you think that I can love Caroline as I do, and not grieve, and weep, and groan in the spirit? I do grieve; I have wept for it. I am not stone."

And in this also there had been some craft. She had been as it were forced to guard the thoughts of her own heart; and had, therefore, turned the river of the conversation right through the heart of her companion.

"For whom do you weep? for which of us do you weep?" he asked.

"For both; that, having so much to enjoy, you should between you have thrown it all away."

"She will be happy. That at any rate is a consolation to me. Though you will hardly believe that."

"I hope she will. I hope she will. But, oh! Mr. Bertram, it is so fearful a risk. What — what if she should not be? What if she shall find, when the time will be too late for finding anything — what if she shall then find that she cannot love him?"

"Love him!" said the other with a sneer. "You do not know her. What need is there for love?"

"Ah! do not be harsh to her; do not you be harsh to her."

"Harsh, no; I will not be harsh to her. I will be all kindness. And being kind, I ask what need is there for love? Looking at it in any light, of course she cannot love him."

"Cannot love him! why not?"

"How is it possible? Had she loved me, could she

have shaken off one lover and taken up another in two months? And if she never loved me; if for three years she could go on, never loving me — then what reason is there to think she should want such excitement now?"

"But you — could you love her, and yet cast her from you?"

"Yes; I could do it. I did do it — and were it to do again, it should be done again. I did love her — if I know what love is, if I can at all understand it. I did love her with all my heart. And yet — I will not say I cast her off; it would be unmanly as well as false; but I let her go."

"Ah! you did more than that, Mr. Bertram."

"I gave her back her troth; and she accepted it, as it was her duty to do — seeing that her wishes were then changed. I did no more than that."

"Women, Mr. Bertram, well know that when married they must sometimes bear a sharp word. But the sharp word before marriage; that is very hard to be borne."

"I measure my words. But why should I defend myself? Of course your verdict will be on your friend's side. I should hate you if it were not so. But, oh! Adela, if I have sinned, I have been punished. I have been punished heavily. Indeed, indeed, I have been punished." And sitting down, he bowed himself on the table, and his face within his hands.

This was in the drawing-room, and before Adela could venture to speak to him again, one of the girls came into the room.

"Adela," said she, "we are waiting for you to go down to the school."

"I am coming directly," said Adela, jumping up,

and still hoping that Mary would go on, so as to leave her one moment alone with Bertram. But Mary showed no sign of moving without her friend. Instead of doing so, she asked her cousin whether he had a headache?

"Not at all," said he looking up; "but I am half asleep. This Hurst Staple is a sleepy place, I think. Where's Arthur?"

"He's in the study."

"Well, I'll go into the study also. One can always sleep there without being disturbed."

"You're very civil, master George." And then Adela followed her friend down to the school.

But she could not rest while the matter stood in this way. She felt that she had been both harsh and unjust to Bertram. She knew that the fault had been with Caroline; and yet she had allowed herself to speak of it as though he, and he only, had been to blame. She felt, moreover, an expressible tenderness for his sorrow. When he declared how cruel was his punishment, she could willingly have given him the sympathy of her tears. For were not their cases in many points the same?

She was determined to see him again before she went, and to tell him that she acquitted him; — that she knew the greater fault was not with him. This in itself would not comfort him; but she would endeavour so to put it that he might draw comfort from it.

"I must see you for a moment alone, before I go," she said to him that evening in the drawing-room. "I go very early on Thursday morning. When can I speak to you? You are never up early, I know."

"But I will be to-morrow. Will you be afraid to come out with me before breakfast?"

"Oh no! she would not be at all afraid," she said: and so the appointment was made.

"I know you'll think me very foolish for giving this trouble," she began, in rather a confused way, "and making so much about nothing."

"No man thinks there is much ado about nothing when the ado is about himself," said Bertram, laughing.

"Well, but I know it is foolish. But I was unjust to you the other day, and I could not leave you without confessing it."

"How unjust, Adela?"

"I said you had cast Caroline off."

"Ah, no! I certainly did not do that."

"She wrote to me, and told me everything. She wrote very truly, I know; and she did not say a word — not a word against you."

"Did she not? Well — no — I know she would not. And remember this, Adela: I do not say a word against her. Do tell her, not from me, you know, but of your own observation, that I do not say one word against her. I only say she did not love me."

"Ah! Mr. Bertram."

"That is all; and that is true. Adela, I have not much to give; but I would give it all — all — everything to have her back — to have her back as I used to think her. But if I could have her now — as I know her now — by raising this hand, I would not take her. But this imputes no blame to her. She tried to love me, but she could not."

"Ah! she did love you."

"Never!" He almost shouted as he said this; and as he did so, he stood across his companion's path. "Never! She never loved me. I know it now. What poor vile wretches we are! It is this I think that most torments me."

And then they walked on. Adela had come there expressly to speak to him, but now she was almost afraid to speak. Her heart had been full of what it would utter, but now all utterance seemed to have left her. She had intended to console, but she did not dare to attempt it. There was a depth, almost a sublimity about his grief which kept her silent.

"Oh! Adela," he said, "if you knew what it is to have an empty heart — or rather a heart not empty — that would fain be empty that you might again refill it. Dear Adela!" And he put out his hand to take her own. She hardly knew why, but she let him take her hand. "Dear Adela; have you never sighed for the comfort of an empty heart? You probe my wounds to the bottom; may I not search your own?"

She did not answer him. Was it possible that she should answer such a question? Her eyes became suffused with tears, and she was unable to raise them from the ground. She could not recall her hand — not at that moment. She had come there to lecture him, to talk to him, to comfort him; and now she was unable to say a word. Did he know the secret of her heart; that secret which once and but once had involuntarily broken from out her lips? Had Caroline told him? Had she been so false to friendship — as false to friendship as she had been to love?

"Adela! Adela! I would that we had met earlier in our lives. Yes, you and I." These last words he added after she had quickly rescued her hand from his grasp. Very quickly she withdrew it now. As quickly she lifted up her face, all covered as it was with tears, and endured the full weight of his gaze. What! was it possible that

he knew how she had loved, and thought that her love had been for him!

"Yes, you and I," he continued. "Even though your eyes flash upon me so sternly. You mean to say that had it been ever so early, that prize would have been impossible for me. Speak out, Adela. That is what you mean?"

"Yes; it would have been impossible; impossible every way; impossible, that is, on both sides."

"Then you have not that empty heart, Adela? What else should make it impossible?"

"Mr. Bertram, when I came here, I had no wish, no intention to talk about myself."

"Why not of yourself as well as of me? I say again, I would we had both met earlier. It might have been that I should have been saved from this shipwreck. I will speak openly to you, Adela. Why not?" he added, seeing that she shrunk from him, and seemed as though she would move on quickly — away from his words.

"Mr. Bertram, do not say that which it will be useless for you to have said."

"It shall not be useless. You are my friend, and friends should understand each other. You know how I have loved Caroline. You believe that I have loved her, do you not?"

"Oh, yes; I do believe that."

"Well, you may; that at any rate is true. I have loved her. She will now be that man's property, and I must love her no longer."

"No; not with that sort of love."

"That sort! Are there two sorts on which a man may run the changes, as he may from one room to another? I must wipe her out of my mind — out of my heart —

or burn her out. I would not wish to love anything that he possesses."

"No!" said she, "not his wife."

"Wife! she will never be his wife. She will never be bone of his bone, and flesh of his flesh, as I would have made her. It will be but a partnership between them, to be dissolved when they have made the most of their world's trading."

"If you love her, Mr. Bertram, do not be so bitter in speaking of her."

"Bitter! I tell you that I think her quite right in what she does. If a woman cannot love, what better can she do than trade upon her beauty? But, there, let her go; I did not wish to speak of her."

"I was very wrong in asking you to walk with me this morning."

"No, Adela, not wrong; but very, very right. There, well, I will not ask you for your hand again, though it was but in friendship."

"In friendship I will give it you," and she stretched out her hand to him. It was ungloved, and very white and fair; a prettier hand than even Caroline could boast.

"I must not take it. I must not lie to you, Adela: I am broken-hearted. I have loved; I have loved that woman with all my heart, with my very soul, with the utmost strength of my whole being—and now it has come to this. If I know what a broken heart means, I have it here. But yet — yet — yet. Oh, Adela, I would fain try yet once again. I can do nothing for myself; nothing. If the world were there at my feet, wealth, power, glory, to be had for the stooping, I would not stoop to pick them, if I could not share them with — a friend. Adela, it is so sad to be alone!"

"Yes, it is sad. Is not sadness the lot of many of us?"

"Yes; but nature bids us seek a cure when a cure is possible."

"I do not know what you wish me to understand, Mr. Bertram?"

"Yes, Adela, you do; I think you do. I think I am honest and open. At any rate, I strive to be so. I think you do understand me."

"If I do, then the cure which you seek is impossible."

"Ah!"

"Is impossible."

"You are not angry with me?"

"Angry; no, not angry."

"And do not be angry now, if I speak openly again. I thought — I thought. But I fear that I shall pain you."

"I do not care for pain if any good can come of it."

"I thought that you also had been wounded. In the woods, the stricken harts lie down together and lick each other's wounds while the herd roams far away from them."

"Is it so? Why do we hear then of 'the poor sequestered stag, left and abandoned of his velvet friend?' No, Mr. Bertram, grief, I fear, must still be solitary."

"And so, unendurable."

"God still tempers the wind to the shorn lamb, now as he has ever done. But there is no sudden cure for these evils. The time will come when all this will be remembered, not without sorrow, but with a calm, quiet mourning that will be endurable; when your heart, now

not broken as you say, but tortured, will be able to receive other images. But that time cannot come at once. Nor, I think, is it well that we should wish it. Those who have courage to love should have courage to suffer."

"Yes, yes, yes. But if the courage be wanting; if one have it not? One cannot have such courage for the asking."

"The first weight of the blow will stun the sufferer. I know that, Mr. Bertram. But that dull, dead, deathly feeling will wear off at last. You have but to work; to read, to write, to study. In that respect, you men are more fortunate than we are. You have that which must occupy your thoughts."

"And you, Adela —?"

"Do not speak of me. If you are generous, you will not do so. If I have in any way seemed to speak of myself, it is because you have made it unavoidable. What God has given me to bear is bearable; though I would that he could have spared my poor father." And, so saying, Adela at last gave way to tears. On that subject she might be allowed to weep.

Bertram said nothing to disturb her till they were near the house, and then he again held out his hand to her. "As a true friend; I hope as a dear friend. Is it not so?" said he.

"Yes," she answered, in her lowest voice, "as a dear friend. But remember that I expect a friend's generosity and a friend's forbearance." And so she made her way back to her own room, and appeared at breakfast in her usual sober guise, but with eyes that told no tales.

On the next morning she took her departure. The nearest station on the railway by which she was to go

to Littlebath was distant about twelve miles, and it was proposed that she should be sent thither in Mrs. Wilkinson's phaeton. This, indeed, except the farm-yard cart, was the only vehicle which belonged to the parsonage, and was a low four-wheeled carriage, not very well contrived for the accommodation of two moderate-sized people in front, and of two immoderately-small people on the hind seat. Mrs. Wilkinson habitually drove it herself, with one of her daughters beside her, and with two others — those two whose legs had been found by measurement to be the shortest — in durance vile behind; but when so packed, it was clear to all men that the capacity of the phaeton was exhausted. Now the first arrangement proposed was, that Arthur should drive the phaeton, and that Sophy should accompany Adela to the station. But Sophy, in so arranging, had forgotten that her friend had a bag, a trunk, and a bonnet-box, the presence of which at Littlebath would be indispensable; and, therefore, at the last moment, when the phaeton came to the door with the luggage fastened on the hinder seat, it was discovered for the first time that Sophy must be left behind.

Arthur Wilkinson would willingly have given up his position, and George Bertram would willingly have taken it. Adela also would have been well pleased at such a change. But though all would have been pleased, it could not be effected. The vicar could not very well proclaim that, as his sister was not to accompany him and shield him, he would not act as charioteer to Miss Gauntlet; nor could the lady object to be driven by her host. So at last they started from the vicarage door with many farewell kisses, and a large paper of sandwiches. Who is it that consumes the large packets of sandwiches

with which parting guests are always laden? I imagine that station-masters' dogs are mainly fed upon them.

The first half-mile was occupied, on Wilkinson's part, in little would-be efforts to make his companion more comfortable. He shifted himself about into the furthest corner so as to give her more room; he pulled his cloak out from under her, and put it over her knees to guard her from the dust; and recommended her three times to put up her parasol. Then he had a word or two to say to the neighbours; but that only lasted as long as he was in his own parish. Then he came to a hill which gave him an opportunity of walking; and on getting in again he occupied half a minute in taking out his watch, and assuring Adela that she would not be too late for the train.

But when all this was done, the necessity for conversation still remained. They had hardly been together — thrown for conversation on each other as they now were — since that day when Arthur had walked over for the last time to West Putford. Reader, do you remember it? Hardly; for have not all the fortunes and misfortunes of our more prominent hero intervened since that chapter was before you?

"I hope you will find yourself comfortable at Little-bath," he said at last.

"Oh, yes; that is, I shall be when my aunt comes home. I shall be at home then, you know."

"But that will be some time?"

"I fear so; and I dread greatly going to this Miss Todd, whom I have never seen. But you see, dear Miss Baker must go back to Hadley soon, and Miss Todd has certainly been very good-natured in offering to take me."

Then there was another silence, which lasted for about half a mile.

"My mother would have been very glad if you would have stayed at the parsonage till your aunt's return; and so would my sisters — and so should I."

"You are all very kind — too kind," said Adela.

Then came another pause, perhaps for a quarter of a mile, but it was up-hill work, and the quarter of a mile passed by very slowly.

"It seems so odd that you should go away from us, whom you have known so long, to stay with Miss Todd, whom you never have even seen."

"I think change of scene will be good for me, Mr. Wilkinson."

"Well, perhaps so." And then the other quarter of a mile made away with itself. "Come, get along, Dumpling." This was said to the fat steed; for they had now risen to level ground.

"Our house, I know, must be very stupid for you. It is much changed from what it was; is it not?"

"Oh, I don't know."

"Yes, it is. There is neither the same spirit, nor the same good-will. We miss my father greatly."

"Ah, yes. I can feel for you there. It is a loss; a great loss."

"I sometimes think it unfortunate that my mother should have remained at the vicarage after my father's death."

"You have been very good to her, I know."

"I have done my best, Adela." It was the first time she had distinctly heard him call her by her Christian name since she had come to stay with them. "But I

have failed. She is not happy there; nor, indeed, for that matter, am I."

"A man should be happy when he does his duty."

"We none of us do that so thoroughly as to require no other source of happiness. Go on, Dumpling, and do your duty."

"I see that you are very careful in doing yours."

"Perhaps you will hardly believe me, but I wish Lord Stapledean had never given me the living."

"Well, it is difficult to believe that. Think what it has been for your sisters."

"I know we should have been very poor, but we should not have starved. I had my fellowship, and I could have taken pupils. I am sure we should have been happier. And then —"

"And then — well?" said Adela? and as she spoke, her heart was not quite at rest within her breast.

"Then I should have been free. Since I took that living, I have been a slave." Again he paused a moment, and whipped the horse; but it was only now for a moment that he was silent. "Yes, a slave. Do you not see what a life I live? I could be content to sacrifice myself to my mother if the sacrifice were understood. But you see how it is with her. Nothing that I can do will satisfy her; and yet for her I have sacrificed everything — everything."

"A sacrifice is no sacrifice if it be agreeable. The sacrifice consists in its being painful."

"Well, I suppose so. I say that to myself so often. It is the only consolation I have."

"Not that I think your home should be made uncomfortable to you. There is no reason why it should be. At least, I should think not." She spoke with little

spasmodic efforts, which, however, did not betray themselves to her companion, who seemed to her to be almost more engaged with Dumpling than with the conversation. It certainly had been through no wish of hers that they were thus talking of his household concerns; but as they were speaking of them, she was forced into a certain amount of hypocrisy. It was a subject on which she could not speak openly.

There was then another hill to be walked up, and Adela thought there would be no more of it. The matter had come up by accident, and would now, probably, drop away. But no. Whether by design, or from chance, or because no other topic presented itself, Arthur went back to the subject, and did so now in a manner that was peculiarly startling to Miss Gauntlet.

"Do you remember my calling once at West Putford, soon after I got the living? It is a long time ago now, and I don't suppose you do remember it."

"Yes, I do; very well."

"And do you remember what I told you then?"

"What was it?" said Adela. It clearly is the duty of a young lady on very many occasions to be somewhat hypocritical.

"If there be any man to whose happiness marriage is more necessary than to that of another, it is a country clergyman."

"Yes, I can believe that. That is, if there be not ladies of his own family living with him."

"I do not know that that makes any difference."

"Oh, yes; it must make a difference. I think that a man must be very wretched who has no one to look after his house."

"And is that your idea of the excellence of a wife?"

I should have expected something higher from you, Adela. I suppose you think, then, that if a man have his linen looked after, and his dinner cooked, that is sufficient." Poor Adela! It must be acknowledged that this was hard on her.

"No, I do not think that sufficient."

"It would seem so from what you say."

"Then what I said belied my thoughts. It seems to me, Mr. Wilkinson, since you drive me to speak out, that the matter is very much in your own hands. You are certainly a free agent. You know better than I can tell you what your duty to your mother and sisters requires. Circumstances have made them dependent on you, and you certainly are not the man to disacknowledge that burden."

"Certainly not."

"No, certainly not. But, having made up my mind to that, I would not, were I you, allow myself to be a slave."

"But what can I do?"

"You mean that you would be a poor man, were you — were you to give up your fellowship and at the same time take upon yourself other cares as well; do as other poor men do."

"I know no other man situated as I am."

"But you know men who are much worse situated as regards their worldly means. Were you to give your mother the half of your income, you would still, I presume, be richer than Mr. Young." Mr. Young was the curate of a neighbouring parish, who had lately married in his curacy.

It will be said by my critics, especially by my female critics, that in saying this, Adela went a long way

towards teaching Mr. Wilkinson the way to woo. Indeed, she brought that accusation against herself, and not lightly. But she was, as she herself had expressed it, driven in the cause of truth to say what she had said. Nor did she, in her heart of hearts, believe that Mr. Wilkinson had any thought of her in saying what she did say. Her mind on that matter had been long made up. She knew herself to be "the poor sequestered stag left and abandoned by his velvet friend." She had no feeling in the matter which amounted to the slightest hope. He had asked her for her counsel, and she had given him the only counsel which she honestly could give.

Therefore, bear lightly on her, oh my critics. Bear lightly on her especially, my critics feminine. To the worst of your wrath and scorn I willingly subject the other lovers with whom my tale is burthened.

"Yes, I should be better off than Young," said Wilkinson, as though he were speaking to himself. "But that is not the point. I do not know that I have ever looked at it exactly in that light. There is the house, the parsonage I mean. It is full of women" — 'twas thus irreverently that he spoke of his mother and sisters — "what other woman would come among them?"

"Oh, that is the treasure for which you have to search" — this she said laughingly. The bitterness of the day was over with her, at least it then seemed so. She was not even thinking of herself when she said this.

"Would you come to such a house, Adela? You, you yourself?"

"You mean to ask whether, if, as regards other cir-

cumstances, I was minded to marry, I would then be deterred by a mother-in-law and sister-in-law?"

"Yes, just so," said Wilkinson, timidly.

"Well, that would depend much upon how well I might like the gentleman; something also upon how much I might like the ladies."

"A man's wife should always be mistress in his own house."

"Oh yes, of course."

"And my mother is determined to be mistress in that house."

"Well, I will not recommend you to rebel against your mother. Is that the station, Mr Wilkinson?"

"Yes — that's the station. Dear me, we have forty minutes to wait yet."

"Don't mind me, Mr. Wilkinson. I shall not in the least dislike waiting by myself."

"Of course I shall see you off. Dumpling won't run away; you may be sure of that. There is very little of the runaway class to be found at Hurst Staple Parsonage; except you, Adela."

"You don't call me a runaway, I hope?"

"You run away from us just when we are beginning to feel the comfort of your being with us. There, he won't catch cold now;" and so having thrown a rug over Dumpling's back, he followed Adela into the station.

I don't know anything so tedious as waiting at a second-class station for a train. There is the ladies' waiting-room, into which gentlemen may not go, and the gentlemen's waiting-room, in which the parties generally smoke, and the refreshment room, with its dirty counter covered with dirtier cakes. And there is the platform,

which you walk up and down till you are tired. You go to the ticket-window half a dozen times for your ticket, having been warned by the company's bills that you must be prepared to start at least ten minutes before the train is due. But the man inside knows better, and does not open the little hole to which you have to stoop your head till two minutes before the time named for your departure. Then there are five fat farmers, three old women, and a butcher at the aperture, and not finding yourself equal to struggling among them for a place, you make up your mind to be left behind. At last, however, you do get your ticket just as the train comes up; but hearing that exciting sound, you nervously cram your change into your pocket without counting it, and afterwards feel quite convinced that you have lost a shilling in the transaction.

"Twas somewhat in this way that the forty minutes were passed by Wilkinson and Adela. Nothing of any moment was spoken between them till he took her hand for the last time. "Adela," he then whispered to her, "I shall think much of what you have said to me, very much. I do so wish you were not leaving us. I wonder whether you would be surprised if I were to write to you?" But the train was gone before she had time to answer.

Two days afterwards, Bertram also left them. "Arthur," he said, as he took leave of the vicar, "If I, who have made such a mess of it myself, may give advice on such a subject, I would not leave Adela Gauntlet long at Littlebath if I were you."

CHAPTER VI.

The Solicitor-General in Love.

CAROLINE WADDINGTON was at Hadley when she received and accepted the proposal made to her by Sir Henry Harcourt. It may be conceived that the affair was arranged without any very great amount of romance. Sir Henry indeed was willing, in a hurried manner, to throw himself at the lady's feet, to swear by her fair hand that he loved her as man never yet had loved, and to go to work in the fashion usually most approved by young ladies. In a hurried manner, I say; for just at this moment he was being made solicitor-general, and had almost too many irons in the fire to permit of a prolonged dallying. But Caroline would have none of it, either hurried or not hurried. Whatever might be the case with Sir Henry, she had gone through that phase of life, and now declared to herself that she did not want any more of it.

Sir Henry did not find the task of gaining his bride very difficult. He had succeeded in establishing a sort of intimacy with old Mr. Bertram, and it appeared that permission to run down to Hadley and run back again had already been accorded to him before Miss Baker and Caroline arrived there. He never slept, though he sometimes dined in the house; but he had always something to talk about when an excuse for going to Hadley was required. Mr. Bertram had asked him something about some investment, and he had found out this something; or he wanted to ask Mr. Bertram's advice on some question as to his political career. At this period he was, or professed to be, very much guided in his public life by Mr. Bertram's opinion.

And thus he fell in with Caroline. On the first occasion of his doing so, he contrived to whisper to her his deep sympathy with her sorrow; on his second visit, he spoke more of himself and less of Bertram; on his third, he alluded only to her own virtues; on his fourth, he asked her to be Lady Harcourt. She told him that she would be Lady Harcourt; and, as far as she was concerned, there was an end of it for the present.

Then Sir Henry proposed that the day should be named. On this subject also he found her ready to accommodate him. She had no coy scruples as to the time. He suggested that it should be before Christmas. Very well; let it be before Christmas. Christmas is a cold time for marrying; but this was to be a cold marriage. Christmas, however, for the fortunate is made warm with pudding, ale, and spiced beef. They intended to be among the fortunate, the fortunate in place, and money, and rank; and they would as best they might make themselves warm with the best pudding, ale, and spiced beef which the world could afford them.

Sir Henry was alive to the delight of being the possessor of so many charms, and was somewhat chagrined that for the present he was so cruelly debarred from any party, his legitimate enjoyment. Though he was a solicitor-general, he could have been content to sit for ten minutes with his arm round Caroline's waist; and — in spite of the energy with which he was preparing a bill for the regulation of County Courts, as to which he knew that he should have that terrible demigod, Lord Boanerges, down upon his shoulders — still he would fain have stolen a kiss or two. But Caroline's waist and Caroline's kisses were to be his only after Christmas; and to be his only as payment accorded

for her new rank, and for her fine new house in Eaton Square.

How is it that girls are so potent to refuse such favours at one time, and so impotent in preventing their exaction at another? Sir Henry, we may say, had every right to demand some trifling payment in advance? but he could not get a doit. Should we be violating secrecy too much if we suggested that George Bertram had had some slight partial success even when he had no such positive claim? — some success which had of course been in direct opposition to the lady's will?

Miss Baker had now gone back to Littlebath, either to receive Adela Gauntlet, or because she knew that she should be more comfortable in her own rooms than in her uncle's dismal house — or perhaps because Sir Lionel was there. She had, however, gone back, and Caroline remained mistress for the time of her grandfather's household.

The old man now seemed to have dropped all mystery in the matter. He generally, indeed, spoke of Caroline as Miss Waddington; but he heard her talked of as his granddaughter without expressing anger, and with Sir Henry he himself so spoke of her. He appeared to be quite reconciled to the marriage. In spite of all his entreaties to George, all his attempted bribery, his broken-hearted sorrow when he failed, he seemed to be now content. Indeed, he had made no opposition to the match. When Caroline had freely spoken to him about it, he made some little snappish remark as to the fickleness of women; but he at the same time signified that he would not object.

Why should he? Sir Henry Harcourt was in every respect a good match for his granddaughter. He had

often been angry with George Bertram because George had not prospered in the world. Sir Henry had prospered signally — would probably prosper much more signally. Might it not be safely predicated of a man who was solicitor-general before he was thirty, that he would be lord-chancellor or lord chief-justice, or at any rate some very big-wig indeed before he was fifty? So of course Mr. Bertram did not object.

But he had not signified his acquiescence in any very cordial way. Rich old men, when they wish to be cordial on such occasions, have but one way of evincing cordiality. It is not by a pressure of the hand, by a kind word, by an approving glance. Their embrace conveys no satisfaction; their warmest words, if unsupported, are very cold. An old man, if he intends to be cordial on such an occasion, must speak of *thousands of pounds*. "My dear young fellow, I approve altogether. She shall have *twenty thousand pounds* the day she becomes yours." Then is the hand shaken with true fervour? then is real cordiality expressed and felt. "What a dear old man grandpapa is! Is there any one like him? Dear old duck. He is going to be so generous to Harry."

But Mr. Bertram said nothing about twenty thousand pounds, nothing about ten, nothing about money at all till he was spoken to on the subject. It was Sir Henry's special object not to be pressing on this point, to show that he was marrying Caroline without any sordid views, and that his admiration for Mr. Bertram had no bearing at all on that gentleman's cash-box. He did certainly make little feints at Mr. Pritchett; but Mr. Pritchett merely weazed and said nothing. Mr. Pritchett was not fond of the Harcourt interest; and seemed to care but

little for Miss Caroline now that she had transferred her affections.

But it was essentially necessary that Sir Henry Harcourt should know what was to be done. If he were to have nothing, it was necessary that he should know that. He had certainly counted on having something, and on having something immediately. He was a thoroughly hard-working man of business, but yet he was not an economizing man. A man who lives before the world in London, and lives chiefly among men of fortune, can hardly be economical. He had not therefore any large sum of money in hand. He was certainly in receipt of a large income, but then his expenses were large. He had taken and now had to furnish an expensive house in Eaton Square, and a few thousand pounds in ready money were almost indispensable to him.

One Friday — this was after his return to town from the ten days' grouse-shooting, and occurred at the time when he was most busy with the County Courts — he wrote to Caroline to say that he would go down to Hadley on Saturday afternoon, stay there over the Sunday, and return to town on the Monday morning; that is to say, he would do so if perfectly agreeable to Mr. Bertram.

He went down, and found everything prepared for him that was suitable for a solicitor-general. They did not put before him merely roast mutton or boiled beef. He was not put to sleep in the back bedroom without a carpet. Such treatment had been good enough for George Bertram; but for the solicitor-general all the glories of Hadley were put forth. He slept in the best bedroom, which was damp enough no doubt, seeing that it was not used above twice in the year; and went through at

dinner a whole course of *entrées*, such as *entrées* usually are in the suburban districts. This was naturally gratifying to him as a solicitor-general, and fortified him for the struggle he was to make.

He had some hope that he should have a *tête-à-tête* with Caroline on the Saturday evening. But neither fate nor love would favour him. He came down just before dinner, and there was clearly no time then: infirm as the old man was, he sat at the dinner-table; and though Sir Henry was solicitor-general, there was no second room, no withdrawing-room prepared for his reception.

"Grandpapa does not like moving," said Caroline, as she got up to leave the room after dinner, "so perhaps, Sir Henry, you will allow me to come down to tea here? We always sit here of an evening."

"I never could bear to live in two rooms," said the old man. "When one is just warm and comfortable, one has to go out into all the draughts of the house. That's the fashion, I know. But I hope you'll excuse me, Sir Henry, for not liking it."

Sir Henry of course did excuse him. There was nothing he himself liked so much as sitting cosy over a dining-room fire.

In about an hour Caroline did come down again; and in another hour, before the old man went, she again vanished for the night. Sir Henry had made up his mind not to speak to Mr. Bertram about money that evening; so he also soon followed Caroline, and sat down to work upon the County Courts in his own bedroom.

On the next morning Sir Henry and Caroline went to church. All the Hadleyians of course knew of the engagement, and were delighted to have an opportunity of staring at the two turtle-doves. A solicitor-general in

love is a sight to behold; and the clergyman had certainly no right to be angry if the attention paid to his sermon was something less fixed than usual. After church, there was luncheon; and then Sir Henry asked his betrothed if she would take a walk with him. "Oh, certainly, she would be delighted." Her church-going bonnet was still on, and she was quite ready. Sir Henry also was ready; but as he left the room he stooped over Mr. Bertram's chair and whispered to him, "Could I speak to you a few words before dinner, sir; on business? I know I ought to apologize, this being Sunday."

"Oh, I don't care about Sunday," said the stubborn-minded old man. "I shall be here till I go to bed, I suppose, if you want me."

And then they started on their walk. Oh, those lovers' rambles! A man as he grows old can perhaps teach himself to regret but few of the sweets which he is compelled to leave behind him. He can learn to disregard most of his youth's pleasures, and to live contented though he has outlived them. The polka and the waltz were once joyous; but he sees now that the work was warm, and that one was often compelled to perform it in company for which one did not care. Those picnics too were nice; but it may be a question whether a good dinner at his own dinner-table is not nicer. Though fat and over forty he may still ride to hounds, and as for boating and cricketing, after all they were but boy's play. For those things one's soul does not sigh. But, ah! those lovers' walks, those loving lovers' rambles. Tom Moore is usually somewhat sugary and mawkish; but in so much he was right. If there be an Elysium on earth, it is this. They are done and over for us, oh my compatriots. Never again, unless we are destined

to rejoin our houris in heaven, and to saunter over fields of asphodel in another and a greener youth — never again shall those joys be ours! And what can ever equal them? 'Twas then, between sweet hedgerows, under green oaks, with our feet rustling on the crisp leaves, that the world's cold reserve was first thrown off, and we found that those we loved were not goddesses made of buckram and brocade, but human beings like ourselves, with blood in their veins, and hearts in their bosoms, veritable children of Adam like ourselves.

"Gin a body meet a body ganging through the rye." Ah, how delicious were those meetings! How convinced we were that there was no necessity for loud alarm! How fervently we agreed with the poet! My friends, born together with me, in the consulship of Lord Liverpool, all that is done and over for us. We shall never gang that gait more.

There is a melancholy in this that will tinge our thoughts, let us draw ever so strongly on our philosophy. We can still walk with our wives — and that is pleasant too, very — of course. But there was more animation in it when we walked with the same ladies under other names. Nay, my spouse, mother of sweet bairns, who hast so well done thy duty; but this was so, let thy brows be knit never so angrily. That lord of thine has been indifferently good to thee, and thou to him hast been more than good. Up-hill together have ye walked peaceably labouring; and now arm-in-arm ye shall go down the gradual slope which ends below there in the green churchyard. 'Tis good and salutary to walk thus. But for the full cup of joy, for the brimming spring-tide of human bliss, oh, give me back, give me back — —! Well, well, well; it is nonsense; I know it; but may not

a man dream now and again in his evening nap and yet do no harm?

Vixi puellis nuper idoneus, et militavi. How well Horace knew all about it! But that hanging up of the gittern —. One would fain have put it off, had falling hairs, and marriage-vows, and obesity have permitted it. Náý, is it not so, old friend of the grizzled beard? Dost thou not envy that smirk young knave with his five lustrums, though it goes hard with him to purchase his kid-gloves? He dines for one and twopence at an eating-house; but what cares Maria where he dines? He rambles through the rye with his empty pockets, and at the turn of the field-path Maria will be there to meet him. Envy him not; thou hast had thy walk; but lend him rather that thirty shillings that he asks of thee. So shall Maria's heart be glad as she accepts his golden brooch.

But for our friend Sir Henry every joy was present. Youth and wealth and love were all his, and his all together. He was but eight-and-twenty, was a member of Parliament, solicitor-general, owner of a house in Eaton Square, and possessor of as much well-trained beauty as was to be found at that time within the magic circle of any circumambient crinoline within the bills of mortality. Was it not sweet for him to wander through the rye? Had he not fallen upon an Elysium, a very paradise of earthly joys? Was not his spring-tide at the full flood?

And so they started on their walk. It was the first that they had ever taken together. What Sir Henry may have done before in that line this history says not. A man who is solicitor general at eight-and-twenty can hardly have had time for much. But the practice which he perhaps wanted, Caroline had had. There had been

walks as well as rides at Littlebath; and walks also, though perhaps of doubtful joy, amidst those graves below the walls of Jerusalem.

And so they started. There is — or perhaps we should say was; for time and railways, and straggling new suburban villas, may now have destroyed it all; but there is, or was, a pretty woodland lane, running from the back of Hadley church, through the last remnants of what once was Enfield Chase. How many lovers' feet have crushed the leaves that used to lie in autumn along that pretty lane! Well, well, there shall not be another word in that strain. I speak solely now of the time here present to Sir Henry; all former days and former roamings there shall be clean forgotten. The solicitor-general now thither wends his way, and love and beauty attend upon his feet. See how he opens the gate that stands by the churchyard paling? Does it stand there yet, I wonder. Well, well, we will say it does.

"It is a beautiful day for a walk," said Sir Henry.

"Yes, very beautiful," said Caroline.

"There is nothing I am so fond of as a long walk," said the gentleman.

"It is very nice," said the lady. "But I do not know that I care for going very far to-day. I am not quite strong at present."

"Not strong?" And the solicitor-general put on a look of deep alarm.

"Oh, there is nothing the matter with me; but I am not quite strong for walking. I am out of practice; and my boots are not quite of the right sort."

"They don't hurt you, I hope."

"Oh, no; they don't actually hurt me. They'll do

very well for to-day." And then there was a short pause, and they got on the green grass which runs away into the chase in front of the parsonage windows. I wonder whether wickets are ever standing there now on the summer afternoons.

They were soon as much alone — or nearly so — as lovers might wish to be; quite enough so for Caroline. Some curious eyes were still peeping, no doubt, to see how the great lawyer looked when he was walking with the girl of his heart; to see how the rich miser's granddaughter looked when she was walking with the man of her heart. And perhaps some voices were whispering that she had changed her lover; for in these rural seclusions everything is known by everybody. But neither the peepers nor the whisperers interfered with the contentment of the fortunate pair.

"I hope you are happy, Caroline?" said Sir Henry, as he gently squeezed the hand that was so gently laid upon his arm.

"Happy; oh yes — I am happy. I don't believe, you know, in a great deal of very ecstatic happiness. I never did."

"But I hope you are rationally happy — not discontented — at any rate, not regretful? I hope you believe that I shall do my best, my very best, to make you happy?"

"Oh, yes; I quite believe that. We must each think of the other's comfort. After all, that I take it is the great thing in married life."

"I don't expect you to be passionately in love with me — not as yet, Caroline."

"No. Let neither of us expect that, Sir Henry. Passionate love, I take it, rarely lasts long, and is very

troublesome while it does last. Mutual esteem is very much more valuable."

"But, Caroline, I would have you believe in my love."

"Oh, yes; I do believe in it. Why else should you wish to marry me? I think too well of myself to feel it strange that you should love me. But love with you, and with me also for the future, will be subordinate to other passions."

Sir Henry did not altogether like that reference to the past which was conveyed in the word future; but, however, he bore it without wincing.

"You know so thoroughly the history of the last three years," she continued, "that it would be impossible for me to deceive you if I could. But if I knew myself, under no circumstances would I have done so. I have loved once, and no good has come of it. It was contrary to my nature to do so — to love in that mad passionate self-sacrificing manner. But yet I did. I think I may say with certainty that I never shall be so foolish again."

"You have suffered lately, Caroline; and as the sore still smarts, you hardly yet know what happiness may be in store for you."

"Yes; I have suffered," and he felt from the touch on his arm that her whole body shuddered.

He walked on in silence for awhile considering within himself. Why should he marry this girl, rejected of her former lover, who now hung upon his arm? He was now at the very fullest tide of his prosperity; he had everything to offer which mothers wish for their daughters, and which daughters wish for themselves. He had income, rank, name, youth, and talent. Why

should he fling his rich treasures at the feet of a proud minx who in taking them swore that she could not love him? Would it not be better for him to recede? A word he well knew would do it; for her pride was real pride. He felt in his heart that it was not assumed. He had only to say that he was not contented with this cool look of love, and she would simply desire him to lead her back to her home and leave her there. It would be easy enough for him to get his head from out the noose.

But it was this very easiness, perhaps, which made him hesitate. She knew her own price, and was not at all anxious to dispose of herself a cheap bargain. If you, sir, have a horse to sell, never appear anxious for the sale. That rule is well understood among those who deal in horses. If you, madam, have a daughter to sell, it will be well for you also to remember this. Or, my young friend, if you have yourself to sell, the same rule holds good. But it is hard to put an old head on young shoulders. Hard as the task is, however, it would seem to have been effected as regards Caroline Waddington.

And then Sir Henry looked at her. Not exactly with his present eyesight as then at that moment existing; for seeing that she was walking by his side, he could not take the comprehensive view which his taste and mind required. But he looked at her searchingly with the eyesight of his memory, and found that she exactly tallied with what his taste required. That she was very beautiful, no man had ever doubted. That she was now in the full pride of her beauty was to him certain. And then her beauty was of that goddess class which seems for so long a period to set years at defiance. It was

produced by no girlish softness, by no perishable mixture of white and red; it was not born of a sparkling eye, and a ripe lip, and a cherry cheek. To her face belonged lines of contour, severe, lovely, and of ineradicable grace. It was not when she smiled and laughed that she most pleased. She did not charm only when she spoke; though, indeed, the expression of her speaking face was perfect. But she had the beauty of a marble bust. It would not be easy even for Sir Henry Harcourt, even for a young solicitor-general, to find a face more beautiful with which to adorn his drawing-room.

And then she had that air of fashion, that look of being able to look down the unfashionable, which was so much in the eyes of Sir Henry; though in those of George Bertram it had been almost a demerit. With Caroline, as with many women, this was an appearance rather than a reality. She had not moved much among high people; she had not taught herself to despise those of her own class, the women of Littlebath, the Todds, and the Adela Gauntlets; but she looked as though she would be able to do so. And it was fitting she should have such a look if ever she were to be the wife of a solicitor-general.

And then Sir Henry thought of Mr. Bertram's coffers. Ah! if he could only be let into that secret, it might be easy to come to a decision. That the old man had quarrelled with his nephew, he was well aware. That George, in his pigheaded folly, would make no overtures towards a reconciliation; of that also he was sure. Was it not probable that at any rate a great portion of that almost fabulous wealth would go to the man's granddaughter? There was doubtless risk; but then

one must run some risk in everything. It might be, if he could play his cards wisely, he would get it all — that he would be placed in a position to make even the solicitor-generalship beneath his notice.

And so, in spite of Caroline's coldness, he resolved to persevere.

Having thus made up his mind, he turned the conversation to another subject.

"You liked the house on the whole; did you?" Caroline during the past week had been up to see the new house in Eaton Square.

"Oh, yes; very much. Nothing could be nicer. Only I am afraid it's expensive." This was a subject on which Caroline could talk to him.

"Not particularly," said Sir Harcourt. "Of course one can't get a house in London for nothing. I shall have rather a bargain of that if I can pay the money down. The great thing is whether you like it."

"I was charmed with it. I never saw prettier drawing-rooms — never. And the bedrooms for a London house are so large and airy."

"Did you go into the dining-room?"

"Oh, yes; I went in."

"There's room for four-and-twenty, is there not?"

"Well, I don't know. I can't give an opinion about that. You could have three times that number at supper."

"I'm not thinking of suppers; but I'm sure you could. Kitchen's convenient, eh?"

"Very — so at least aunt Mary said."

"And now about the furniture. You can give me two or three days in town, can't you?"

"Oh, yes; if you require it. But I would trust your taste in all those matters."

"My taste! I have neither taste nor time. If you won't mind going to ——"

And so the conversation went on for another fifteen minutes, and then they were at home. Caroline's boots had begun to tease her, and their walk, therefore, had not been prolonged to a great distance.

Ah, me! again I say how pleasant, how delightful were those lovers' walks!

Then Caroline went up to her bedroom, and Sir Henry sat himself down near Mr. Bertram's chair in the dining-room.

"I wanted to speak to you, sir," said he, rushing at once into the midst of his subject, "about Caroline's settlement. It is time that all that should be arranged. I would have made my lawyer see Pritchett; but I don't know that Pritchett has any authority to act for you in such matters."

"Act for me! Pritchett has no authority to act — nor have I either." This little renunciation of his granddaughter's affairs was no more than Sir Henry expected. He was, therefore, neither surprised nor disgusted.

"Well! I only want to know who has the authority. I don't anticipate any great difficulty. Caroline's fortune is not very large; but of course it must be settled. Six thousand pounds, I believe."

"Four, Sir Henry. That is if I am rightly informed."

"Four, is it? I was told six — I think by George Bertram in former days. I should of course prefer six; but if it be only four, why we must make the best of it."

"She has only four of her own," said the old man, somewhat mollified.

"Have you any objection to my telling you what I would propose to do?"

"No objection in life, Sir Henry."

"My income is large; but I want a little ready money at present to conclude the purchase of my house, and to furnish it. Would you object to the four thousand pounds being paid into my hands, if I insure my life for six for her benefit? Were her fortune larger, I should of course propose that my insurance should be heavier."

Sir Henry was so very reasonable that Mr. Bertram by degrees thawed. He would make his granddaughter's fortune six thousand as he had always intended. This should be settled on her, the income of course going to her husband. He should insure his life for four thousand more on her behalf; and Mr. Bertram would lend Sir Henry three thousand for his furniture.

Sir Henry agreed to this, saying to himself that such a loan from Mr. Bertram was equal to a gift. Mr. Bertram himself seemed to look at it in a different light. "Mind, Sir Henry, I shall expect the interest to the day. I will only charge you four per cent. And it must be made a bond debt."

"Oh, certainly," said Sir Henry.

And so the affair of the settlement was arranged.

CHAPTER VII.

Mrs. Leake of Rissbury.

ADELA GAUNTLET reached Littlebath without any adventures, and at the station she met Miss Baker ready to take her and her boxes in charge. She soon learned what was to be her fate for that autumn. It was im-

peratively necessary that Miss Baker should go up to town in a week or two. "There are such hundreds of things so be done about furniture and all that, you know," said Miss Baker, looking rather grand as she spoke of her niece's great match; and yet doing so with the least possible amount of intentional pride or vanity. Adela of course acknowledged that there must be hundreds of things, and expressed her deepest regret that she should be so much in the way. Perhaps she almost wished that she had remained at Hurst Staple.

"Not at all in the way, my dear," said Miss Baker; "I shall be back again in a week at the furthest, and Miss Todd will be delighted to have you for that time. Indeed, she would be very much disappointed now, and offended too if you did not go. But all the same, I would not leave you, only that Sir Henry insists that Caroline should choose all the things herself; and of course he has not time to go with her — and then the responsibility is so great. Why, I suppose she will have to lay out about two thousand pounds!"

"But what sort of a person is Miss Todd?" asked Adela.

"Oh, an extremely nice person; you'll like her amazingly — so lively, so good-natured, so generous; and very clever too. Perhaps, for her age, she's a little too fond —"

"Too fond of what? You were going to say dress, I suppose."

"No, indeed. I can't say that there's anything to blame her for in that. She dresses very handsomely, but always plain. No; what I was going to say is, that perhaps for a woman of her age — she is a little too fond of gentlemen's attention."

"Caroline told me that she was the most confirmed old maid she knew — an old maid who gloried in being an old maid."

"I don't know about that, my dear, but if a certain gentleman were to ask her, I don't think she'd glory in it much longer. But she's a very nice person, and you'll like her very much."

Miss Baker did go up to town, leaving Adela to Miss Todd's hospitality. She did go up, but in doing so resolved to return as soon as possible. Sir Lionel was now in the Paragon nearly every other day. To be sure, he did generally call in Montpellier Terrace on the alternate days. But then there was a reason for that. They had to talk about George and Caroline. What possible reason could there be for his going to the Paragon?

Adela was rather frightened when she found herself left at Miss Todd's lodgings; though that lady's manner to her was not such as need have inspired much awe.

"Now, my dear," she said, "don't mind me in the least. Do just whatever you like. If I only knew what you did like, you should have it if I could get it. What are you fond of now? Shall I ask some young people here to-night?"

"Oh, no, Miss Todd; not for me. I have never been much in society, and certainly do not wish for it at present."

"Well, society is not a bad thing. You don't play cards, I suppose?"

"I don't know one card from another."

You'd just suit Mr. O'Callaghan then. Are you fond of young clergymen? There's one here might just suit you. All the young ladies are dying for him."

"Then pray don't let me interfere with them, Miss Todd."

"Perhaps you like officers better. There are heaps of them here. I don't know where they come from, and they never seem to have anything to do. The young ladies, however — those who don't run after M. O'Callaghan — seem to think them very nice."

"Oh, Miss Todd, I don't want clergymen or officers."

"Don't you? Well then, we'll get some novels from the circulating library. At three o'clock I always drive out, and we'll go to the pastrycook's. Oh, I declare, here's Sir Lionel Bertram, as usual. You know Sir Lionel, don't you?"

Adela said that she had met Sir Lionel at Miss Baker's.

"What a pity that match should have gone off, isn't it? I mean dear Miss Waddington. But though that match is off, another may come on. I for one should be very happy. You don't know anything about it, I see. I'll tell you some of these days. How do, Sir Lionel? You mustn't stay long, because Miss Gauntlet and I am going out. Or I'll tell you what. You shall take care of us. It's a beautiful day; and if Miss Gauntlet likes, we'll walk instead of having the fly." Miss Todd never aped grandeur, and always called her private carriage a fly, because it had only one horse.

Sir Lionel, having made his salutations to Miss Gauntlet, declared that he should be most happy to be trusted with their custody through the streets of Little-bath.

"But we can't walk either, Miss Gauntlet, to-day, because I must call on old Mrs. Leake, at Rissbury. I quite forgot Mrs. Leake. So you see, Sir Lionel, we shan't want you after all."

Sir Lionel declared that this last decision made him quite miserable.

"You'll be recovered by dinner-time, I don't doubt," said Miss Todd. "And now I'll go upstairs and put my bonnet on. As Miss Gauntlet has got hers, you can stay and talk to her."

"Charming creature, Miss Todd; isn't she?" said Sir Lionel, before the door was well closed. "Such freshness of character, so much bonhommie — a little odd sometimes." These last words were not added till Miss Todd's footsteps, heavier than Camilla's, were heard well up the stairs.

"She seems to be a very good-natured person. I never saw her before to-day."

"Did you not? We knew her very intimately in the Holy Land" — as if any land ever was or could be holy to Sir Lionel and such as he. "That is, George and I, and Caroline. Of course, you know all about that Miss Waddington."

Adela signified to him that she did know the circumstances to which he alluded.

"It is very sad, is it not? and then the connection between them being so near; and their being the joint-heirs to such an enormous property! I know the people here take Caroline's part, and say that she has been hardly used. But I cannot say that I blame George; I cannot, indeed."

"It is one of those cases in which no one should be blamed."

"Exactly — that is just what I say. My advice to George was this. Don't let money influence your conduct in any way. Thank God, there's enough of that for all of us. What you have to think of, is her

happiness and your own. That's what I said; and I do believe he took my advice. I don't think he had any sordid views with reference to Caroline's fortune."

"I am sure he had not."

"Oh, no, never. What Sir Henry's views may be, I don't pretend to know. People here do say that he has been ingratiating himself with my brother for some time past. He has my leave, Miss Gauntlet. I am an old man, old enough to be your father" — the well-preserved old beau might have said grandfather — "and my experience of life is this, that money is never worth the trouble that men take to get it. They say my brother is fond of it; if so, I think he has made a mistake in life — a great mistake."

All this sounded very nice, but even to Adela's inexperienced ears it was not like the ring of genuine silver. After all, mock virtue imposes on but few people. The man of the world is personally known for such; as also are known the cruel, the griping, the avaricious, the unjust. That which enables the avaricious and the unjust to pass scathless through the world is not the ignorance of the world as to their sins, but the indifference of the world whether they be sinful or no.

"And now, Sir Lionel, you may just put us into the fly, and then we won't keep you any longer," said Miss Todd, as she re-entered the room with her bonnet and shawl.

Mrs. Leake, who lived at Rissbury, was a deaf old lady, not very popular among other old ladies at Littlebath. All the world of course knows that the village of Rissbury is hardly more than a suburb of Littlebath, being distant from the high street not above a mile and a half. It will be remembered that the second milestone

on Hinchcombe Road is altogether beyond the village, just as you begin to ascend the hill near the turnpike.

Mrs. Leake was not very popular, seeing that though her ear was excessively dull, her tongue was peculiarly acute. She had the repute of saying the most biting things of any lady in Littlebath — and many of the ladies of Littlebath were apt to say biting things. Then Mrs. Leake did not play cards, nor did she give suppers, nor add much in any way to the happiness of the other ladies, her compatriots. But she lived in rather a grand house of her own, whereas others lived in lodgings; she kept a carriage with a pair of horses, whereas others kept flies; and she had some mysterious acquaintance with the countyocracy which went a long way with the ladies of Littlebath; though what good it even did to Mrs. Leake herself was never very apparent.

It is a terrible bore to have to talk to people who use speaking-trumpets, and who are so fidgety themselves that they won't use their speaking-trumpets properly. Miss Todd greatly dreaded the speaking-trumpet; she did not usually care one straw for Mrs. Leake's tongue, nor much for her carriage and horses, or county standing; but the Littlebath world called on Leake; and Miss Todd being at Rome did as Rome did.

"I'll take her for five minutes," said Miss Todd, as driving through the village of Rissbury, she finished her description of the lady; "and then do you take her up for five more; and then I'll go on again; and then we'll go away." Adela agreed, though with a heavy heart; for what subject of conversation could she find on which to dilate to Mrs. Leake through a speaking-trumpet for five minutes?

"Miss who?" said Mrs. Leake, putting her trumpet

down from her ear that she might stare the better at Adela. "Oh, Miss Gaunt — very well — I hope you'll like Littlebath, Miss Gaunt."

"Miss Gaunt-let!" shouted Miss Todd, with a voice that would have broken the trumpet into shivers had it not been made of the very best metal.

"Never hollo, my dear. When you do that I can't hear at all. It only makes a noise like a dog barking. You'll find the young men about Littlebath very good-natured, Miss Gaunt. They are rather empty-headed — but I think young ladies generally like them better for that."

Adela felt herself called on to make no answer to this, as it was not her turn at the trumpet.

"What news have you heard lately, Mrs. Leake?" asked Miss Todd. The great thing was to make Mrs. Leake talk instead of having to talk to her.

"Amuse! No, I don't think they do amuse any one very much. But then that's not their line. I suppose they can dance, most of them; and those who've got any money may do for husbands — as the world goes. We mustn't be too particular; must we, Miss Gaunt?"

"Miss Gaunt—let," whispered Miss Todd into the trumpet, separating the sounds well, so that they should not clash on the unsusceptible tympanum of her friend's ear.

"Let, let, let! I think I can hear anybody almost better than I can you, Miss Todd. I don't know how it is, but I never can hear the people out of the town as well as I can my own set. It's habit I take it."

"They're used to deaf people in the country, I suppose," said Miss Todd, who, with all her good nature, didn't choose to be over much put upon.

"Ah, I can't hear you," said Mrs. Leake. She had, however, heard this. "But I want you to tell me something about this Caroline Waddington. Isn't it true she's got another lover already?"

"Oh, quite true; she's going to be married."

"Wants to be married. Yes, I don't doubt she wants to be married. That's what they all want, only some are not able to manage it. Ha! ha! ha! I beg your pardon, Miss Gaunt; but we old women must have our joke about the young ones; mustn't we, Miss Todd?" Mrs. Leake, be it noticed, was past seventy, whereas, our dear Miss Todd, was only just forty-four.

"Miss Gauntlet can tell you all about Miss Waddington," said Miss Todd, in her very plainest voice. "They are very great friends, and correspond with each other." So Miss Todd handed over the spout of the trumpet.

"She was corresponding with another! I dare say she was; with half a dozen at once. Do you know anything about it, Miss Gaunt?"

Poor Adela! what was she to say or do. Her hand absolutely trembled as she put it lightly to the instrument. Thrice she bent her head down before she was able to say anything, and thrice she lifted it up in despair.

"Is it the lady or the gentleman that is a friend of yours, my dear? or which of the gentlemen? I hope she has not robbed you of a beau."

"Miss Waddington is a very dear friend of mine, ma'am."

"Oh; she is, is she?"

"And I know Mr. Bertram also."

"Is he a dear friend too? Well, I suppose he's disengaged now. But they tell me he's got nothing, eh?"

"I really don't know."

"It's very hard to know; very. I don't much admire such jilts myself, but —"

"Miss Waddington did not jilt him, madam."

"Then he jilted her. That's just what I want to come at. I'm very much obliged to you, my dear. I see you can tell me all about it. It was about money, wasn't it?"

"No," shouted Adela, with an energy that quite surprised herself. "Money had nothing to do with it."

"I did not say you had anything to do with it. But don't take up that habit of holloing from Miss Todd. I suppose the truth was that he found out what he wasn't meant to find out. Men shouldn't be too inquisitive; should they, Miss Todd? You are quite right, Miss Gaunt, don't have anything to do with it; it's a bad affair."

"I think you are very much mistaken, madam," said Adela, again shouting. But it was all thrown away. "I can't hear a word, when you hollo in that way, not a word," said Mrs. Leake. And then Adela, with an imploring look at Miss Todd, relinquished her seat.

Miss Todd rose with the usual little speech about leave taking. She had, as we have seen, intended to have gone in for a second innings herself, but all hope of winning the game against Mrs. Leake was over; even her carriage was nearly upset; so making a little whisper to Adela, she held out her hand to the old lady, and prepared to depart.

"Dear me, you are in a great hurry to go," said Mrs. Leake.

"Yes; we are rather in a hurry this morning," said

Miss Todd, neglectful of the trumpet, "we have so many people to see."

"Well, good-bye; I'm very much obliged to you for coming, and Miss Todd" — and here Mrs. Leake affected to whisper; but her whisper would have been audible to a dozen, had a dozen been there — "I mustn't forget to wish you joy about Sir Lionel. Good morning to you, Miss Gaunt," and then Mrs. Leake dropt an old-fashioned gracious curtsy.

To say that Miss Todd blushed would be to belie the general rosiness of that lady's complexion. She was all blush always. Over her face colour of the highest was always flying. It was not only that her cheeks carried a settled brilliant tint, but at every smile — and Miss Todd was ever smiling — this tint would suffuse her forehead and her neck; at every peal of laughter — and her peals of laughter were innumerable — it would become brighter and brighter, coming and going, or rather ever coming fresh and never going, till the reflection from her countenance would illumine the whole room, and light up the faces of all around her. But now she almost blushed black. She had delighted hitherto in all the little bits of libellous tittle tattle to which her position as a young old maid had given rise, and had affected always to assist their propagation; but there was a poison about this old female snake, a sting in the tongue of this old adder which reached even her.

"The old fool!" said Miss Todd, by no means *sotto voce*.

Mrs. Leake heard her though the speaking trumpet was not in action. "No, no, no," she said, in her most good-natured voice, "I don't think he's such a fool at all. Of course he is old, and in want of an income, no doubt.

But then he's a knight you know, my dear, and a colonel;" and then the two ladies, waiting for no further courtesies, went back to their fly.

Miss Todd had quite regained her good-humour by the time she was seated. "Well," said she, "what do you think of my friend, Mrs. Leake?"

"What makes her so very spiteful?" asked Adela.

"Why, you see, my dear, she'd be nothing if she wasn't spiteful. It's her fate. She's very old, and she lives there by herself, and she doesn't go out much, and she has nothing to amuse her. If she didn't do that, she couldn't do anything. I rather like it myself."

"Well, I can't say I like it," said Adela; and then they sat silent for a time, Miss Todd the while reflecting whether she would, in any way, defend herself from that imputation about Sir Lionel.

"But you see what sort of a woman she is, Miss Gauntlet; and, of course, you must not believe a word that she says."

"How very dreadful!"

"Oh; it does not mean anything. I call all those white lies. Nobody notices them. But what she said about Sir Lionel, you know —"

"I really shall not think of anything she said."

"But I must explain to you," said Miss Todd, in whose mind, in spite of her blushing, a certain amount of pleasure was mixed with the displeasure which Mrs. Leake's scandal had caused her. For at this moment Sir Lionel was not a little thought of at Littlebath, and among the Lucretias there assembled, there was many a one who would have felt but small regret in abandoning her maiden meditations at the instance of Sir Lionel Bertram.

"But I must explain to you. Sir Lionel does come to see me very often; and I should think there was something in it — or, rather, I shouldn't be surprised at others thinking so — only that I am quite sure that he's thinking of somebody else."

"Is he?" asked Adela, perhaps not with a great deal of animation.

"Yes; and I'll tell you who that somebody else is. Mind, I shouldn't say anything about it if I wasn't sure; that is almost sure; for one never can be quite sure about anything."

"Then I don't think one ought to talk about people."

"Oh, that's all very well. But then, at such a place as Littlebath, one would have to hold one's tongue altogether. I let people talk of me, and so I talk about them. One can't live without it, my dear. But I don't say things like Mrs. Leake."

"I'm sure you don't."

"But now about Sir Lionel; can't you guess who it is?"

"How should I, Miss Todd? I don't know a person in Littlebath except you and Miss Baker."

"There; now you have guessed it; I knew you would. Don't say I told you."

"Miss Baker marry Sir Lionel!"

"Yes, Miss Baker marry Sir Lionel! and why not? Why shouldn't she? and why shouldn't he? I think it would be very wise. I think those sort of marriages often make people very happy."

"Do you think he loves her?" said Adela, whose ideas of marriage were of very primitive description.

"Well, I don't see why he shouldn't; that is in a sort of a way. He won't write poetry about her eye-

brows, if you mean that. But I think he'd like her to keep his house for him; and now that Caroline is going away, I think she'd like to have some one to live with. She's not born to be a solitary wild beast as I am."

Adela was surprised, but she had nothing to say. She was aware of no reason which it suited her to allege why Miss Baker should not marry Sir Lionel Bertram. Had she been asked before, she would have said that Miss Baker seemed settled in her maiden life; and that she was but little likely to be moved by the civil speeches of an old military beau. But silence was perhaps the more prudent, and, therefore, she said nothing.

Her fortnight with Miss Todd passed without much inconvenience to her. She had to sit out one or two card-parties; and to resist, at last with peremptory decision, her host's attempts to take her elsewhere. But Miss Todd was so truly kind, so generous, so fond of making others happy, that she won upon Adela at last, and they parted excellent friends.

"I am so fond of Miss Baker," Miss Todd said, on the last morning; "and I do so truly hope she'll be happy; but don't you say a word about what I was saying. Only you watch if it isn't true. You'll see quite as much of Sir Lionel there as you have here:" and so they parted, and Adela was transferred over to Montpellier Terrace.

There had been some probability that Caroline would return to Littlebath with her aunt; but such was not the case. The autumn was advancing to its close. It was now November, and hardly a month remained before that — may we say happy day? — on which Miss Waddington was to become Lady Harcourt. There was, as Miss Baker said, so much to do, and so little time to do

it! It had therefore been decided that Caroline should not return to Littlebath.

"And you have come back only on my account?" said Adela.

"Not at all; I should have come back any way, for many reasons. I like to see Mr. Bertram from time to time, especially now that he has acknowledged Caroline; but it would kill me to stay long at that house. Did you see much of Sir Lionel while you were at Miss Todd's?"

"Yes, a good deal," said Adela, who could hardly keep from smiling as she answered the question.

"He is always there, I believe. My idea is, that they mean to make a match of it. It is, indeed."

"Oh, no; I don't think that."

"Don't you now? Well, you have been in the house, and must have seen a great deal. But what else can bring him there so much?"

"Miss Todd says he's always talking about you."

"About me; what nonsense!" And Miss Baker went up to her room rather better pleased than she had been.

Caroline, as will be remembered, had written to Adela with the tidings of her new engagement. Adela had answered that letter affectionately, but shortly; wishing her friend every happiness, and saying what little in the cheerful vein she could allow herself to say on such an occasion. The very shortness of her letter had conveyed condemnation, but that Adela could not help.

Caroline had expected condemnation. She knew that she would be condemned, either by words or by the lack of them. It was nearly equal to her by which; her mind was in that state, that having half condemned herself, she

would have given anything for a cordial acquittal from one she loved and valued. But she did not expect it from Adela, and she did not receive it.

She carried herself with a brave face, however. To her grandfather, to Miss Baker, and to her betrothed, she showed no sign of sorrow, no sign of repentance; but though there was, perhaps, no repentance in her heart, there was much sorrow and much remorse, and she could not keep herself wholly silent.

She wrote again to Adela, almost imploring her for pity. We need not give the whole letter, but a portion of it will show how the poor girl's mind was at work. "I know you have judged me, and found me guilty," she said. "I can tell that from the tone of your letter, though you were generous enough to endeavour to deceive me. But you have condemned me because you do not know me. I feel sure that what I am doing, is prudent, and, I think I may say, right. Had I refused Sir Henry's offer, or some other such offer — and any offer to me would have been, and must have been open to the same objections — what should I have done? what would have been my career? I am not now speaking of happiness. But of what use could I have been to any one?

"You will say that I do not love Sir Henry. I have told him that in the usual acceptation of the word, I do not love him. But I esteem his high qualities; and I shall marry him with the full intention of doing my duty, of sacrificing myself to him if needs be, of being useful in the position in which he will place me. What better can I do than this? You can do better, Adela. I know you will do better. To have loved, and married for love the poorest gentleman on God's earth would be to have done better. But I cannot do that now. The

power of doing that has been taken from me. The question with me was, whether I should be useful as a wife, or useless as an unmarried woman. For useless I should have been, and petulant, and wretched. Employment, work, duty, will now save me from that. Dear Adela, try to look at it in this way if it be possible. Do not throw me over without an attempt. Do not be unmerciful. * * * At any rate," she ended her letter by saying — "At any rate you will come to me in London in the early, early spring. Say that you will do so, or I shall think that you mean to abandon me altogether!"

Adela answered this as sweetly and as delicately as she could. Natures, she said, were different, and it would be presumptuous in her to set herself up as judge on her friend's conduct. She would abstain from doing so, and would pray to God that Caroline and Sir Henry might be happy together. And as to going to London in the spring, she would do so if her aunt Penelope's plans would allow of it. She must of course be governed by her aunt Penelope, who was now hurrying home from Italy on purpose to give her a home.

Nothing further occurred this year at Littlebath sufficiently memorable to need relation, unless it be necessary further to relate Miss Baker's nervous apprehensions respecting Sir Lionel. She was, in truth, so innocent that she would have revealed every day to her young friend the inmost secrets of her heart if she had had secrets. But, in truth, she had none. She was desperately jealous of Miss Todd, but she herself knew not why. She asked all manner of questions as to his going and coming, but she never asked herself why she was so anxious about it. She was in a twitter of sentimental restlessness, but she did not understand the cause of her

own uneasiness. On the days that Sir Lionel came to her, she was happy, and in good spirits; when, however, he went to Miss Todd, she was fretful. Sometimes she would rally him on his admiration for her rival, but she did it with a bad grace. Wit, repartee, and sarcasm were by no means her forte. She could not have stood up for five minutes against deaf old Mrs. Leake; and when she tried her hand on Sir Lionel, her failure was piteous. It merely amounted to a gentle rebuke to him for going to the Paragon instead of coming to Montpellier Terrace. Adela saw it all, and saw also that Sir Lionel was in no way sincere. But what could she do, or what could she say?

"I hope Miss Todd was quite well yesterday, Sir Lionel?" Miss Baker would say.

"I don't think there was much the matter with her," Sir Lionel would answer. "She was talking a great deal about you while I was with her."

"About me; he! he! he! I'm sure you had something better than me to talk of."

"There could be nothing better," the gallant colonel would say.

"Oh, couldn't there? And when is it to be? Adela here is most anxious to know."

"How can you say so, Miss Baker? You know I am not anxious at all."

"Well, if you're not, I am. I hope we shall be asked — ha! ha! ha!"

And why did not Sir Lionel make up his mind and put an end, in one way or the other, to the torment of this poor lady? Many reasons guided him in his high policy. In the first place, he could not make himself certain whether Miss Todd would accept him or refuse

him. Her money was by far the safer; her fortune was assured; what she possessed, Sir Lionel already knew to a fraction.

But Miss Baker, he was sure, would accept him; and having accepted him, would be amenable to all his little reasons in life, obedient, conformable, and, in money matters, manageable. Miss Todd, on the other hand, might, nay, certainly would have a will of her own. He would sooner have taken Miss Baker with half the money.

But then would Miss Baker have half the money? If that stupid old man at Hadley would only go, and tell the only tale with which it was now possible that he should interest the world, then Sir Lionel would know how to act. At any rate, he would wait till after the solicitor-general's marriage. It might appear on that occasion whether or no Sir Henry was to be regarded as the old man's heir in all things. If so, Sir Lionel would be prepared to run all matrimonial risks, and present Miss Todd to the world as Lady Bertram.

CHAPTER VIII.

Marriage-Bells.

AND now came the day of execution. "A long day, my lord, a long day," screams the unfortunate culprit from the dock when about to undergo the heaviest sentence of the law. But the convicted wretch is a coward by his profession. Caroline Waddington was no coward. Having made up her mind to a long martyrdom, she would not condescend to ask for one short month of grace.

"I don't like to press you unfairly," Sir Henry had

said, "but you know how I am situated with regard to business."

"It shall be as you wish," Caroline had said. And so the day had been settled; a day hardly more than six months distant from that on which she had half permitted the last embrace from her now forfeited, but not forgotten lover.

Duty was now her watchward to herself. For the last six weeks she had been employed — nay, more than employed — hard at work — doing the best she could for her future husband's happiness and welfare. She had given orders with as much composure as a woman might do who had been the mistress of her lord's purse and bosom for the last six years. Tradesmen, anxious of the coming event, had had their little delicacies and made their little hints. But she had thrown all these to the wind. She had spoken of Sir Henry as Sir Henry, and of herself as being now Miss Waddington, but soon about to be Lady Harcourt, with a studied openness. She had looked to carriages and broughams — and horses also under Sir Henry's protection — as though these things were dear to her soul. But they were not dear, though in her heart she tried to teach herself that they were so. For many a long year — many at least in her still scanty list of years — she had been telling herself that these things were dear; that these were the prizes for which men strive and women too; that the wise and prudent gained them; and that she too would be wise and prudent, that she too would gain them. She had gained them; and before she had assayed to enjoy them, they turned into dust before her eyes, into ashes between her teeth.

Gilding and tinsel were no longer bright to her, silks

and velvet were no longer soft. The splendour of her drawing-room, the richness of her draperies, the luxurious comfort of the chamber that was prepared for her, gave her no delight. She acquiesced in these things because her lord desired that they should be there, and she intended that her lord should be among the rich ones of the earth. But not for one moment did she feel even that trumpety joy which comes from an elated spirit.

Her lord! there was the misery; there was the great rock against which she feared that the timbers of her bark would go in pieces. If she could only have the three first years done and over. If she could only jump at once to that time in which habit would have made her fate endurable! her lord! Who was her lord truly? Had she not in her heart another lord, whom her whole soul would worship, despite her body's efforts?

And then she began to fear for her beauty; not for her own sake; not with that sort of sorrow which must attend the waning roses of those ladies who, in early years, have trusted too much to their loveliness. No; it was for the sake of him to whom she had sold her beauty. She would fain perform her part of that bargain. She would fain give him on his marriage-day all that had been intended in his purchase. If, having accepted him, she allowed herself to pine and fade away because she was to be his, would she not in fact be robbing him? Would not that be unjust? All that she could give him he should have.

But neither did Sir Henry see any change, nor did Mr. Bertram, nor those others who were round her. Indeed, hers was not a beauty that would fade in such manner. When she saw her own eyes heavy with suppressed wretchedness, she feared for herself. But her

power over herself was great, and that look was gone as soon as others were with her.

But her worst sufferings were at night. She would wake from her short slumbers, and see him, him always before her; that him who in the essence of things was still her lord, the master of her woman's mind, the lord of her woman's soul. To screen her eyes from that sight, she would turn her moistened face to the pillow; but her eyeballs would flash in the darkness, and she would still see him there, there before her. She would see him as he stood beside her with manly bashfulness, when on the side of Olivet he first told her that he loved her. She would see him as he had sometimes sat, in his sweetest moods, in that drawing-room at Littlebath, talking to her with rapid utterance, with sweet, but energetic utterance, saying words which she did not always fully understand, but which she felt to be full of wit, full of learning, full of truth. Ah, how proud she had been of him then — so proud of him, though she would never say so! And then she would see him, as he came to her on that fatal day, boiling in his wrath, speaking such words as had never before reached her ears; words, however, of which so many had been tinged by an inexpressible tenderness.

Then she would turn herself in her bed, and, by a strong effort of her will, she would for a while throw off such thoughts. She would count over to herself the chairs and tables she had ordered, the cups and china bowls which were to decorate her room, till sleep would come again — but in sleep she would still dream of him. Ah, that there might have been no waking from such dreams!

But in the morning she would come down to break-

fast with no trouble on her outward brow. She was minutely particular in her dress, even when no one but her grandfather was to see the effects of her toilet. Her hair was scrupulously neat, her dresses were rich and in the newest fashion. Her future career was to be that of Lady Harcourt, a leader of ton; and she was determined to commence her new duties with a good grace.

And so from week to week, and day to day, she prepared herself for the sacrifice.

Miss Baker of course returned to Hadley a day or two before the ceremony. The recent death of old Mr. Gauntlet was Adela's excuse for not being present. Had there been no such excuse, she would have been forced to act a bridesmaid's part. It was much better for both of them that she had not to perform the task.

Bridesmaids were chosen in London — eight of them. These were not special friends of Caroline's; indeed, it had not been her instinct to attach to herself special friends. Circumstances had created friendship between her and Adela, unlike in all things as they were to each other. But other bosom-friends Caroline had not; nor had she felt the want of them.

This was perhaps well for her now. It would have driven her to madness if among the bevy of attendant nymphs there had been any to whom it would have been necessary for her to open her heart — to open it, or to pretend to open it. Much she could do; much she was now doing; much she was prepared to do. But she could not have spoken with missish rapture of her coming happiness; nor could she, to any ears, have laid bare the secrets of her bosom.

So eight young ladies were had from London. Two

were second-cousins by her father's side; one, who was very full of the universal joy that was to follow this happy event, was a sister of Sir Henry's; a fourth was the daughter of an old crony of Miss Baker's; and the other four were got to order — there being no doubt a repertory for articles so useful and so ornamental.

Old Mr. Bertram behaved well on the occasion. He told Miss Baker that nothing was to be spared — in moderation; and he left her to be sole judge of what moderation meant. She, poor woman, knew well enough that she would have at some future day to fight over with him the battle of the bills. But for the moment he affected generosity, and so a fitting breakfast was prepared.

And then the bells were rung, the Hadley bells, the merry marriage-bells.

I know full well the tone with which they toll when the soul is ushered to its last long rest. I have stood in that green churchyard when earth has been laid to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust — the ashes and the dust that were loved so well.

But now the scene was of another sort. How merrily they rang, those joyous marriage-bells! Youth was then to know the full delight of matured happiness. Soul should be joined to soul, heart to heart, hand to hand, manly strength and vigour to all the grace and beauty of womanhood. The world was pleasant with its most joyous smile as it opened its embraces to the young pair — about to be two no longer — now to become one bone and one flesh. Out rung the Hadley bells, the happy marriage-bells.

And when should bells ring so joyously? Do they not give promise of all that this world knows of hap-

piness? What is love, sweet pure love, but the anticipation of this, the natural longing for this, the consummation of our loving here? To neither man nor woman does the world fairly begin till seated together in their first mutual home they bethink themselves that the excitement of their honeymoon is over. It would seem that the full meaning of the word marriage can never be known by those who, at their first out-spring into life, are surrounded by all that money can give. It requires the single sitting-room, the single fire, the necessary little efforts of self-devotion, the inward declaration that some struggle shall be made for that other one, some world's struggle of which wealth can know nothing. One would almost wish to be poor, that one might work for one's wife; almost wish to be ill used, that one might fight for her.

He, as he goes forth to his labour, swears within his heart that, by God's help in his endeavours, all shall go well with her. And she, as she stands musing alone in her young home, with a soft happy tear in her bright eye, she also swears in her heart that, by God's help, his home shall be to him "the sweetest spot on the earth's surface." Then should not marriage-bells ring joyously? Ah, my friends, do not count too exactly your three hundreds a year — your four hundreds. Try the world. But try it with industry and truth, not with idleness and falsehood.

And now Sir Henry and Lady Harcourt were to try the world in sweet communion together. One may say that as to doubt about the trial, there was need of none. He had more than won his spurs. He was already a practised knight in the highest flight of the world's tourneys. And for her, too, there was little cause of

fear. They who saw her arrayed in that bright frosty marriage morning, and watched the majesty of her brow, the brilliancy of her eye, the grace and dignity of her step, all swore that the young lawyer had done well. He had found for himself a meet companion for his high career; a proper bride for his coming greatness. And so the marriage-bells rang on, with all their merriness, with all their joy.

And now the words have been said, the vows have been plighted, the magic circlet of pure gold has done its wondrous work. The priest smiles and grasps their hands as he gives them his parting friendly blessing. Laughing bridesmaids press in to sign the book, and all observe that no signature was ever written with more decision than that of Caroline Waddington.

Caroline Waddington now no longer! Yes; the deed had, in truth, been done. The vows had been plighted. She had taken this man to be her wedded husband, to live together with him after God's ordinance. She had sworn to obey him, and serve him, and — Ah! ah! ah! How had she lived while that word was uttered to her! how had she lived to swear that falsest oath!

But it was not then, while standing at the altar, that the struggle had been made. Then she did but act her part, as some stage-queen acts hers. She acted it well; that was all. There was no meaning in her words then. Though her lips moved, she swore no oath. Her oath had been sworn before that.

No educated woman, we may suppose, stands at the altar as a bride, without having read and re-read those words till they are closely fixed on her memory. It is a great oath, and a woman should know well what that is to which she is about to pledge herself. Caroline

Waddington had studied them well. She would live with him after God's ordinance; that is, as his wife. Yes, she was prepared for that. She would obey him. Yes; if obedience were required, she would give it. Serve him? oh, yes, certainly; to the best of her power of mind and body. Love him? No; she was bold, at least, if not righteous. No; she could not love him. But, then, how few who were married complied with all those behests? How many were undutiful, disobedient, careless? Might not she accept for herself one point? be false on one article if she were true in so many? She would honour him, for honour was possible to her; she would keep him in sickness and health, and forsaking all other — yes, all other, in body, certainly, in heart too if God would give her ease — and keep herself only to him, her husband. And so she swore to it all before she went there — all, with the one exception.

And Sir Henry swore too — with a light, indifferent oath, which, however, he had no intention of breaking in any part. He would live with her, and love her, and comfort her, and all that sort of thing; and very well she would look at the top of his table, in black velvet.

And the merry bells went on ringing as they trooped back to the old man's house. They went in gay carriages, though the distance was but some hundred yards. But brides and bridegrooms cannot walk on their wedding-days in all their gala garments, though it be but a few hundred yards.

And then, as they entered the breakfast-room, the old man met them, and blessed them. He was too infirm to go to church, and had seen none of them before the ceremony; but now that the deed was done, he also was there, dressed in his best, his last new coat, not more

than twelve years old, his dress waistcoat sent home before the Reform Bill, his newest shoes, which creaked twice worse than any of their older brethren. But when a man can shower thousands on a wedded pair, what do they, or even the bridesmaids, care about his clothes?

And then after this fashion he blessed them — not holding each a hand as he might otherwise have done; for his infirmities compelled him to use two crutches.

"I wish you joy, Sir Henry — of your bride — with all my heart. And a bonny bride she is, and well able to take her place in the world. Though you'll be rich and well to do, you'll not find her over extravagant. And though her fortune's not much for a man like you, perhaps, she might have had less, mightn't she? ha! ha! ha! Little as it is, it will help — it will help. And you'll not find debts coming home after her; I'm sure of that. She'll keep your house well together; and your money too — but I guess you'll not leave that to her keeping.

"And I wish you joy with all my heart, my Lady Harcourt. You've done very well — much better doubtless than we were thinking of; you and me too. And as for me, I was an old fool." Mr. Bertram was doubtless thinking of that interview with his nephew. "Much better, much better. Your husband's a rising man, and he'll live to be a rich man. I have always thought a lawyer's profession very good for a man who would know how to make money at it. Sir Henry knows how to do that well. So I wish you joy with all my heart, Lady Bertram — Harcourt, I mean. And now we'll sit down and have a bit of something to eat." Such was the marriage-blessing of this old man, who knew and understood the world so well. To be Lady Harcourt, and

have the spending of three or four thousand a year! What a destiny was that for his grand-daughter! And to have achieved that without any large call upon his own purse!

It was not intended that Sir Henry and his bride were to sit down to the breakfast. That is, I believe, now voted to be a bore — and always should have been so voted. They had done, or were now to do their necessary eating in private, and the company was to see no more of them. An effort had been made to explain this to Mr. Bertram, but it had not been successful. So when Caroline kissed him, and bade him adieu after his little speech, he expressed himself surprised.

"What, off before the breakfast! What's the good of the breakfast then?" His idea, in his extravagance, had been that he would give a last feed to the solicitor-general. But he had another piece of extravagance in his mind, which he had been unable to bring himself to perpetrate till the last moment; but which now he did perpetrate.

"Sir Henry, Sir Henry," and he toddled to a window. "Here; you'll be spending a lot of money on her in foreign parts, and I think you have behaved well; here," and he slipped a bit of paper into his hands. "But, remember, it will be the last. And, Sir Henry, remember the interest of the three thousand — punctually — eh, Sir Henry?"

Sir Henry nodded — thanked him — slipped the bit of paper into his pocket, and followed his bride to the carriage.

"Your grandfather has just given me five hundred pounds," was his first word in private to his wife.

"Has he?" said Lady Harcourt, "I'm very glad of it;

very." And so she was. What else had she to be glad of now, except hundreds — and hundreds — and hundreds of pounds?

And so they were whisked away to London, to Dover, to Paris, to Nice.

"Sed post equitem sedet atra cura."

The care was very black that sat behind that female knight. But we will not now follow either her thoughts or her carriage-wheels.

CHAPTER IX.

Sir Lionel goes to his Wooing.

YES, they were off. All the joys of that honeymoon shall be left to the imagination of the reader. Their first conversation, as it took place in the carriage which bore them from Mr. Bertram's door, has been given. Those which followed were probably more or less of the same nature. Sir Henry, no doubt, did strive to give some touch of romance to the occasion; but in no such attempt would his wife assist him. To every material proposition that he made, she gave a ready assent; in everything she acceded to his views; she would dine at two, or at eight, as he pleased; she was ready to stay two weeks, or only two days in Paris, as best suited him; she would adapt herself to pictures, or to architecture, or to theatres, or to society, or to going on and seeing nothing, exactly as he adapted himself. She never frowned, or looked black, or had headaches, or couldn't go on, or wouldn't stay still, or turned herself into a Niobian deluge, as some ladies, and very nice ladies too, will sometimes do on their travels. But she

would not talk of love, or hold his hand, or turn her cheek to his. She had made her bargain, and would keep to it. Of that which she had promised him she would give him full measure; of that which she had not promised him -- of which she had explained to him that she had nothing to give -- of that she would make no attempt to give anything.

So they spent their Christmas and opened the new year at Nice, and made an excursion along the Cornice road to Genoa, during which Lady Harcourt learned for the first time that the people of Italy are not so free from cold winds as is generally imagined; and then, early in February, they returned to their house in Eaton Square. How she became soon immersed in society, and he in Parliament and the county courts, we may also leave to the imagination of the reader. In a month or two from that time, when the rigours of a London May shall have commenced, we will return to them again. In the meantime, we must go back to Hadley — the two old Bertrams, and dear Miss Baker.

The marriage-feast prepared by Miss Baker for the wedding guests, did not occupy very long; nor was there any great inducement for those assembled to remain with Mr. Bertram. He and Miss Baker soon found themselves again alone; and were no sooner alone than the business of life recommenced.

"It's a very splendid match for her," said Mr. Bertram.

"Yes, I suppose it is," said Miss Baker. Miss Baker in her heart of hearts had never quite approved of the marriage.

"And now, Mary, what do you mean to do?"

"Oh, I'll see and get these things taken away," said she.

"Yes, yes, stop a minute; that's of course. But what I mean is, what do you mean to do with yourself; you can't go back and live at Littlebath all alone?"

If I were to use the word "flabbergasted" as expressing Miss Baker's immediate state of mind, I should draw down on myself the just anger of the critics, in that I had condescended to the use of slang; but what other word will so well express what is meant? She had fully intended to go back to Littlebath, and had intended to do so at the earliest moment that would be possible. Was not Sir Lionel still at Littlebath? And, moreover, she fully intended to live there. That she should have some little difficulty in the matter, she had anticipated. Her own income — that which was indefeasibly her own — was very small; by far too small to admit of her permanently keeping on those rooms in Montpellier Terrace. Hitherto their income, her own and Caroline's put together, had been very comfortable; for Mr. Bertram had annually paid to her a sum which of itself would have been sufficient for her own living. But she had not known what difference Caroline's marriage might make in this allowance. It had been given to herself without any specification that it had been so given for any purpose; but yet it had been an understood thing that Caroline was to live with her and be supported. And though Caroline's income had also been used, it had gone rather in luxurious enjoyments than in necessary expenses; in the keep of a horse, for instance, in a journey to Jerusalem, in a new grand piano, and such like. Now there might naturally be a doubt whether under altered circumstances this allowance from Mr. Bertram would remain unaltered.

But it had never occurred to her that she would be

asked to live at Hadley. That idea did not occur to her, and therefore she stood before her uncle hesitating in her answer, and — may my inability to select any better word be taken in excuse — “flabbergasted” in her mind and feelings.

But her doom followed quickly on her hesitation. “Because,” said Mr. Bertram, “there is plenty of room here. There can be no need of two houses and two establishments now; you had better send for your things and fix yourself here at once.”

“But I couldn’t leave the rooms at Littlebath without a quarter’s notice” — the coward’s plea; a long day, my lord, a long day — “that was particularly understood when I got them so cheap.”

“There will be no difficulty in reletting them at this time of the year,” growled Mr. Bertram.

“Oh, no, I suppose not; one would have to pay something, of course. But, dear me! one can hardly leave the place where one has lived so long all of a moment,”

“Why not?” demanded the tyrant.

“Well, I don’t know. I can hardly say why not; but one has so many people to see, and so many things to do, and so much to pack up.”

It may be easily conceived that in such an encounter Miss Baker would not achieve victory. She had neither spirit for the fight, nor power to use it even had the spirit been there; but she effected a compromise by the very dint of her own weakness. “Yes, certainly,” she said; “as Mr. Bertram thought it best, she would be very happy to live with him at Hadley — most happy, of course; but mightn’t she go down and pack up her things, and settle with everybody, and say good-bye

to her friends?" Oh, those friends! that horrible Miss Todd!

And thus she got a month of grace. She was to go down immediately after Christmas-day, and be up again at Hadley, and fixed there permanently, before the end of January.

She wrote to Caroline on the subject, rather plaintively; but owning that it was of course her duty to stay by her uncle now that he was so infirm. It would be very dull, of course, she said; but any place would be dull now that she, Caroline, was gone. And it would be sad giving up her old friends. She named one or two, and among them Sir Lionel. "It would be a great pleasure to me," she went on to say, "if I could be the means of reconciling the two brothers — not but what Sir Henry Harcourt will always be Mr. Bertram's favourite; I am sure of that. I don't think I shall mind leaving Miss Todd, though she does pretend to be so friendly; I was never quite sure she was sincere; and then she does talk so very loud; and, in spite of all she says, I am not sure she's not looking out for a husband."

And then she went back to Littlebath, intent on enjoying her short reprieve. Something might happen; she did not ask herself what. The old gentleman might not last long; but she certainly did not speculate on his death. Or; she had a sort of an idea that there might be an "or," though she never allowed herself to dwell on it as a reality. But on one point she did make up her mind, that if it should be her destiny to keep house for either of those two gentlemen, she would much rather keep house for Sir Lionel than for his brother.

Her absolute money dealings had always been with

Mr. Pritchett; and as she passed through town, Mr. Pritchett came to her and made her the usual quarterly payment.

"But, Mr. Pritchett," said she, "I am going to live with Mr. Bertram after another month or so."

"Oh, ma'am; yes, ma'am; that will be very proper, ma'am. I always supposed it would be so when Miss Caroline was gone," said Pritchett, in a melancholy tone.

"But will it be proper for me to have this money now?"

"Oh, yes, ma'am. It wouldn't be my duty for me to stop any payments till I get orders. Mr. Bertram never forgets anything, ma'am. If he'd a meant me to stop it, he wouldn't have forgot to say so."

"Oh, very well, Mr. Pritchett;" and Miss Baker was going away.

"But, one word, if you please, ma'am. I don't detain you, ma'am, do I?" and you might have guessed by Pritchett's voice that he was quite willing to let her go if she wished, even though his own death on the spot might be the instant result.

"Oh dear, no, Mr. Pritchett," said Miss Baker.

"We all see how things have gone, ma'am, now; about Miss Caroline, I mean."

"Yes, she is Lady Harcourt now."

"Oh, yes, I know that, ma'am," and Mr. Pritchett here sank to the lowest bathos of misery. "I know she's Lady Harcourt, very well. I didn't mean her ladyship any disrespect."

"Oh dear, no, of course not, Mr. Pritchett. Who would think such a thing of you, who's known her from a baby?"

"Yes, I have know'd her from a babby, ma'am.

That's just it; and I've know'd you from amost a babby too, ma'am."

"That was a very long time ago, Mr. Pritchett."

"Yes, it is some years now, certainly, Miss Baker. I'm not so young as I was; I know that." Mr Pritchett's voice at this juncture would have softened the heart of any stone that had one. "But this is what it is, ma'am; you're going to live with the old gentleman now."

"Yes, I believe I am."

"Well, now; about Mr. George, ma'am."

"Mr. George!"

"Yes; Mr. George, Miss Baker. It ain't of course for me to say anything of what goes on between young ladies and young gentlemen. I don't know anything about it, and never did; and I don't suppose I never shall now. But they two was to have been one, and now they're two." Mr. Pritchett could not get on any further without pausing for breath.

"The match was broken off, you know."

"It was broke off. I say nothing about that, nor about them who did it. I knows nothing, and therefore I says nothing; but this I do say: that it will be very hard — very hard, and very cruel if so that the old gentleman is set against Mr. George because Sir Henry Harcourt has got a handle to his name for himself."

The conference ended in a promise on Miss Baker's part that she, at least, would say nothing against Mr. George; but with an assurance, also, that it was impossible for her to say anything in his favour.

"You may be sure of this, Mr. Pritchett, that my uncle will never consult me about his money."

"He'll never consult any human being, ma'am. He wouldn't consult Solomon if Solomon were to go to

Hadley o' purpose. But you might slip in a word that Mr. George was not in fault, mightn't you, ma'am?"

Miss Baker reiterated her promise that she would not at any rate say anything evil of George Bertram.

"He is such a foolish young man, ma'am; so like a baby about money. It's that's why I feel for him, because he is so foolish."

And then Miss Baker prosecuted her journey, and reached Littlebath in safety.

She had not been long there before Sir Lionel had heard all the news. Miss Baker, without knowing that a process of pumping had been applied to her, soon made him understand that for the present Sir Harcourt had certainly not been received into the place of heir. It was clear that but a very moderate amount of the old gentleman's wealth — he was usually now called the old gentleman by them all; Sir Lionel, Miss Baker, Mr. Pritchett, and others — had been bestowed on the rising lawyer; and that, as far as that point was concerned, the game was still open. But then, if it was open to him, Sir Lionel, through Miss Baker, it was also open to his son George. And it appeared from Miss Baker's testimony that, during the whole period of these wedding doings, no word had escaped the mouth of the old gentleman in vituperation or anger against George. Perhaps George after all might be the best card. Oh, what an excellent card might he be if he would only consent to guide himself by the commonest rules of decent prudence! But then, as Mr. Pritchett had truly observed, Mr. George was so foolish! Moreover, Sir Lionel was not blind to the reflection that the old gentleman would never countenance his marriage with Miss Baker. Whatever Mr. Bertram's good intentions Miss

Bakerwards might be, they would undoubtedly be frustrated by such a marriage. If Sir Lionel decided on Miss Baker, things must be so arranged that the marriage should be postponed till that tedious old gentleman should move himself off the scene; and the tedious old gentleman, moreover, must not be allowed to know anything about it.

But with Miss Todd there need be no secrecy, no drawback, no delay — no drawback but that of doubtful reception; and after reception, of doubtful masterdom.

On thorough review of all the circumstances, much balancing them in his high mind, Sir Lionel at last thus resolved. He would throw himself, his heart, and his fortune at the feet of Miss Todd. If there accepted, he would struggle with every muscle of the manhood which was yet within him for that supremacy in purse and power which of law and of right belongs to the man. He thought he knew himself, and that it would not be easy for a woman to get the better of him. But if there rejected — and he could not confess but what there was a doubt — he would immediately fall back upon Miss Baker. Whatever he did must be done immediately, for in less than a month's time, Miss Baker would be out of his reach altogether. As to seeking Miss Baker at Hadley, that would be above even his courage. All must be done within the next month. If on Miss Baker was to fall the honour of being Lady Bertram, she must not only receive him within the month, but, having done so, must also agree to wear her vestal zone yet a little longer, till that troublesome old gentleman should have departed.

Such being his month's work — he had not quite

four weeks left when he came to this resolution — he wisely resolved to commence it at once.

So on one Monday morning he sallied out to the Paragon about two o'clock. At that hour he knew Miss Todd would be surely at home; for at half-past one she ate her lunch. In the regularity of her eatings and her drinkings, Miss Todd might have been taken as an example by all the ladies of Littlebath. Sir Lionel's personal appearance has been already described; considering his age, he was very well preserved. He was still straight; did not fumble much in his walk; and had that decent look of military decorum which, since the days of Cæsar and the duke, has been always held to accompany a hook-nose. He had considered much about his toilet; indeed, he did that habitually; but on this occasion he had come to the conclusion that he had better make no unusual sacrifice to the Graces. A touch of the curling-iron to his whiskers, or a surtout that should be absolutely fresh from the tailor's hands, might have an effect with Miss Baker; but if any impression was to be made on Miss Todd, it would not be done by curled whiskers or a new coat. She must be won, if won at all, by the unsophisticated man.

So the unsophisticated man knocked at the door in the Paragon. Yes; Miss Todd was at home. Up he went, and found not only Miss Todd, but also with Miss Todd the venerable Mrs. Shortpointz, settling all the details for a coming rubber of whist for that evening.

"Ah, Sir Lionel; how do? Sit down. Very well, my dear," — Miss Todd called everybody my dear, even Sir Lionel himself sometimes; but on the present occasion she was addressing Mrs. Shortpointz — "I'll be there at eight; but mind this, I won't sit down with Lady Ruth,

nor yet with Miss Ruff." So spoke Miss Todd, who, by dint of her suppers and voice, was becoming rather autocratic at Littlebath.

"You shan't, Miss Todd. Lady Ruth —"

"Very well; that's all I bargain for. And now here Sir Lionel; how lucky! Sir Lionel, you can be so civil, and so useful. Do give Mrs. Shortpointz your arm home. Her niece was to call; but there's been some mistake. And Mrs. Shortpointz does not like walking alone. Come, Sir Lionel."

Sir Lionel strove against the order; but it was in vain. He had to yield; and walked away with old Mrs. Shortpointz on his arm. It was hard, we must acknowledge, that a man of Sir Lionel's age and standing should be so employed at such a moment, because that flirt, Maria Shortpointz, had gone out to see young Mr. Garded ride by in his pink coat and spattered boots. He would have let her fall and break her leg, only that by doing so he would have prolonged the time of his own attendance on her. She lived half across Littlebath; and her step, ordinarily slow, was slower than usual now that she was leaning on a knight's arm. At last she was deposited at home; and the gallant colonel, having scornfully repudiated her offer of cake and sherry, flew back to the Paragon on the wings of love — in a street cab, for which he had to pay eighteenpence.

But he was all too late. Miss Todd had gone out in her fly just three minutes since; and thus a whole day was lost.

On the Tuesday, in proper course, he was due at Miss Baker's. But for this turn, Miss Baker must be neglected. At the same hour he again knocked at the door of the Paragon, and was again admitted, and now

Miss Todd was all alone. She was rarely left so very long, and the precious moments must be seized at once. Sir Lionel, with that military genius which was so peculiarly his own, determined to use his yesterday's defeat in aid of to-day's victory. He would make even Mrs. Shortpointz serviceable.

When gentlemen past sixty make love to ladies past forty, it may be supposed that they are not so dilatory in their proceedings as younger swains and younger maidens. Time is then behind them, not before them; and urges them on to quick decisions. It may be presumed, moreover, that this pair knew their own minds.

"How cruel you were to me yesterday!" said Sir Lionel, seating himself not very close to her — nor yet very far from her.

"What! about poor Mrs. Shortpointz? Ha! ha! ha! Poor old lady; she didn't think so, I am sure. One ought to be of use sometimes, you know, Sir Lionel."

"True, true, Miss Todd; quite true. But I was particularly unfortunate yesterday. I wished that Mrs. Shortpointz was hanging — anywhere except on my arm. I did, indeed."

"Ha! ha! ha! Poor Mrs. Shortpointz! And she was so full of you last night. The beau ideal of manly beauty! that was what she called you. She did indeed. Ha! ha! ha!"

"She was very kind."

"And then we all quizzed her about you; and Miss Finesse called her Lady Bertram. You can't think how funny we old women are when we get together. There wasn't a gentleman in the room — except Mr. Fuzzybell; and he never seems to make any difference. But I tell you what, Sir Lionel; a certain friend of yours didn't

seem to like it when we called Mrs. Shortpointz Lady Bertram."

"And were you that friend, Miss Todd?"

"I! Ha! ha! ha! No; not I, but Miss Baker. And I'll tell you what, Sir Lionel," said Miss Todd, intending to do a kinder act for Miss Baker than Miss Baker would have done for her. "And I'll tell you what; Miss Baker is the nicest-looking woman of her time of life in Littlebath. I don't care who the other is. I never saw her look better than she did last night; never." This was good-natured on the part of Miss Todd; but it sounded in Sir Lionel's ears as though it did not augur well for his hopes.

"Yes; she's very nice; very nice indeed. But I know one, Miss Todd, that's much nicer." And Sir Lionel drew his chair a little nearer.

"What, Mrs. Shortpointz, I suppose. Ha! ha! ha! Well, every man to his taste."

"I wonder whether I may speak to you seriously, Miss Todd, for five minutes?"

"Oh laws, yes; why not?" But don't tell me any secrets, Sir Lionel; for I shan't keep them."

"I hope what I may say need not be kept a secret long. You joke with me about Miss Baker; but you cannot really believe that my affections are placed there? You must, I think, have guessed by this time —"

"I am the worst hand in the world at guessing anything."

"I am not a young man, Miss Todd —"

"No; and she isn't a young woman. She's fifty. It would all be very proper in that respect."

"I'm not thinking of Miss Baker, Miss Todd."

"Dear! well now, I really thought you were thinking

of her. And I'll tell you this, Sir Lionel; if you want a wife to look after you, you couldn't do better than think of her — a nice, good-tempered, cheerful, easy, good-looking woman; with none of the Littlebath nastiness about her; — and a little money too, I've no doubt. How could you do better than think of her?" Would it not have softened Miss Baker's heart towards her friend if she could have heard all this?

"Ah; you say this to try me. I know you do."

"Try you! no; but I want you to try Miss Baker."

"Well; I am going to make an attempt of that kind, certainly; certainly I am. But it is not with Miss Baker, as I cannot but think you know;" and then he paused to collect his ideas, and take in at a *coup d'œil* the weak point to which his attacks should be turned. Meanwhile, Miss Todd sat silent. She knew by this time what was coming; and knew also, that in courtesy the gentleman should be allowed to have his say. Sir Lionel drew his chair again nearer — it was now very near — and thus began: —

"Dear Sarah! —" How he had found out that Miss Todd's name was Sarah it might be difficult to say. Her signature was S. Todd; and Sir Lionel had certainly never heard her called by her Christian name. But facts were with him. She undoubtedly had been christened Sarah.

"Dear Sarah! —"

"Ha! ha! ha! Ha! ha! ha!" laughed Miss Todd, with terrible loudness, with a shaking of her sides, throwing herself backwards and forwards in the corner of her sofa. It was not civil, and so Sir Lionel felt. When you first call your lady-love by her Christian name, you do not like to have the little liberty made a

subject of ridicule — you feel it by far less if the matter be taken up seriously against you as a crime on your part.

“Ha! ha! ha!” continued Miss Todd, roaring in her laughter louder than ever; “I don’t think, Sir Lionel, I was ever called Sarah before since the day I was born; and it does sound so funny. Sarah! Ha! ha! ha!”

Sir Lionel was struck dumb. What could he say when his little tenderness was met in such a manner?

“Call me Sally, if you like, Sir Lionel. All my brothers and sisters, and uncles and aunts, and all those sort of people always called me Sally. But, Sarah! Ha! ha! ha! Suppose you call me Sally, Sir Lionel.”

Sir Lionel tried, but he could not call her Sally; his lips at that moment would not form the sound.

But the subject had now been introduced. If he should ever be able to claim her as his own, he might then call her Sarah, or Sally, or use any other term of endearment which the tenderness of the moment might suggest. When that day should come, perhaps he might have his own little joke; but, in the meantime, the plunge had been taken, and he could now swim on.

“Miss Todd, you now know what my feelings are, and I hope that you will at any rate not disapprove of them. We have known each other for some time, and have, I hope, enjoyed and valued each other’s society.” Miss Todd here made a little bow, but she said nothing. She had a just perception that Sir Lionel should be permitted to have his say, and that, as matters had become serious, it would be well for her to wait till he had done, and then she might have her say. So she merely bowed, by way of giving a civil acquiescence in Sir Lionel’s last little suggestion.

"I have hoped so, dear Miss Todd" — he had taken a moment to consider, and thought that he had better drop the Sarah altogether for the present. "In myself, I can safely say that it has been so. With you, I feel that I am happy, and at my ease. Your modes of thought and way of life are all such as I admire and approve," — Miss Todd again bowed — "and — and — what I mean is, that I think we both live very much after the same fashion."

Miss Todd, who knew everything that went on in Littlebath, and was *au fait* at every bit of scandal and tittle-tattle in the place, had probably heard more of the fashion of Sir Lionel's life than he was aware. In places such as Littlebath, ladies such as Miss Todd do have sources of information which are almost miraculous. But still she said nothing. She merely thought that Sir Lionel was a good deal mistaken in the opinion which he had last expressed.

"I am not a young man," continued Sir Lionel. "My brother, you know, is a very old man, and there are but fifteen years' difference between us." This was a mistake of Sir Lionel's; the real difference being ten years. "And you, I know, are hardly yet past your youth."

"I was forty-five last Guy Fawkes' day," said Miss Todd.

"Then there are fifteen years' difference between us." The reader will please to read "twenty." "Can you look over that difference, and take me, old as I am, for your companion for life? Shall we not both be happier if we have such a companion? As to money —"

"Oh, Sir Lionel, don't trouble about that; nor yet about your age. If I wanted to marry, I'd as lief have

an old man as a young one; perhaps liefer: and as to money, I've got enough for myself, and I have no doubt you have too" — nevertheless, Miss Todd did know of that heavy over-due bill at the livery-stables, and had heard that the very natty groom who never left Sir Lionel's phaëton for a moment was a sworn bailiff; sworn to bring the carriage and horses back to the livery-stable yard — "but the fact is, I don't want to marry."

"Do you mean, Miss Todd, that you will prefer to live in solitude for ever?"

"Oh, as for solitude, I'm not much of a Robinson Crusoe, nor yet an Alexander Selkirk. I never found any of its charms. But, Lord bless you, Sir Lionel, people never leave me in solitude. I'm never alone. My sister Patty has fifteen children. I could have half of them to live with me if I liked it." This view of the case did throw some cold water on Sir Lionel's ardour.

"And you are quite resolved on this?" he said, with a dash of expiring sentiment in his tone.

"What! to have Patty's children? No, I find it more convenient to pay for their schooling."

"But you are quite resolved to — to — to give me no other, no more favourable answer?"

"Oh! about marrying. On that subject, Sir Lionel, my mind is altogether made up. Miss Todd I am, and Miss Todd I mean to remain. To tell the truth plainly, I like to be number one in my own house. Lady Bertram, I am quite sure, will be a fortunate and happy woman; but then, she'll be number two, I take it. Eh, Sir Lionel?"

Sir Lionel smiled and laughed, and looked at the

ground, and then looked up again; but he did not deny the imputation. "Well," said he, "I trust we shall still remain friends."

"Oh, certainly; why not?" replied Miss Todd.

And so they parted. Sir Lionel took his hat and stick, and went his way.

CHAPTER X.

He tries his Hand again.

Miss Todd shook hands with him as he went, and then, putting on her bonnet and cloak, got into her fly.

She felt some little triumph at her heart in thinking that Sir Lionel had wished to marry her. Had she not, she would hardly have been a woman. But by far her strongest feeling was one of dislike to him for not having wished to marry Miss Baker. She had watched the gallant soldier closely for the last year, and well knew how tenderly he had been used to squeeze Miss Baker's hand. He had squeezed her own hand too; but what was that? She made others the subject of jokes, and was prepared to be joked upon herself. Whatever Oliver Sir Lionel, or other person, might give her, she would give back to him or to her — always excepting Mrs. Leake — a Rowland that should be quite as good. But Miss Baker was no subject for a joke, and Sir Lionel was in duty bound to have proposed to her.

It is perhaps almost true that no one can touch pitch and not be defiled. Miss Todd had been touching pitch for many years past, and was undoubtedly defiled to a certain extent. But the grime with her had never gone deep; it was not ingrained; it had not become an ineradicable stain; it was dirt on which soap-and-water

might yet operate. May we not say that her truth and good-nature, and love of her fellow-creatures, would furnish her at last with the means whereby she might be cleansed?

She was of the world, worldly. It in no way disgusted her that Sir Lionel was an old rip, and that she knew him to be so. There were a great many old male rips at Littlebath and elsewhere. Miss Todd's path in life had brought her across more than one or two such. She encountered them without horror, welcomed them without shame, and spoke of them with a laugh rather than a shudder. Her idea was, that such a rip as Sir Lionel would best mend his manners by marriage; by marriage, but not with her. She knew better than trust herself to any Sir Lionel.

And she had encountered old female rips; that is, if dishonesty in money-dealings, selfishness, coarseness, vanity, absence of religion, and false pretences, when joined to age, may be held as constituting an old female rip. Many such had been around her frequently. She would laugh with them, feed them, call on them, lose her money to them, and feel herself no whit degraded. Such company brought on her no conviction of shame. But yet she was not of them. Coarse she was; but neither dishonest, nor selfish, nor vain, nor irreligious, nor false.

Such being the nature of the woman, she had not found it necessary to display any indignation when Sir Lionel made his offer; but she did feel angry with him on Miss Baker's behalf. Why had he deceived that woman, and made an ass of himself? Had he had any wit, any knowledge of character, he would have known what sort of an answer he was likely to get if he

brought his vows and offers to the Paragon. There he had been received with no special favour. No lures had been there displayed to catch him. He had not been turned out of the house when he came there, and that was all. So now, as she put on her bonnet, she determined to punish Sir Lionel.

But in accusing her suitor of want of judgment, she was quite in the dark as to his real course of action. She little knew with how profound a judgment he was managing his affairs. Had she known, she would hardly have interfered as she now did. As she put her foot on the step of the fly she desired her servant to drive to Montpellier Terrace.

She was shown into the drawing-room, and there she found Miss Baker and Miss Gauntlet; not our friend Adela, but Miss Penelope Gauntlet, who was now again settled in Littlebath.

"Well, ladies," said Miss Todd, walking up the room with well-assured foot and full comfortable presence, "I've news to tell you."

They both of them saw at a glance that she had news. Between Miss P. Gauntlet and Miss Todd there had never been cordiality. Miss Todd was, as we have said, of the world, worldly; whereas Miss Gauntlet was of Dr. Snort, godly. She belonged plainly to the third set of which we have spoken; Miss Todd was an amalgamation of the two first. Miss Baker, however, was a point of union, a connecting rod. There was about her a savouring of the fragrance of Ebenezer, but accompanied, it must be owned, by a whiff of brimstone. Thus these three ladies were brought together; and as it was manifest that Miss Todd had news to tell, the other two were prepared to listen.

"What do you think, ladies?" and she sat herself down, filling an arm-chair with her goodly person. "What do you think has happened to me to-day?"

"Perhaps the doctor has been with you," said Miss P. Gauntlet, not alluding to the Littlebath galen, but meaning to insinuate that Miss Todd might have come thither to tell them of her conversion from the world.

"Better than ten doctors, my dear" — Miss Penelope drew herself up very stiffly — "or twenty! I've had an offer of marriage. What do you think of that?"

Miss P. Gauntlet looked as though she thought a great deal of it. She certainly did think that had such an accident happened to her, she would not have spoken of it with such a voice, or before such an audience. But now her face, which was always long and thin, became longer and thinner, and she sat with her mouth open, expecting further news.

Miss Baker became rather red, then rather pale, and then red again. She put out her hand, and took hold of the side of the chair in which she sat; but she said nothing. Her heart told her that that offer had been made by Sir Lionel.

"You don't wish me joy, ladies," said Miss Todd.

"But you have not told us whether you accepted it," said Miss Penelope.

"Ha! ha! ha! No, that's the worst of it. No, I didn't accept it. But, upon my word, it was made."

Then it was not Sir Lionel, thought Miss Baker, releasing her hold of the chair, and feeling that the blood about her heart was again circulating.

"And is that all that we are to know," asked Miss Penelope.

"Oh, my dears, you shall know it all. I told my lover that I should keep no secrets. But, come, you shall guess. Who was it, Miss Baker?"

"I couldn't say at all," said Miss Baker, in a faint voice.

"Perhaps Mr. O'Callaghan," suggested Miss Penelope, conscious, probably, that an ardent young evangelical clergyman is generally in want of an income.

"Mr. O'Callaghan!" shouted Miss Todd, throwing up her head with scorn. "Pho! The gentleman I speak of would have made me a lady. Lady —! Now who do you think it was, Miss Baker?"

"Oh, I couldn't guess at all," said poor Miss Baker. But she now knew that it was Sir Lionel. It might have been worse, however, and that she felt — much worse!

"Was it Sir Lionel Bertram?" asked the other.

"Ah! Miss Gauntlet, you know all about the gentlemen of Littlebath. I can see that. It was Sir Lionel. Wasn't that a triumph?"

"And you refused him?" asked Miss Penelope.

"Of course I did. You don't mean to say that you think I would have accepted him?"

To this Miss Penelope made no answer. Her opinions were of a mixed sort. She partly misbelieved Miss Todd — partly wondered at her. Unmarried ladies of a certain age, whatever may be their own feelings in regard to matrimony on their own behalf, seem always impressed with a conviction that other ladies in the same condition would certainly marry if they got an opportunity. Penelope could not believe that Miss Todd had rejected Sir Lionel; but at the same time she could not but be startled also by the great fact of such a rejection.

At any rate her course of duty was open. Littlebath should be enlightened on the subject before the drawing-room candles were lit that evening; or at any rate that set in Littlebath to which she belonged. So she rose from her chair, and, declaring that she had sat an unconscionable time with Miss Baker, departed, diligent, about her work.

"Well, what do you think of that, my dear?" said Miss Todd, as soon as the two of them were left alone.

It was strange that Miss Todd, who was ordinarily so good-natured, who was so especially intent on being good-natured to Miss Baker, should have thus roughly communicated to her friend tidings which were sure to wound. But she had omitted to look at it in this light. Her intention had been to punish Sir Lionel for having been so grossly false and grossly foolish. She had seen through him — at least, hardly through him; had seen at least that he must have been doubling between the two ladies, and that he had given up the one whom he believed to be the poorer. She did not imagine it possible that, after having offered to her, he should then go with a similar offer to Miss Baker. Had such an idea arisen in her mind, she would certainly have allowed Miss Baker to take her chance of promotion unmolested.

Miss Baker gave a long sigh. Now that Miss Gauntlet was gone she felt herself better able to speak; but, nevertheless, any speech on the subject was very difficult to her. Her kind heart at once forgave Miss Todd. There could now be no marriage between that false one and her friend; and, therefore, if the ice would only get itself broken, she would not be unwilling to converse upon the subject. But how to break the ice!

"I always thought he would," at last she said.

"Did you?" said Miss Todd. "Well, he certainly used to come there, but I never knew why; sometimes I thought it was to talk about you."

"Oh, no!" said Miss Baker, plaintively.

"I gave him no encouragement — none whatever; used to send him here and there — anything to get rid of him. Sometimes I thought—" and then Miss Todd hesitated.

"Thought what?" asked Miss Baker.

"Well, I don't want to be ill-natured; but sometimes I thought that he wanted to borrow money, and didn't exactly know how to begin."

"To borrow money!"

"Well, I don't know; I only say I thought so. He never did."

Miss Baker sighed again, and then there was a slight pause in the conversation.

"But, Miss Todd —"

"Well, my dear!"

"Do you think that —"

"Think what? Speak out, my dear; you may before me. If you've got any secret, I'll keep it."

"Oh! I've got no secret; only this. Do you think that Sir Lionel is — is poor — that he should want to borrow money?"

"Well; poor! I hardly know what you call poor. But we all know that he is a distressed man. I suppose he has a good income, and a little ready money would, perhaps, set him up; but there's no doubt about his being over head and ears in debt, I suppose."

This seemed to throw a new and unexpected light on Miss Baker's mind. "I thought he was always so very respectable," said she.

"Hum-m-m!" said Miss Todd, who knew the world.

"Eh?" said Miss Baker, who did not.

"It depends on what one means by respectable," said Miss Todd.

"I really thought he was so very —"

"Hum-m-m," repeated Miss Todd, shaking her head.

And then there was a little conversation carried on between these ladies so entirely *sotto voce* that the reporter of this scene was unable to hear a word of it. But this he could see, that Miss Todd bore by far the greater part in it.

At the end of it, Miss Baker gave another, and a longer, and a deeper sigh. "But you know, my dear," said Miss Todd, in her most consolatory voice, and these words were distinctly audible, "nothing does a man of that sort so much good as marrying."

"Does it?" asked Miss Baker.

"Certainly; if his wife knows how to manage him."

And then Miss Todd departed, leaving Miss Baker with much work for her thoughts. Her female friend Miss Baker had quite forgiven; but she felt that she could never quite forgive him. "To have deceived me so!" she said to herself, recurring to her old idea of his great respectability. But, nevertheless, it was probably his other sin that rankled deepest in her mind.

Of Miss Baker it may be said that she had hardly touched the pitch; at any rate, that it had not defiled her.

Sir Lionel was somewhat ill at ease as he walked from the Paragon to his livery stables. He had certainly looked upon success with Miss Todd as by no means sure; but, nevertheless, he was disappointed. Let any of us in any attempt that we may make convince ourselves

with ever so much firmness that we shall fail, yet we are hardly the less downhearted when the failure comes. We assure ourselves that we are not sanguine, but we assure ourselves falsely. It is man's nature to be sanguine; his nature, and perhaps his greatest privilege.

And Sir Lionel, as he walked along, began to fear that his own scruples would now stand in the way of that other marriage — of that second string to his bow. When, in making his little private arrangements within his own mind, he had decided that if Miss Todd rejected him he would forthwith walk off to Miss Baker, it never occurred to him that his own feelings would militate against such a proceeding. But such was now absolutely the fact. Having talked about "dear Sarah," he found that even he would have a difficulty in bringing himself to the utterance of "dear Mary."

He went to bed, however, that night with the comfortable reflection that any such nonsense would be dissipated by the morning. But when the morning came — his morning, one p. m. — his feeling he found was the same. He could not see Miss Baker that day.

He was disgusted and disappointed with himself. He had flattered himself that he was gifted with greater firmness; and now that he found himself so wanting in strength of character, he fretted and fumed, as men will do, even at their own faults. He swore to himself that he would go to-morrow, and that evening went to bed early, trying to persuade himself that indigestion had weakened him. He did great injustice, however, to as fine a set of internal organs as ever blessed a man of sixty.

At two o'clock next day he dressed himself for the campaign in Montpellier Terrace; but when dressed he

was again disorganised. He found that he could not do it. He told himself over and over again that with Miss Baker there need be no doubt; she, at least, would accept him. He had only to smile there and she would smile again. He had only to say "dear Mary," and those soft eyes would be turned to the ground and the battle would be won.

But still he could not do it. He was sick; he was ill; he could not eat his breakfast. He looked in the glass, and found himself to be yellow, and wrinkled, and wizened. He was not half himself. There were yet three weeks before Miss Baker would leave Littlebath. It was on the whole better that his little arrangement should be made immediately previous to her departure. He would leave Littlebath for ten days, and return a new man. So he went up to London, and bestowed his time upon his son.

At the end of the ten days much of his repugnance had worn off. But still the sound of that word "Sarah," and the peal of laughter which followed rang in his ears. That utterance of the verbiage of love is a disagreeable task for a gentleman of his years. He had tried it, and found it very disagreeable. He would save himself a repetition of the nuisance and write to her.

He did so. His letter was not very long. He said nothing about "Mary" in it, but contented himself with calling her his dearest friend. A few words were sufficient to make her understand what he meant, and those few words were there. He merely added a caution, that for both their sakes, the matter had better not at present be mentioned to anybody.

Miss Baker, when she received this letter, had almost recovered her equanimity. Hers had been a soft and

gentle sorrow. She had had no fits of bursting grief; her wailings had been neither loud nor hysterical. A gentle, soft, faint tinge of melancholy had come upon her; so that she had sighed much as she sat at her solitary tea, and had allowed her novel to fall uncared for to the ground. "Would it not be well for her," she said to herself more than once, "to go to Hadley? Would not any change be well for her?" She felt now that Caroline's absence was a heavy blow to her, and that it would be well that she should leave Littlebath. It was astonishing how this affair of Miss Todd's reconciled her to her future home.

And then, when she was thus tranquil, thus resigned, thus all but happy, came this tremendous letter, upsetting all her peace of mind, and throwing her into a new maze of difficulties.

She had never said to herself at any time that if Sir Lionel did propose she would accept him. She had never questioned herself as to the probability of such an event. That she would have accepted him a fortnight ago, there can be no doubt; but what was she to do now?

It was not only that Sir Lionel had made another tender of his hand to another lady ten or twelve days since, but to this must be added the fact that all Littlebath knew that he had done so. Miss Todd, after the first ebullition of her comic spleen, had not said much about it; but Miss P. Gauntlet's tongue had not been idle. She, perhaps, had told it only to the godly; but the godly, let them be ever so exclusive, must have some intercourse with the wicked world; and thus every lady in Littlebath now knew all about it. And then there were other difficulties. That whispered conversation still

rang in her ears. She was not quite sure how far it might be her mission to reclaim such a man as Sir Lionel — this new Sir Lionel whom Miss Todd had described. And then, too, he was in want of money. Why, she was in want of money herself!

But was there not something also to be said on the other side? It is reported that unmarried ladies such as Miss Baker generally regret the forlornness of their own condition. If so, the fault is not their own, but must be attributed to the social system to which they belong. The English world is pleased to say that an unmarried lady past forty has missed her hit in life — has omitted to take her tide at the ebb; and what can unmarried ladies do but yield to the world's dictum? That the English world may become better informed, and learn as speedily as may be to speak with more sense on the subject, let us all pray.

But, in the meantime, the world's dictum was strong at Littlebath, and did influence this dear lady. She would prefer the name of Lady Bertram to that of Miss Baker for the remainder of the term of years allotted to her. It would please her to walk into a room as a married woman, and to quit herself of that disgrace, which injustice and prejudice, and the folly of her own sex rather than of the other, had so cruelly attached to her present position. And then, to be *Lady* Bertram! There were but few angels at this time in Littlebath, and Miss Baker was not one of them: she had a taint of vanity in her composition, but we doubt if such female vanity could exist in any human breast in a more pardonable form than it did in hers.

And then, perhaps, this plan of marrying might have the wished-for effect on Sir Lionel's way of living — and

how desirable was this! Would it not be a splendid work for her to reclaim a lost colonel? Might it not be her duty to marry him with this special object?

There certainly did appear to be some difficulty as to money. If, as Miss Todd assured her, Sir Lionel were really in difficulties, her own present annuity — all that she could absolutely call her own — her one hundred and eighty-nine pounds, seventeen shillings and threepence per annum — would not help them much. Sir Lionel was at any rate disinterested in his offers; that at least was clear to her.

And then a sudden light broke in upon her meditations. Sir Lionel and the old gentleman were at variance. We allude to the old gentleman at Hadley: with the other old gentleman, of whom we wot, it may be presumed that Sir Lionel was on tolerably favourable terms. Might not she be the means of bringing the two brothers together? If she were Lady Bertram, would not the old gentleman receive Sir Lionel back to his bosom for her sake — to his bosom, and also to his purse? But before she took any step in the dark, she resolved to ask the old gentleman the question.

It is true that Sir Lionel had desired her to speak to no person on the subject; but that injunction of course referred to strangers. It could not but be expected that on such a matter she should consult her best friends. Sir Lionel had also enjoined a speedy answer; and in order that she might not disappoint him in this matter, she resolved to put the question at once to Mr. Bertram. Great measures require great means. She would herself go to Hadley on the morrow — and so she wrote a letter that night, to beg that her uncle would expect her.

"So; you got tired of Littlebath before the month was out?" said he.

"Oh! but I am going back again."

"Going back again! Then why the d— have you come up now?" Alas! it was too clear that the old gentleman was not in one of his more pacific moods.

As these words were spoken, Miss Baker was still standing in the passage, that she might see her box brought in from the fly. She of course had on her bonnet, and thickest shawl, and cloak. She had thick boots on also, and an umbrella in her hand. The maid was in the passage, and so was the man who had driven her. She was very cold, and her nose was blue, and her teeth chattered. She could not tell her tale of love in such guise, or to such audience.

"What the d— has brought you up?" repeated the old gentleman, standing with his two sticks at the sitting-room door. He did not care who heard him, or how cold it was, or of what nature might be her present mission. He knew that an extra journey from Littlebath to London and back, frys and porters included, would cost two pounds ten shillings. He knew, or thought that he knew, that this might have been avoided. He also knew that his rheumatism plagued him, that his old bones were sore, that he could not sleep at night, that he could not get into the city to see how things went, and that the game was coming to an end with him, and that the grave was claiming him. It was not surprising that the old gentleman should be cross.

"I'll tell you if you'll let me come into the room," said Miss Baker. "Take the box upstairs, Mary. Half a crown! oh no, two shillings will be quite enough."

This economy was assumed to pacify the old gentleman; but it did not have the desired effect. "One and sixpence," he holloed out from his crutches. "Don't give him a halfpenny more."

"Please, sir, the luggage, sir," said the fly-driver.

"Luggage!" shouted the old man. His limbs were impotent, but his voice was not; and the fly-driver shook in his shoes.

"There," said Miss Baker, insidiously giving the man two and threepence. "I shall not give you a farthing more." It is to be feared that she intended her uncle to think that his limit had not been exceeded.

And then she was alone with Mr. Bertram. Her nose was still blue, and her toes still cold; but at any rate she was alone with him. It was hard for her to tell her tale; and she thoroughly wished herself back at Littlebath; but, nevertheless, she did tell it. The courage of women in some conditions of life surpasses anything that man can do.

"I want to consult you about that," said she, producing Sir Lionel's letter.

The old gentleman took it, and looked at it, and turned it. "What! it's from that swindler, is it?" said he.

"It's from Sir Lionel," said Miss Baker, trembling. There were as yet no promising auspices for the fraternal reconciliation.

"Yes; I see who it's from — and what is it all about? I shan't read it. You can tell me, I suppose, what's in it."

"I had hoped that perhaps, sir, you and he might —"

"Might what?"

"Be brought together as brothers and friends."

"Brothers and friends! One can't choose one's brother;

but who would choose to be the friend of a swindler? Is that what the letter is about?"

"Not exactly that, Mr. Bertram."

"Then what the d— is it?"

"Sir Lionel, sir, has made me —"

"Made you what? Put your name to a bill, I suppose."

"No; indeed he has not. Nothing of that kind."

"Then what has he made you do?"

"He has not made me do anything; but he has sent me — an — an offer of marriage." And poor Miss Baker, with her blue nose, looked up so innocently, so imploringly, so trustingly, that any one but Mr. Bertram would have comforted her.

"An offer of marriage from Sir Lionel!" said he.

"Yes," said Miss Baker, timidly. "Here it is; and I have come up to consult you about the answer." Mr. Bertram now did take the letter, and did read it through.

"Well!" he said, closing his eyes and shaking his head gently. "Well!"

"I thought it better to do nothing without seeing you. And that is what has brought me to Hadley in such a hurry."

"The audacious, impudent scoundrel!"

"You think, then, that I should refuse him!"

"You are a fool, an ass; a downright old soft-headed fool." Such was the old gentleman's answer to her question.

"But I didn't know what to say without consulting you," said Miss Baker, with her handkerchief to her face.

"Not know! Don't you know that he's a swindler, a reprobate, a penniless adventurer? Good heavens! And you are such a fool as that! It's well that you are not to be left at Littlebath by yourself."

Miss Baker made no attempt to defend herself, but, bursting into tears, assured her uncle that she would be guided by him. Under his absolute dictation she wrote the enclosed short answer to Sir Lionel.

“Hadley, January —, 184—.

“Dear Sir,

“Mr. Bertram says that it will be sufficient to let you know that he would not give me a penny during his life, or leave me a penny at his death if I were to become your wife.

“Yours truly,

“MARY BAKER.”

That was all that the old gentleman would allow; but as she folded the letter, she surreptitiously added the slightest imaginable postscript to explain the matter — such words as occurred to her at the spur of the moment.

“He is so angry about it all!”

After that Miss Baker was not allowed to go back to Littlebath, even to pack up or pay her bills, or say good-bye to those she left behind. The servant had to do it all. Reflecting on the danger which had been surmounted, Mr. Bertram determined that she should not again be put in the way of temptation.

And this was the end of Sir Lionel’s wooing.

CHAPTER XI.

A quiet little Dinner.

SIR HENRY HARCOURT was married and took his bride to Paris and Nice, and Sir Lionel Bertram tried to get married, but his bride — bride as he hoped her to have

been — ran away by herself to Hadley. In the meantime George Bertram lived alone in his dark dull chambers in London.

He would fain have been all alone; but at what was perhaps the worst moment of his misery, his father came to him. It may be remembered how anxiously he had longed to know his father when he first commenced that journey to Jerusalem, how soon he became attached to him, how fascinated he had been by Sir Lionel's manners, how easily he forgave the first little traits of unpaternal conduct on his father's part, how gradually the truth forced itself upon his mind. But now, at this time, the truth had forced itself on his mind. He knew his father for what he was.

And his mind was not one which could reject such knowledge, or alter the nature of it because the man was his father. There are those to whom a father's sins, or a husband's sins, or a brother's sins are no sins at all. And of such one may say, that though we must of compulsion find their judgment to be in some sort delinquent, that their hearts more than make up for such delinquency. One knows that they are wrong, but can hardly wish them to be less so.

But George Bertram was not one of them; he had been in no hurry to condemn his father; but, having seen his sins, he knew them for sins, and did condemn them. He found that his uncle had been right, and that Sir Lionel was a man whom he could in no wise respect, and could hardly love. Money he perceived was his father's desire. He would therefore give him what money he could spare; but he would not give him his society.

When, therefore, Sir Lionel announced his arrival in town and his intention to remain there some little time, George Bertram was by no means solaced in his misery. In those days he was very miserable. It was only now that he knew how thoroughly he loved this woman, now that she was so utterly beyond his reach. Weak and wavering as he was in many things he was not weak enough to abandon himself altogether to unavailing sorrow. He knew that work alone could preserve him from sinking — hard, constant, unflinching work, that one great cure for all our sorrow, that only means of adapting ourselves to God's providences.

So he sat himself to work — not a lazy, listless reading of counted pages; not history at two volumes a week, or science at a treatise a day, but to such true work as he found it in him to do, working with all his mind and all his strength. He had already written and was known as a writer; but he had written under impulse, carelessly, without due regard to his words or due thought as to his conclusions. He had written things of which he was already ashamed, and had put forth with the *ex cathedra* air of an established master ideas which had already ceased to be his own. But all that should be altered now. Then he had wanted a quick return for his writing. It had piqued him to think that the names of others, his contemporaries, were bruited about the world, but that the world knew nothing of his own. Harcourt was already a noted man, while he had done no more than attempted and abandoned a profession. Harcourt's early success had made him an early author; but he already felt that his authorship was unavailing. Harcourt's success had been solid, stable, such as men delight in; his had as yet resulted only in his all but

forced withdrawal from the only respectable position which he had achieved.

And now Harcourt's success was again before him. Harcourt had now as his own that which he had looked to as the goal of all his success, the worldly reward for which he had been willing to work. And yet what was Harcourt as compared with him? He knew himself to be of a higher temperament, of a brighter genius, of greater powers. He would not condescend even to compare himself to this man who had so thoroughly distanced him in the world's race.

Thinking, and feeling, and suffering thus, he had begun to work with all the vehemence of which he was master. He would ask for no speedy return now. His first object was to deaden the present misery of his mind; and then, if it might be so, to vindicate his claim to be regarded as one of England's worthy children, letting such vindication come in its own time.

Such being the state of his mind, his father's arrival did not contribute much to his comfort. Sir Lionel was rather petulant when he was with him; objected to him that he had played his cards badly; would talk about Caroline, and, which was almost worse, about the solicitor-general; constantly urged him to make overtures of reconciliation to his uncle and wanted one day five pounds, on another ten pounds, and again on a third fifteen pounds. At this moment George's fixed income was but two hundred pounds a year; and any other wealth of which he was possessed was the remainder of his uncle's thousand pounds. When that was gone, he must either live on his income, small as it was, or write for the booksellers. Such being the case, he felt himself obliged to decline when the fifteen pounds was mentioned.

"You can let me have it for a couple of months?" said Sir Lionel.

"Not conveniently," said his son.

"I will send it you back immediately on my return to Littlebath," said the father; "so if you have got it by you, pray oblige me."

"I certainly have got it," said the son — and he handed him the desired check; "but I think you should remember, sir, how very small my income is, and that there is no prospect of its being increased."

"It must be altogether your own fault then," said the colonel, pocketing the money. "I never knew a young man who had a finer hand of cards put into his hand — never; if you have played it badly, it is your own fault, altogether your own fault." In truth, Sir Lionel did really feel that his son had used him badly, and owed him some amends. Had George but done his duty, he might now have been the actual recognized heir of his uncle's wealth, and the actual possessor of as much as would have been allowed to a dutiful, obedient son. To a man of Sir Lionel's temperament, it was annoying that there should be so much wealth so near him, and yet absolutely, and, alas! probably for ever out of his reach.

Sir Lionel had resolved to wait in London for his answer, and there he received it. Short as was poor Miss Baker's letter, it was quite sufficiently explicit. She had betrayed him to the old gentleman, and after that all hopes of money from that source were over. It might still be possible for him to talk over Miss Baker, but such triumph would be but barren. Miss Baker with a transferred allegiance — transferred from the old gentleman to him — would be but a very indifferent

helpmate; he learnt, however, from Littlebath that she was still away, and would probably not return. Then he went back in fancied security, and found himself the centre of all those amatory ovations which Miss Todd and Miss Gauntlet had prepared for him.

It was about two months after this that George Bertram saw Sir Henry Harcourt for the first time after the marriage. He had heard that Sir Henry was in town, had heard of the blaze of their new house in Eaton Square, had seen in the papers how magnificently Lady Harcourt had appeared at court, how well she graced her brilliant home, how fortunate the world esteemed that young lawyer who, having genius, industry, and position of his own, had now taken to himself in marriage beauty, wealth, and social charms. All this George Bertram heard and read, and hearing it and reading it, had kept himself from the paths in which such petted children of fortune might probably be met.

Twice in the course of these two months did Sir Henry call at Bertram's chambers; but Bertram was now at home to no one. He lived in a great desert in which was no living being but himself, in a huge desert without water and without grass, in which there was no green thing. He was alone; to one person only had he spoken of his misery; once only had he thought of escaping from it. That thought had been in vain: that companion was beyond his reach; and, therefore, living there in his London chambers, he had been all alone.

But at last they did meet. Sir Henry, determined not to be beaten in his attempt to effect a reconciliation, wrote to him, saying that he would call, and naming an hour. "Caroline and you," he said, "are cousins; there

can be no reason why you should be enemies. For her sake, if not for mine, do oblige me in this."

Bertram sat for hours with that note beneath his eyes before he could bring himself to answer it. Could it really be that she desired to see him again? That she, in her splendour and first glow of prosperous joy, would wish to encounter him in his dreary, sad, deserted misery? And why could she wish it? and, ah! how could she wish it?

And then he asked himself whether he also would wish to see her. That he still loved her, loved her as he never had done while she was yet his own, he had often told himself. That he should never be at rest till he had ceased to make her the first object of his thoughts he had said as often. That he ought not to see her, he knew full well; the controversy within his own bosom was carried on for two hours, and then he wrote to Sir Henry, saying that he would be at his chambers at the hour named. From that moment the salutary effort was discontinued, the work was put aside, and the good that had been done was all revoked.

Sir Henry came, true to his appointment: whatever might be his object, he was energetic in it. He was now a man of many concernments; hours were scanty with him, and a day much too short. The calls of clients, and the calls of party, joined to those other calls which society makes upon men in such brilliant stations, hardly left him time for sleeping; but not the less urgent was he in his resolve to see his beaten rival who would so willingly have left him to his brilliant joy. But was not all this explained long even before Christianity was in vogue? "*Quos Deus vult perdere, prius dementat.*" Whom God will confound, those he first maddens.

Nothing could exceed the bland friendship, the winning manners, and the frank courtesy of Sir Henry. He said but little about what was past; but that little went to show that he had been blessed with the hand of Caroline Waddington only because Bertram had rejected that blessing as not worthy his acceptance. Great man as he was, he almost humbled himself before Bertram's talent. He spoke of their mutual connection at Hadley as though they two were his heirs of right, and as though their rights were equal; and then he ended by begging that they might still be friends.

"Our careers must be widely different," said Bertram, somewhat touched by his tone; "yours will be in the light; mine must be in the dark."

"Most men who do any good live in the dark for some periods of their lives," said Harcourt. "I, too, have had my dark days, and doubtless shall have them again; but neither with you nor with me will they endure long."

Bertram thought that Harcourt knew nothing about it, and sneered when the successful man talked of his dark days. What darkness had his mental eyesight ever known? We are all apt to think when our days are dark that there is no darkness dark as our own.

"I know what your feelings are," continued Sir Henry; "and I hope you will forgive me if I speak openly. You have resolved not to meet Caroline. My object is to make you put aside that resolve. It is my object and hers also. It is out of the question that you should continue to avoid the world. Your walk in life will be that of a literary man: but nowadays literary men become senators and statesmen. They have high rank, are well paid, and hold their own boldly against

men of meaner capacities. This is the career that we both foresee for you; and in that career we both hope to be your friends."

So spoke the great advocate with suasive eloquence — with eloquence dangerously suasive as regarded his own happiness: but in truth this man knew not what love meant — not that love which those two wretched lovers understood so well. That his own wife was cold to him, cold as ice — that he well knew. That Bertram had flung her from him because she had been cold to him — that he believed. That he himself could live without any passionate love — that he acknowledged. His wife was graceful and very beautiful — all the world confessed that. And thus Sir Henry was contented. Those honeymoon days had indeed been rather dreary. Once or twice before that labour was over he had been almost tempted to tell her that he had paid too high for the privilege of pressing such an icicle to his bosom. But he had restrained himself, and now, in the blaze of the London season, passing his mornings in courts of law and his evening in the House of Parliament, he flattered himself that he was a happy man.

"Come and dine with us in a quiet way the day after to-morrow," said Sir Henry, "and then the ice will be broken." George Bertram said that he would; and from that moment his studies were at an end.

This occurred on the Monday. The invitation was for the following Wednesday. Sir Henry explained that from some special cause he would be relieved from parliamentary attendance, at any rate till ten o'clock; that at the quiet dinner there would be no other guests except Mr. and Mrs. Stistick, and Baron Brawl, whose wife and family were not yet in town.

"You'll like the baron," said Harcourt; "he's loud and arrogant, no doubt; but he's not loud and arrogant about nothing, as some men are. Stistick is a bore. Of course you know him. He's member for Peterloo, and goes with us on condition that somebody listens to him about once a week. But the baron will put him down."

"And Mrs. Stistick?" said George.

"I never heard of her till yesterday, and Caroline has gone to call on her to-day. It's rather a bore for her, for they live somewhere half-way to Harrow, I believe. Half-past seven. Good-bye, old fellow. I ought to have been before Baron Brawl at Westminster twenty minutes since;" and so the solicitor-general, rushing out from the Temple, threw himself into a cab; and as the very wheels rattled along the Strand, he made himself acquainted with the contents of his brief.

Why should Caroline have expressed a wish to see him? That was the thought that chiefly rested in Bertram's mind when Sir Henry left him. Why should it be an object to her to force a meeting between her and him? Would it not be better for them both that they should be far as the poles asunder?

"Well," he said to himself; "if it be no difficulty to her, neither shall it be a difficulty to me. She is strong-minded, and I will be so no less. I will go and meet her. It is but the first plunge that gives the shock."

And thus he closed his work, and sat moodily thinking. He was angry with her in that she could endure to see him; but, alas! half-pleased also that she should wish to do so. He had no thought, no most distant thought that she could ever now be more to him than the wife of an acquaintance whom he did not love too

well. But yet there was in his heart some fragment of half-satisfied vanity at hearing that she did look forward to see him once again.

And how shall we speak of such a wish on her part? "Caroline," her husband had said to her at breakfast, "it will be all nonsense for you and George Bertram to keep up any kind of quarrel. I hate nonsense of that sort."

"There is no quarrel between us," she replied.

"There ought to be none; and I shall get him to come here."

The colour of her face became slightly heightened as she answered: "If you wish it, Sir Henry, and he wishes it also, I shall not object."

"I do wish it, certainly. I think it absolutely necessary as regards my position with your grandfather."

"Do just as you think best," said his wife. 'Twas thus that Lady Harcourt had expressed her desire to see George Bertram at her house. Had he known the truth, that fragment of half-satisfied vanity would have been but small.

In those early days of her marriage, Lady Harcourt bore her triumphs very placidly. She showed no great elation at the change that had come over her life. Her aunt from Hadley was frequently with her, and wondered to find her so little altered, or rather, in some respects so much altered; for she was more considerate in her manner, more sparing of her speech, much less inclined to domineer now, as Lady Harcourt, than in former days she had ever been as Caroline Waddington. She went constantly into society, and was always made much of; but her triumphs were mainly of that quiet nature

which one sometimes sees to be achieved with so little effort by beautiful women. It seemed but necessary that she should sit still, and sometimes smile, and the world was ready to throw itself at her feet. Nay, the smile was but too often omitted, and yet the world was there.

At home, though more employed, she was hardly more energetic. Her husband told her that he wished his house to be noted for the pleasantness of his dinner-parties, and, therefore, she studied the subject as a good child would study a lesson. She taught herself what the material of a dinner should be, she satisfied herself that her cook was good, she looked to the brilliancy of her appointments, and did her best to make the house shine brightly. The house did shine, and on the whole Sir Henry was contented. It was true that his wife did not talk much; but what little she did say was said with a sweet manner and with perfect grace. She was always dressed with care, was always beautiful, was always ladylike. Had not Sir Henry reason to be contented? As for talking, he could do that himself.

And now that she was told that George Bertram was to come to her house, she did not show much more excitement at the tidings than at the promised advent of Mr. Baron Brawl. She took the matter with such indifference that Sir Henry, at least, had no cause for jealousy. But then she was indifferent about everything. Nothing seemed to wake her either to joy or sorrow. Sir Henry, perhaps, was contented; but lovely, ladylike, attractive as she was, he sometimes did feel almost curious to know whether it were possible to rouse this doll of his to any sense of life or animation. He had thought, nay, almost wished, that the name of her old

lover would have moved her, that the idea of seeing him would have disturbed her. But, no; one name was the same to her as another. She had been told to go and call on Mrs. Stistick, and she had gone. She was told to receive Mr. Bertram, and she was quite ready to do so. Angels from heaven, or spirits from below, could Sir Henry have summoned such to his table, would have been received by her with equal equanimity. This was dutiful on her part, and naturally satisfactory to a husband inclined to be somewhat original. But even duty may pall on an original husband, and a man may be brought to wish that his wife would cross him.

But on this occasion Sir Henry had no such pleasure. "I saw Bertram this morning," he said, when he went home for five minutes before taking his seat in the House for the night. "He's to be here on Wednesday."

"Oh, very well. There will be six, then." She said no more. It was clear that the dinner, and that only, was on her mind. He had told her to be careful about his dinners, and therefore could not complain; but, nevertheless, he was almost vexed. Don't let any wife think that she will satisfy her husband by perfect obedience. Overmuch virtue in one's neighbours is never satisfactory to us sinners.

But there were moments in which Lady Harcourt could think of her present life, when no eye was by to watch her — no master there to wonder at her perfections. Moments! nay, but there were hours, and hours, and hours. There were crowds of hours; slow, dull, lingering hours, in which she had no choice but to think of it. A woman may see to her husband's dinners and her own toilet and yet have too much time for

thinking. It would almost have been a comfort to Lady Harcourt if Sir Henry could have had a dinner-party every day.

How should she bear herself; what should she say; how should she look when George Bertram came there as a guest to her house? How could he be so cruel, so heartless, so inhuman as to come there? Her path was difficult enough for her poor weary feet. He must know that — should, at any rate, have known it. How could he be so cruel as to add this great stumbling-block to her other perils?

The Wednesday came, and at half-past seven she was in the drawing-room as beautiful and as dignified as ever. She had a peculiar place of her own in the corner of a peculiar sofa, and there she lived. It was her goddess' shrine, and her worshippers came and did reverence before her. None came and sat beside her. Hers was not that gentle fascination which entices men, and women too, to a near proximity. Her bow was very gracious, and said much; but "*noli me tangere*" was part of its eloquence. And so Baron Brawl found when on entering her drawing-room he told her that the fame of her charms had reached his ears, and that he was delighted to have an opportunity of making her acquaintance.

Mr. and Mrs. Stistick were the next comers. Mrs. Stistick sat herself down on an opposite sofa, and seemed to think that she did her duty to society by sitting there. And so she did. Only permit her so to sit, and there was no further labour in entertaining Mrs. Stistick. She was a large, heavy woman, with a square forehead and a square chin, and she had brought up seven children most successfully. Now, in these days of her husband's

parliamentary prosperity, she was carried about to dinners; and in her way she enjoyed them. She was not too shy to eat, and had no wish whatever either to be talked to or to talk. To sit easily on a sofa and listen to the buzz of voices was life and society to her. Perhaps in those long hours she was meditating on her children's frocks or her husband's linen. But they never seemed to be long to her.

Mr. Stistick was standing on the rug before the fire, preparing for his first onslaught on Baron Brawl, when the servant announced Mr. Bertram.

"Ah! Bertram, I'm delighted to see you," said Sir Henry; "doubly so, as dinner is ready. Judge, you know my friend Bertram, by name, at any rate?" and some sort of half-introduction was performed.

"He who moved all Oxford from its propriety?" said the baron. But Bertram neither saw him nor heard him. Neither his eyes nor his ears were at his command.

As he took his host's proffered hand, he glanced his eyes for a moment round the room. There she sat, and he had to speak to her as best he might. At his last interview with her he had spoken freely enough, and it all rushed now upon his mind. Then how little he had made of her, how lightly he had esteemed her! Now, as she sat there before him his spirit acknowledged her as a goddess, and he all but feared to address her. His face, he knew, was hot and red; his manner, he felt, was awkward. He was not master of himself, and when such is the case with a man, the fact always betrays itself.

But he did speak to her. "How do you do, Lady Harcourt?" he said, and he put his hand out, and he felt the ends of her fingers once more within his own.

And she spoke too, probably. But pretty women can say almost as much as is necessary on such occasions as this without opening their lips. Whether she spoke, or whether she did not, it was the same to him. He certainly did not hear her. But her fingers did touch his hand, her eyes did rest upon his face; and then, in that moment of time, he thought of Jerusalem, of the Mount of Olives, of those rides at Littlebath, and of that last meeting, when all, all had been shattered to pieces.

"There are five hundred and fifty-five thousand male children between the ages of nine and twelve," said Mr. Stistick, pursuing some wondrous line of argument, as Bertram turned himself towards the fire.

"What a fine national family!" said the baron. "And how ashamed I feel when I bethink myself only one of them is mine."

"Dinner is served," said the butler.

"Mrs. Stistick, will you allow me?" said Sir Henry. And then in half a minute Bertram found himself walking down to dinner with the member of Parliament. "And we have school accommodation for just one hundred and fourteen," continued that gentleman on the stairs. "Now, will you tell me what becomes of the other four hundred and forty-one?"

Bertram was not at that moment in a condition to give him any information on the subject.

"I can tell you about the one," said the baron, as Sir Henry began his grace.

"An odd thousand is nothing," said Mr. Stistick, pausing for one second till the grace was over.

The judge and Mr. Stistick sat at Lady Harcourt's right and left, so that Bertram was not called upon to say much to her during dinner. The judge talked in-

cessantly, and so did the member of Parliament, and so also did the solicitor-general. A party of six is always a talking party. Men and women are not formed into pairs, and do not therefore become dumb. Each person's voice makes another person emulous, and the difficulty felt is not as to what one shall say, but how one shall get it in. Ten, and twelve, and fourteen are the silent numbers.

Every now and again Harcourt endeavoured to make Bertram join in the conversation; and Bertram did make some faint attempts. He essayed to answer some of Mr. Stistick's very difficult inquiries, and was even roused to parry some raillery from the judge. But he was not himself; and Caroline, who could not but watch him narrowly as she sat there in her silent beauty, saw that he was not so. She arraigned him in her mind for want of courage; but had he been happy, and noisy, and light of heart, she would probably have arraigned him for some deeper sin.

"As long as the matter is left in the hands of the parents, nothing on earth will be done," said Mr. Stistick.

"That's what I have always said to Lady Brawl," said the judge.

"And it's what I have said to Lord John; and what I intend to say to him again. Lord John is all very well—"

"Thank you, Stistick. I am glad, at any rate, to get as much as that from you," said the solicitor.

"Lord John is all very well," continued the member, not altogether liking the interruption; "but there is only one man in the county who thoroughly understands the subject, and who is able—"

"And I don't see the slightest probability of finding a second," said the judge.

"And who is able to make himself heard."

"What do you say, Lady Harcourt," asked the baron, "as to the management of a school with — how many millions of them, Mr. Stistick?"

"Five hundred and fifty-five thousand male children—"

"Suppose we say boys," said the judge.

"Boys?" asked Mr. Stistick, not quite understanding him, but rather disconcerted by the familiarity of the word.

"Well, I suppose they must be boys; at least the most of them."

"They are all from nine to twelve, I say," continued Mr. Stistick, completely bewildered.

"Oh, that alters the question," said the judge.

"Not at all," said Mr. Stistick. "There is accommodation for only —"

"Well, we'll ask Lady Harcourt. What do you say, Lady Harcourt?"

Lady Harcourt felt herself by no means inclined to enter into the joke on either side; so she said, with her gravest smile, "I'm sure Mr. Stistick understands very well what he is talking about."

"What do you say, ma'am?" said the judge, turning round to the lady on his left.

"Mr. Stistick is always right on such matters," said the lady.

"See what it is to have a character. It absolutely enables one to upset the laws of human nature. But still I do say, Mr. Solicitor, that the majority of them were probably boys."

"Boys!" exclaimed the member of Parliament. "Boys! I don't think you can have understood a word that we have been saying."

"I don't think I have," said the baron.

"There are five hundred and fifty-five thousand male children between —"

"Oh — h — h! male children! Ah — h — h! Now I see the difference; I beg your pardon, Mr. Stistick, but I really was very stupid. And you mean to explain all this to Lord John in the present session?"

"But, Stistick, who is the one man?" said Sir Henry.

"The one man is Lord Boanerges. He, I believe, is the only man living who really understands the social wants of this kingdom."

"And everything else also," sneered the baron. The baron always sneered at cleverness that was relevant to his own profession, especially when exhibited by one who, like the noble lord named, should have confined his efforts to that profession.

"So Boanerges is to take in hand these male children? And very fitting, too; he was made to be a schoolmaster."

"He is the first man of the age; don't you think so, Sir Henry?"

"He was, certainly, when he was on the woolsack," said Sir Henry. "That is the normal position always assumed by the first man of his age in this country."

"Though some of them when there do hide their lights under a bushel," said the judge.

"He is the first law reformer that perhaps ever lived," said Mr. Stistick, enthusiastically.

"And I hope will be the last in my time," said his enemy.

"I hope he will live to complete his work," said the politician.

"Then Methuselah will be a child to him, and Jared and Lamech little babies," said the judge.

"In such case he had got his work before him, certainly," said Mr. Solicitor.

And so the battle was kept up between them, and George Bertram and Lady Harcourt sat by and listened; or more probably, perhaps, sat by and did not listen.

But when her ladyship and Mrs. Stistick had retreated — oh, my readers, fancy what that next hour must have been to Caroline Harcourt! How gothic, how barbarous are we still in our habits, in that we devote our wives to such wretchedness as that. O, lady, has it ever been your lot to sit out such hour as that with some Mrs. Stistick, who would neither talk, nor read, nor sleep; in whose company you could neither talk, nor read, nor yet sleep? And if such has been your lot, have you not asked yourself why in this civilized country, in this civilized century, you should be doomed to such a senseless, sleepless purgatory? But when they were gone, and when the judge, radiant with fun and happiness, hastened to fill his claret beaker, then Bertram by degrees thawed, and began to feel that after all the world was perhaps not yet dead around him.

"Well, Mr. Stistick," said the baron; "if Sir Henry will allow us, we'll drink Lord Boanerges."

"With all my heart," said Mr. Stistick. "He is a man of whom it may be said —"

"That no man knew better on which side his bread was buttered."

"He is buttering the bread of millions upon millions," said Mr. Stistick.

"Or doing better still," said Bertram; "enabling them to butter their own. Lord Boanerges is probably the only public man of this day who will be greater in a hundred years than he is now."

"Let us at any rate hope," said the baron, "that he will at that time be less truculent."

"I can't agree with you, Bertram," said Sir Henry. "I consider we are fertile in statesmen. Do you think that Peel will be forgotten in a hundred years?" This was said with the usual candour of a modern turncoat. For Sir Henry had now deserted Peel.

"Almost, I should hope, by that time," said Bertram. "He will have a sort of a niche in history, no doubt; as has Mr. Perceval, who did so much to assist us in the war; and Lord Castlereagh, who carried the Union. They also were heaven-sent ministers, whom Acheron has not as yet altogether swallowed up."

"And Boanerges you think will escape Libitina?"

"If the spirit of the age will allow immortality to any man of these days, I think he will. But I doubt whether public opinion, as now existing, will admit of hero-worship."

"Public opinion is the best safeguard for a great man's great name," said Mr. Stistick, with intense reliance on the civilization of his own era.

"Quite true, sir; quite true," said the baron, "for the space of twenty-four hours."

Then followed a calm, and then coffee. After that, the solicitor-general, looking at his watch, marched off impetuous to the House. "Judge," he said, "I know you will excuse me; for you, too, have been a slave in your time: but you will go up to Lady Harcourt, Bertram; you will not be forgiven if you do not go upstairs."

Bertram did go upstairs, that he might not appear to be unmanly, as he said to himself, in slinking out of the house. He did go upstairs, for one quarter of an hour.

But the baron did not. For him, it may be presumed, his club had charms. Mr. Stistick, however, did do so; he had to hand Mrs. Stistick down from that elysium which she had so exquisitely graced. He did hand her down; and then for five minutes George Bertram found himself once more alone with Caroline Waddington.

"Good-night, Lady Harcourt," he said, again essaying to take her hand. This and his other customary greeting was all he had yet spoken to her.

"Good-night, Mr. Bertram." At last her voice faltered, at last her eye fell to the ground, at last her hand trembled. Had she stood firm through this trial all might have been well; but though she could bear herself right manfully before stranger eyes, she could not alone support his gaze; one touch of tenderness, one sign of weakness was enough — and that touch was there, that sign she gave.

"We are cousins still, are we not?" said he.

"Yes, we are cousins — I suppose so."

"And as cousins we need not hate each other?"

"Hate each other!" and she shuddered as she spoke; "oh, no, I hope there is no hatred."

He stood there silent for a moment, looking, not at her, but at the costly ornaments which stood at the foot of the huge pier-glass over the fireplace. Why did he not go now? why did he stand there silent and thoughtful? why — why was he so cruel to her?

"I hope you are happy, Lady Harcourt," at last he said.

There was almost a savage sternness in her face as she made an effort to suppress her feelings. "Thank you — yes," she said; and then she added, "I never was a believer in much happiness."

And yet he did not go. "We have met now," he said, after another pause.

"Yes, we have met now;" and she even attempted to smile as she answered him.

"And we need not be strangers?" Then there was again a pause; for at first she had no answer ready. "Is it needful that we should be strangers?" he asked.

"I suppose not; no, not if Sir Henry wishes it otherwise."

And then he put out his hand, and wishing her good-night a second time, he went.

For the next hour, Lady Harcourt sat there looking at the smouldering fire. "Quos Deus vult perdere, prius dementat." Not in such language, but with some such thought, did she pass judgment on the wretched folly of her husband.

CHAPTER XII.

Mrs. Madden's Ball.

Two days after the dinner, George Bertram called in Eaton Square and saw Lady Harcourt; but, as it happened, she was not alone. Their interview on this occasion was not in any great degree embarrassing to either of them. He did not stay long; and as strangers were present, he was able to talk freely on indifferent subjects. Lady Harcourt probably did not talk much, but she looked as though she did.

And then Adela Gauntlet came up to town for a month; and George, though he was on three or four occasions in Eaton Square, never saw Caroline alone; but he became used to seeing her and being with her. The strangeness of their meeting wore itself away; he

could speak to her without reserve on the common matters of life, and found that he had intense delight in doing so.

Adela Gauntlet was present at all these interviews, and in her heart of hearts condemned them bitterly; but she could say nothing to Caroline. They had been friends — real friends; but Caroline was now almost like stone to her. This visit of Adela's had been a long promise — yes, very long; for the visit, when first promised, was to have been made to Mrs. Bertram. One knows how these promises still live on. Caroline had pressed it even when she felt that Adela's presence could no longer be of comfort to her; and Adela would not now refuse, lest in doing so she might seem to condemn. But she felt that Caroline Harcourt could never be to her what Caroline Bertram would have been.

Lady Harcourt did whatever in her lay to amuse her guest; but Adela was one who did not require much amusing. Had there been friendship between her and her friend, the month would have run by all too quickly; but, as it was, before it was over she wished herself again even at Littlebath.

Bertram dined there twice, and once went with them to some concert. He met them in the park, and called; and then there was a great evening gathering in Eaton Square, and he was there. Caroline was careful on all occasions to let her husband know when she met Bertram, and he as often, in some shape, expressed his satisfaction.

"He'll marry Adela Gauntlet; you see if he does not," he said to her, after one of their dinners in Eaton Square. "She is very pretty, very; and it will be all

very nice, only I wish that one of them had a little money to go on with."

Caroline answered nothing to this: she never did make him any answers; but she felt quite sure in her own heart that he would not marry Adela Gauntlet. And, had she confessed the truth to herself, would she have wished him to do so?

Adela saw and disapproved; she saw much and could not but disapprove of all. She saw that there was very little sympathy between the husband and wife, and that that little was not on the increase — very little! nay, but was there any? Caroline said very little of her lot in life; but the few words that did fall from her seemed to be full of scorn for all that she had around her, and for him who had given it all. She seemed to say, "There — this is that for which I have striven — these ashes on which I now step, and sleep, and feed, which are gritty between my teeth, and foul to my touch! See, here is my reward! Do you not honour me for having won it?"

And then it appeared that Sir Henry Harcourt had already learned how to assume the cross brow of a captious husband; that the sharp word was already spoken on light occasions — spoken without cause and listened to with apparent indifference. Even before Adela such words were spoken, and then Caroline would smile bitterly, and turn her face towards her friend, as though she would say, "See, see what it is to be the wife of so fine a man, so great a man! What a grand match have I not made for myself!" But though her looks spoke thus, no word of complaint fell from her lips — and no word of confidence.

We have said that Sir Henry seemed to encourage

these visits which Bertram made to Eaton Square; and for a time he did so — up to the time of that large evening-party which was given just before Adela's return to Littlebath. But on that evening, Adela thought she saw a deeper frown than usual on the brows of the solicitor-general, as he turned his eyes to a couch on which his lovely wife was sitting, and behind which George Bertram was standing, but so standing that he could speak and she could hear.

And then Adela bethought herself, that though she could say nothing to Caroline, it might not be equally impossible to say something to Bertram. There had been between them a sort of confidence, and if there was any one to whom Adela could now speak freely, it was to him. They each knew something of each other's secrets, and each of them, at least, trusted the other.

But this, if it be done at all, must be done on that evening. There was no probability that they would meet again before her departure. This was the only house in which they did meet, and here Adela had no wish to see him more.

"I am come to say good-bye to you," she said, the first moment she was able to speak to him alone.

"To say good-bye! Is your visit over so soon?"

"I go on Thursday."

"Well, I shall see you again, for I shall come on purpose to make my adieux."

"No, Mr. Bertram; do not do that."

"But I certainly shall."

"No;" and she put out her little hand, and gently — oh! so gently — touched his arm.

"And why not? Why should I not come to see

you? I have not so many friends that I can afford to lose you."

"You shall not lose me, nor would I willingly lose you. But, Mr. Bertram —"

"Well, Miss Gauntlet?"

"Are you right to be here at all?"

The whole tone, and temper, and character of his face altered as he answered her quickly and sharply — "If not, the fault lies with Sir Henry Harcourt, who, with some pertinacity, induced me to come here. But why is it wrong that I should be here? — foolish it may be."

"That is what I mean. I did not say wrong, did I? Do not think that I imagine evil."

"It may be foolish," continued Bertram, as though he had not heard her last words. "But if so, the folly has been his."

"If he is foolish, is that reason why you should not be wise?"

"And what is it you fear, Adela? What is the injury that will come? Will it be to me, or to her, or to Harcourt?"

"No injury, no real injury — I am sure of that. But may not unhappiness come of it? Does it seem to you that she is happy?"

"Happy! Which of us is happy! Which of us is not utterly wretched? She is as happy as you are, and Sir Henry, I have no doubt, is as happy as I am."

"In what you say, Mr. Bertram, you do me injustice; I am not unhappy."

"Are you not? then I congratulate you on getting over the troubles consequent on a true heart."

"I did not mean in any way to speak of myself: I

have cares, regrets, and sorrows, as have most of us; but I have no cause of misery which I cannot assuage."

"Well, you are fortunate; that is all I can say."

"But Caroline I can see is not happy; and, Mr. Bertram, I fear that your coming here will not make her more so."

She had said her little word, meaning it so well. But perhaps she had done more harm than good. He did not come again to Eaton Square till after she was gone; but very shortly after that he did so.

Adela had seen that short whispered conversation between Lady Harcourt and Bertram — that moment, as it were, of confidence; and so, also, had Sir Henry; and yet it had been but for a moment.

"Lady Harcourt," Bertram had said, "how well you do this sort of thing!"

"Do I?" she answered. "Well, one ought to do something well."

"Do you mean to say that your excellence is restricted to this?"

"Pretty nearly, such excellence as there is."

"I should have thought —" and then he paused.

"You are not coming to reproach me, I hope," she said.

"Reproach you, Lady Harcourt! No; my reproaches, silent or expressed, never fall on your head."

"Then you must be much altered;" and as she said these last words, in what was hardly more than a whisper, she saw some lady in a distant part of the room to whom some attention might be considered to be due, and rising from her seat she walked away across the room. It was very shortly after that Adela had spoken to him.

For many a long and bitter day, Bertram had per-

suaded himself that she had not really loved him. He had doubted it when she had first told him so calmly that it was necessary that their marriage should be postponed for years; he had doubted it much when he found her, if not happy, at least contented under that postponement; doubt had become almost certainty when he learnt that she discussed his merits with such a one as Henry Harcourt; but on that day, at Richmond, when he discovered that the very secrets of his heart were made subject of confidential conversation with this man, he had doubted it no longer. Then he had gone to her, and his reception proved to him that his doubts had been too well founded — his certainty only too sure. And so he had parted with her — as we all know.

But now he began to doubt his doubts — to be less certain of his certainty. That she did not much love Sir Henry, that was very apparent; that she could not listen to his slightest word without emotion — that, too, he could perceive; that Adela conceived that she still loved him, and that his presence there was therefore dangerous — that also had been told to him. Was it then possible that he, loving this woman as he did — having never ceased in his love for one moment, having still loved her with his whole heart, his whole strength — that he had flung her from him while her heart was still his own? Could it be that she, during their courtship should have seemed so cold and yet had loved him?

A thousand times he had reproached her in his heart for being worldly; but now the world seemed to have no charms for her. A thousand times she had declared that she cared only for the outward show of things, but these outward shows were now wholly indifferent to her. That

they in no degree contributed to her happiness, or even to her contentment, that was made manifest enough to him.

And then these thoughts drove him wild, and he began to ask himself whether there could be yet any comfort in the fact that she had loved him, and perhaps loved him still. The motives by which men are actuated in their conduct are not only various, but mixed. As Bertram thought in this way concerning Lady Harcourt — the Caroline Waddington that had once belonged to himself — he proposed to himself no scheme of infamy, no indulgence of a disastrous love, no ruin for her whom the world now called so fortunate; but he did think that, if she still loved him, it would be pleasant to sit and talk with her; pleasant to feel some warmth in her hand; pleasant that there should be some confidence in her voice. And so he resolved — but, no, there was no resolve; but he allowed it to come to pass that his intimacy in Eaton Square should not be dropped.

And then he bethought himself of the part which his friend Harcourt had played in this matter, and speculated as to how that pleasant fellow had cheated him out of his wife. What Adela had said might be very true, but why should he regard Sir Henry's happiness? why regard any man's happiness, or any woman's? Who had regarded him? So he hired a horse, and rode in the park when he knew Lady Harcourt would be there, dined with Baron Brawl because Lady Harcourt was to dine there, and went to a ball at Mrs. Madden's for the same reason. All which the solicitor-general now saw, and did not press his friend to take a part at any more of his little dinners.

What may have passed on the subject between Sir

Henry and his wife cannot be said. A man does not willingly accuse his wife of even the first germ of infidelity; does not willingly suggest to her that any one is of more moment to her than himself. It is probable that his brow became blacker than it had been, that his words were less courteous, and his manner less kind; but of Bertram himself, it may be presumed that he said nothing. It might, however, have been easy for Caroline to perceive that he no longer wished to have his old friend at his house.

At Mrs. Madden's ball, Bertram asked her to dance with him, and she did stand up for a quadrille. Mr. Madden was a rich young man, in Parliament, and an intimate friend both of Sir Henry's and of Bertram's. Caroline had danced with him — being her first performance of that nature since her marriage; and having done so, she could not, as she said to herself, refuse Mr. Bertram. So they stood up; and the busy solicitor-general, who showed himself for five minutes in the room, saw them moving, hand-in-hand together, in the figure of the dance. And as he so moved, Bertram himself could hardly believe in the reality of his position. What if anyone had prophesied to him three months since that he would be dancing with Caroline Harcourt!

"Adela did not stay with you long," said he, as they were standing still.

"No, not very long. I do not think she is fond of London;" and then they were again silent till their turn for dancing was over.

"No; I don't think she is," said Bertram, "nor am I. I should not care if I were to leave it for ever. Do you like London, Lady Harcourt?"

"Oh, yes; as well as any other place. I don't think

it much signifies — London, or Littlebath, or New Zealand.”

They were then both silent for a moment, till Bertram again spoke, with an effort that was evident in his voice.

“You used not to be so indifferent in such matters.”

“Used!”

“Has all the world so changed that nothing is any longer of any interest?”

“The world has changed, certainly — with me.”

“And with me also, Lady Harcourt. The world has changed with both of us. But fortune, while she has been crushing me, has been very kind to you.”

“Has she? Well, perhaps she has — as kind, at any rate, as I deserve. But you may be sure of this; I do not complain of her.” And then they were again silent.

“I wonder whether you ever think of old days?” he said, after a pause.

“At any rate, I never talk of them, Mr. Bertram.”

“No; I suppose not. One should not talk of them. But out of a full heart the mouth will speak. Constant thoughts will break forth in words. There is nothing else left to me of which I can think.”

Any one looking at her face as she answered him would have little dreamed how much was passing through her mind, how much was weighing on her heart. She commanded not only her features, but even her colour, and the motion of her eyes. No anger flashed from them; there was no blush of indignation as she answered him in the crowded room. And yet her words were indignant enough, and there was anger, too, in that low tone which reached his ear so plainly, but which reached no further.

"And whose doing has this been? Why is it that I may not think of past times? Why is it that all thought, all memories are denied to me? Who was it that broke the cup at the very fountain?"

"Was it I?"

"Did you ever think of your prayers? 'Forgive us our trespasses.' But you, in your pride — you could forgive nothing. And now you dare to twit me with my fortune!"

"Lady Harcourt!"

"I will sit down if you please, now. I do not know why I speak thus." And then, without further words, she caused herself to be led away, and sitting down between two old dowagers, debarred him absolutely from the power of another word.

Immediately after this he left the house; but she remained for another hour — remained — and danced with young Lord Echo, who was a Whig lordling; and with Mr. Twisleton, whose father was a Treasury secretary. They both talked to her about Harcourt, and the great speech he was making at that moment; and she smiled and looked so beautiful, that when they got together at one end of the supper-table, they declared that Harcourt was out-and-out the luckiest dog of his day; and questioned his right to monopolize such a treasure.

And had he been cruel? had he been unforgiving? had he denied to her that pardon which it behoved him so often to ask for himself? This was the question which Bertram was now forced to put to himself. And that other question, which he could now answer but in one way. Had he then been the cause of his own shipwreck? had he driven his own bark on the rocks while

the open channel was there clear before him? Had she not now assured him of her love, though no word of tenderness had passed her lips? And whose doing had it been? Yes, certainly; it had been his own doing.

The conviction which thus came upon him did not add much to his comfort. There was but little consolation to him now in the assurance that she had loved, and did love him. He had hitherto felt himself to be an injured man; but now he had to feel that he himself had committed the injury. "Whose doing has it been? You — you in your pride, could forgive nothing!" These words rang in his ears; his memory repeated to him hourly the tone in which they had been spoken. She had accused him of destroying all her hopes for this world — and he had answered not a word to the accusation.

On the morning after that ball at Mrs. Madden's, Sir Henry came into his wife's room while she was still dressing. "By-the-by," said he, "I saw you at Mrs. Madden's last night."

"Yes; I perceived that you were there for a moment," Caroline answered.

"You were dancing. I don't know that I ever saw you dancing before."

"I have not done so since I was married. In former days I used to be fond of it."

"Ah, yes; when you were at Littlebath. It did not much matter then what you did in that way; but —"

"Does it matter more now, Sir Henry?"

"Well, if it would entail no great regret, I would rather that you did not dance. It is all very nice for girls."

"You do not mean to say that married women —"

"I do not mean to say anything of the kind. One man has one idea, and another another. Some women also are not placed in so conspicuous a position as you are."

"Why did you not tell me your wishes before?"

"It did not occur to me. I did not think it probable that you would dance. May I understand that you will give it up?"

"As you direct me to do so, of course I shall."

"Direct! I do not direct, I only request."

"It is the same thing, exactly. I will not dance again. I should have felt the prohibition less had I been aware of your wishes before I had offended."

"Well, if you choose to take it in that light, I cannot help it. Good-morning. I shall not dine at home to-day."

And so the solicitor-general went his way, and his wife remained sitting motionless at her dressing-table. They had both of them already become aware that the bargain they had made was not a wise one.

CHAPTER XIII.

Can I escape?

HAD not George Bertram been of all men the most infirm of purpose, he would have quitted London immediately after that ball — at any rate, for many months; but he was lamentably infirm of purpose. He said to himself over and over again, that it behoved him to go. What had either of them done for him that he should regard them? That had hitherto been the question within his own breast, but now it was changed. Had

he not greatly injured her? Had she not herself told him that his want of mercy had caused all her misery? Ought he not, at any rate, to spare her now? But yet he remained. He must ask her pardon before he went; he would do that, and then he would go.

His object was to see her without going to Eaton Square. His instinct told him that Sir Henry no longer wished to see him there, and he was unwilling to enter the house of any one who did not wish his presence. For two weeks he failed in his object. He certainly did see Lady Harcourt, but not in such a way as to allow of conversation; but at last fortune was propitious, or the reverse, and he found himself alone with her.

She was seated quite alone, turning over the engravings which lay in a portfolio before her, when he came up to her.

"Do not be angry," he said, "if I ask you to listen to me for a few moments."

She still continued to move the engravings before her, but with a slower motion than before; and though her eye still rested on the plates, he might have seen, had he dared to look at her, that her mind was far away from them. He might have seen also that there was no flash of anger now in her countenance; her spirit was softer than on that evening when she had reproached him; for she had remembered that he also had been deeply injured. But she answered nothing to the request which he thus made,

"You told me that I was unforgiving," he continued, "I now come to beg that you will not be unforgiving also; that is, if I have done anything that has caused you — caused you to be less happy than you might have been."

"Less happy!" she said; but not with that scorn with which she had before repeated his words.

"You believe, I hope, that I would wish you to be happy; that I would do anything in my power to make you so?"

"There can be nothing now in your power, Mr. Bertram." And as she spoke she involuntarily put an emphasis on the *now*, which made her words convey much more than she had intended.

"No;" he said. "No; what can such a one as I do? What could I ever have done? But say that you forgive me, Lady Harcourt."

"Let us both forgive," she whispered, and as she did so, she put out her hand to him. "Let us both forgive. It is all that we can do for each other."

"Oh, Caroline, Caroline!" he said, speaking hardly above his breath, and with his eyes averted, but still holding her hand; or attempting to hold it, for as he spoke she withdrew it.

"I was unjust to you the other night. It is so hard to be just when one is so wretched. We have been like two children who have quarrelled over their plaything, and broken it in pieces while it was yet new. We cannot put the wheels again together, or make the broken reed produce sweet sounds."

"No," he said. "No, no, no. No sounds are any longer sweet. There is no music now."

"But as we have both sinned, Mr. Bertram, so should we both forgive."

"But I — I have nothing to forgive."

"Alas, yes! and mine was the first fault. I knew that you really loved me, and —"

"Loved you! O, Caroline!"

"Hush, Mr. Bertram; not so; do not speak so. I know that you would not wrong me; I know you would not lead me into trouble — not into further trouble; into worse misery."

"And I, that might have led you — no; that might have been led to such happiness! Lady Harcourt, when I think of what I have thrown away —"

"Think of it not at all, Mr. Bertram."

"And you, can you command your thoughts?"

"Sometimes; and by practice I hope always; at any rate, I make an effort. And now, good-bye. It will be sweet to me to hear that you have forgiven me. You were very angry, you know, when you parted from me last at Littlebath."

"If there be anything for me to forgive, I do forgive it with all my heart; with all my heart."

"And now, God bless you, Mr. Bertram. The thing that would most tend to make me contented would be to see you married to some one you could love; a weight would then be off my soul which now weighs on it very heavily." And so saying, she rose from her seat and left him standing over the engravings. He had thrown his pearl away; a pearl richer than all its tribe. There was nothing for him now but to bear the loss.

There were other sources of unpleasantness between Sir Henry and his wife besides her inclination for dancing. Sir Henry had now paid one half-year's interest on the sum of money which had been lent to him by the old gentleman at Hadley, and had been rather disgusted at finding that it was taken as a matter of course. He was not at the present moment by any means overburdened by money. His constant devotion to politics interfered considerably with his practice. He was also

perhaps better known as a party lawyer than as a practical or practising one; and thus, though his present career was very brilliant, it was not quite so profitable as he had hoped. Most lawyers when they begin to devote themselves to politics have secured, if not fortune, at least the means of making it. And, even at his age, Sir Henry might have been said to have done this had his aspirations been in any way moderate. But they were not moderate. He wished to shine with extreme brilliancy; to live up to the character for wealth which the world gave him; and to give it out as a fact to be understood by all men that he was to be the heir of the Hadley Cræsus.

There was, perhaps, a certain wisdom in this, a wisdom of a dashing chancy nature. Fortune favours the brave; and the world certainly gives the most credit to those who are able to give an unlimited credit to themselves. But there was certainly risk in the life he led. The giving of elegant little dinners two or three times a week in London is an expensive amusement — and so he began to be very anxious about the old gentleman.

But what was he to do that he might get near those money-bags? There was the game. What best sportsman's dodge might he use so as to get it into his bag? Perhaps to do nothing, to use no sportsman's dodge, would have been the best. But then it is so hard to do nothing when so much might be gained by doing something very well.

Sir Henry, duly instructed as to the weaknesses customary to old men, thought his wife would be his best weapon — his surest dodge. If she could be got to be attentive and affectionate to her grandfather, to visit

him, and flatter him, and hover about him, much might be done. So thought Sir Henry. But do what he might, Lady Harcourt would not assist him. It was not part of her bargain that she should toady an old man who had never shown any special regard for her.

"I think you ought to go down to Hadley," Sir Henry said to her one morning.

"What, to stay there?" said Caroline.

"Yes; for a fortnight or so. Parliament will be up now in three weeks, and I shall go to Scotland for a few days. Could not you make it out with the old gentleman till you go to the Grimsdale's?"

"I would much rather remain at home, Sir Henry."

"Ah, yes; that is just like you. And I would much rather that you went."

"If you wish to shut the house up, I shall not object to go to Littlebath."

"Very probably not. But I should object to your going there — exceedingly object to it. Of all places, it is the most vulgar; the most —"

"You forget that I have dear friends living there."

"Dear friends! Yes; Miss Todd, I suppose. I think we may as well leave Miss Todd alone. At the present moment, I am particularly anxious that you should be attentive to your grandfather."

"But I have never been in the habit of staying at Hadley."

"Then the sooner you get into the habit the better."

"I cannot think why you should wish me to trouble an old man who would not have the slightest pleasure in seeing me."

"That is all nonsense. If you behaved well to him, he would have pleasure. Do you ever write to him?"

"Never."

"Write to him to-day then, and ask whether he would be glad to have you."

Caroline did not answer her husband immediately, but went on buttering her toast, and sipping her tea. She had never yet disobeyed any positive order that he had given, and she was now thinking whether she could obey this order, or, if not, how she would explain to him that she could not to so.

"Well!" said he; "why do you not answer me? Will you write to him to-day?"

"I had much rather not."

"Does that mean that you won't?"

"I fear, Sir Henry, that it must mean it. I have not been on terms with my grandfather which would admit of my doing so."

"Nonsense!" said her lord and master.

"You are not very civil to me this morning."

"How can a man be civil when he hears such trash as that? You know how I am situated — how great the stake is; and you will do nothing to help me win it." To this she made no answer. Of what use would it be for her to answer? She also had thrown away her pearl, and taken in exchange this piece of brass. There was nothing for her, too, but to bear her misery.

"Upon my word, you take it all very coolly," he continued; "you seem to think that houses, and furniture, and carriages, and horses are to grow up all round you without any effort on your own part. Does it ever strike you that these things cost money?"

"I will give them all up to-morrow if you wish it."

"That you know is nonsense."

"It was your doing to surround me with these things, and your reproach is not just. Nay, it is not manly."

"A woman's idea of manliness is very extended; you expect to get everything, and to do nothing. You talk of justice! Do you know that when I married you, I looked to your uncle's fortune?"

"Certainly not; had I known it, I should have told you how vain I believed any such hope to be."

"Then, why on earth —?" But he refrained from finishing his question. Even he could not bring himself to tell her that he had married her with no other view. He merely slammed the door behind him as he left the room.

Yes; she had certainly thrown her pearl away. What a life was this to which she had doomed herself! what treatment was this for that Caroline Waddington, who had determined to win the world and wear it! She had given herself to a brute who had taken her only because she might perhaps be the heiress of a rich old man.

And then she thought of that lost pearl. How could she do other than think of it? She thought of what her life would have been had she bravely committed herself to his hands, fearing nothing, trusting everything. She remembered his energy during those happy days in which he had looked forward to an early marriage. She remembered his tenderness of manner, the natural gallantry of his heart, the loving look of his bold eye; and then she thought of her husband.

Yes, she thought of him long and wildly. And as she did so, the indifference with which she had regarded him grew into hatred. She shuddered as her imagination made that frightful contrast between the picture which her eyes would have so loved to look on if it

were only lawful, and that other picture to look on which was her legal doom. Her brow grew wildly black as she thought of his caresses, his love, which were more hateful to her even than his coarse ill-humour. She thought of all this; and, as she did so, she asked herself that question which comes first to the mind of all creatures when in misery: Is there no means of release; no way of escape? was her bark utterly ruined, and for ever?

That marriage without love is a perilous step for any woman who has a heart within her bosom. For those who have none — or only so much as may be necessary for the ordinary blood-circulating department — such an arrangement may be convenient enough. Caroline Wadlington had once flattered herself that that heart of hers was merely a blood-circulating instrument. But she had discovered her mistake, and learned the truth before it was too late. She had known what it was to love — and yet she had married Henry Harcourt! Seldom, indeed, will punishment be so lame of foot as to fail in catching such a criminal as she had been.

Punishment, bitter, cruel, remorseless punishment had caught her now, and held her tight within its grasp. He, too, had said that he was wretched. But what could his wretchedness be to hers? He was not married to a creature that he hated; he was not bound in a foul Mezentian embrace to a being against whom all his human gorge rose in violent disgust. Oh! if she could only be alone, as he was alone! If it could be granted to her to think of her love, to think of him in solitude and silence — in a solitude which no beast with a front of brass and feet of clay had a right to break, both by night and day! Ah! if her wretchedness might only be

as his wretchedness! How blessed would she not think herself!

And then she again asked herself whether there might not be some escape. That women had separated themselves from their husbands, she well knew. That pleas of ill-usage, of neglect, of harshness of temper had been put forward and accepted by the world, to the partial enfranchisement of the unhappy wife, she had often heard. But she had also heard that in such cases cruelty must be proved. A hasty word, a cross look, a black brow would not suffice. Nor could she plead that she hated the man, that she had never loved him, that she had married him in wounded pique, because her lover — he whom she did love — had thrown her off. There was no ground, none as yet, on which she could claim her freedom. She had sold herself as a slave, and she must abide her slavery. She had given herself to this beast with the face of brass and the feet of clay, and she must endure the cold misery of his den. Separation — solitude — silence. He — that he whom her heart worshipped — he might enjoy such things; but for her there was no such relief within her reach.

She had gone up into her room when Sir Henry left her, in order that no one might see her wretchedness, and there she remained for hours. "No!" at last she said aloud, lifting her head from the pillow on which her face had been all but hid, and standing erect in the room; "no, I will not bear it. I will not endure it. He cannot make me." And with quick steps she walked across and along the room, stretching forth her arms as though seeking aid from some one; ay, and as though she were prepared to fight the battle herself if no one would come to aid her.

At this moment there was a knock at her chamber-door, and her maid came in.

"Mr. Bertram is in the drawing-room, my lady."

"Mr. Bertram! Which Mr. Bertram?"

"Mr. Bertram, my lady; the gentleman that comes here. Sir Henry's friend."

"Oh, very well. Why did John say that I was at home?"

"Oh, my lady, I can't say that. Only he told me to tell your ladyship that Mr. Bertram was in the drawing-room."

Lady Harcourt paused for a moment. Then she said, "I will be down directly;" and the Abigail retired. During that moment she had decided that, as he was there, she would meet him yet once again.

It has been said that Bertram was unwilling to go to Sir Henry's house. As long as he had thought of remaining in town he was so. But now he had resolved to fly, and had resolved also that before he did so he would call in the ordinary way and say one last farewell. John, the servant, admitted him at once; though he had on that same morning sent bootless away a score of other suppliants for the honour of being admitted to Lady Harcourt's presence.

Bertram was standing with his back to the door, looking into a small conservatory that opened from the drawing-room, when the mistress of the house entered. She walked straight up to him, after having carefully closed the door, and just touching his hand, she said, "Mr. Bertram, why are you here? You should be thousands and thousands of miles away if that were possible. Why are you here?"

"Lady Harcourt, I will divide myself from you by

any distance you may demand. But may I not come to you to tell you that I am going?"

"To tell me that you are going!"

"Yes. I shall not trouble you much longer. I have become sure of this: that to remain near you and not to love you, to remain near you and not to say that I love you is impossible. And therefore I am going." And he held out his hand, which she had as yet hardly taken — had barely touched.

He was going; but she was to remain. He would escape; but her prison bars could not be broken. Ah, that she could have gone with him! How little now would wealth have weighed with her; or high worldly hopes, or dreams of ambition! To have gone with him anywhere — honestly to have gone with him — trusting to honest love and a true heart. Ah! how much joy is there in this mortal, moribund world if one will but open one's arms to take it!

Ah! young ladies; sweet young ladies; dear embryo mothers of our England as it will be; think not over-much of your lover's incomes. He that is true and honest will not have to beg his bread — neither his nor yours. The true and honest do not beg their bread, though it may be that for awhile they eat it without much butter. But what then? If a wholesome loaf on your tables, and a strong arm round your waists, and a warm heart to lean on cannot make you happy, you are not the girls for whom I take you.

Caroline's bread was buttered, certainly; but the butter had been mixed with gall, and she could not bring herself to swallow it. And now he had come to tell her that he was going; he whose loaf, and arm, and heart

she might have shared. What would the world say of her if she were to share his flight?

"Good-bye," she said, as she took his proffered hand.

"And is that all?"

"What would you have, Mr. Bertram?"

"What would I have? Ah, me! I would have that which is utterly — utterly — utterly beyond my reach."

"Yes, utterly — utterly," she repeated. And as she said so, she thought again, what would the world say of her if she were to share his flight?

"I suppose that now, for the last time, I may speak truly — as a man should speak. Lady Harcourt, I have never ceased to love you, never for one moment; never since that day when we walked together among those strange tombs. My love for you has been the dream of my life."

"But, why — why — why? —" She could not speak further, for her voice was choked with tears.

"I know what you would say. Why was I so cold to you!"

"Why did you go away? Why did you not come to us?"

"Because you distrusted me; not as your lover, but as a man. But I did not come here to blame you, Caroline."

"Nor to be blamed."

"No, nor to be blamed. What good can come of reproaches? We now know each other's faults, if we never did before. And we know also each other's truth —" He paused a moment, and then added, "For, Caroline, your heart has been true."

She sat herself down upon a chair, and wept, with

her face hidden within her hands. Yes, her heart had been true enough; if only her words, her deeds, her mind could have been true also.

He came up to her, and lightly put his hand upon her shoulder. His touch was very light, but yet she felt that there was love in it — illicit, dishonest love. There was treason in it to her lord's rights. Her lord! Yes, he was her lord, and it was treason. But it was very sweet that touch, it was as though a thrill of love passed across her and embraced her whole body. Treason to such a creature as that! a brute with a face of brass and feet of clay, who had got hold of her with a false idea that by her aid he could turn his base brass into gold as base! Could there be treason to such a one as he? Ah! what would the world say of her were she to share that flight?

"Caroline," he murmured in her ear. "Caroline; dearest Caroline!" Thus he murmured soft words into her ear, while his hand still rested gently on her shoulder — oh, so gently! And still she answered nothing, but the gurgling of her sobs was audible to him enough. "Caroline," he repeated; "dearest, dearest Caroline." And then he was on his knees beside her; and the hand which had touched her shoulder was now pressed upon her arm.

"Caroline, speak to me — say one word. I will go if you bid me. Yes, even alone. I will go alone if you have the heart to say so. Speak, Caroline."

"What would you have me say?" and she looked up at him through her tears, so haggard, so wild, so changed, that he was almost frightened at her countenance. "What would you have me say? what would you have me do?"

"I will be your slave if you will let me," said he.

"No, George — you mean that I might be your slave — for awhile, till you thought me too base even for that."

"Ah! you little know me."

"I should but little know you if I thought you could esteem me in that guise. There; God's mercy has not deserted me. It is over now. Go, George — go — go; thou, only love of my heart; my darling; mine that might have been; mine that never can be now — never — never — never. Go, George. It is over now. I have been base, and vile and cowardly — unworthy of your dear memory. But it shall not be so again. You shall not blush that you have loved me."

"But, ah! that I have lost your love."

"You shall not blush that you have loved me, nor will I blush that I, too, have loved you. Go, George; and remember this, the farther, the longer, the more entirely we are apart, the better, the safer it will be. There; there. Go now. I can bear it now; dearest, dearest George."

He took her outstretched hands in his, and stood for awhile gazing into her face. Then, with the strong motion of his arms, he drew her close to his breast, pressed her to his heart, and imprinted one warm kiss upon her brow. Then he left her, and got to the drawing-room door with his fleetest step.

"I beg your pardon, sir," said John, who met him exactly on the landing; "but I think my lady rang."

"Lady Bertram did not ring. She is not well, and you had better not disturb her," said Bertram, trying to look as though he were no whit disconcerted.

"Oh, very well, sir; then I'll go down again;" and

so saying John followed George Bertram into the hall, and opened the door for him very politely.

CHAPTER XIV.

A Matrimonial Dialogue.

SIR HENRY had said also on this day that he would not dine at home; but he came home before dinner; and after being for a few minutes in his own study, he sent for his wife. Abigail, coming up to her, brought her Sir Henry's love, and would she be good enough to step downstairs for five minutes? This was very civil; so she did step down, and found Sir Henry alone in his study.

"George Bertram has been here to-day?" were the first words which the husband spoke when he saw that the door had been fairly closed behind his wife.

What communication there may have been between Sir Henry and his servant John is, oh, my reader, a matter too low for you and me. That there had been some communication we must both fear. Not that Sir Henry wished to find his wife guilty; not that he at all suspected that he should find her guilty. But he did wish to have her entirely in his power; and he wished also that Bertram should be altogether banished from his house.

"George Bertram has been here to-day?" He did not look cruel, or violent, or threatening as he spoke; but yet there was that in his eye which was intended to make Caroline tremble. Caroline, however, did not tremble; but looking up into his face with calm dignity replied, that Mr. Bertram had called that morning.

"And would you object to telling me what passed between you?"

Caroline still looked him full in the face. He was sitting, but she had not sat down. She was standing before him, faultless in demeanour, in posture, and in dress. If it had been his aim to confound her, he certainly had so far missed his object.

"Would I object to telling you what passed between us? The question is a very singular one;" and then she paused a moment. "Yes, Sir Henry, I should object."

"I thought as much," said he.

She still stood before him, perfectly silent; and he sat there, silent also. He hardly knew how to go on with the interview. He wanted her to defend herself, but this was the very thing which she did not intend to do. "May I go now?" she asked, after awhile.

"No; not quite yet. Sit down, Caroline; sit down. I wish to speak to you. George Bertram has been here, and there has been that between you of which you are ashamed to speak!"

"I never said so, Sir Henry — nor will I allow you to say so. There has been that between us to-day which I would rather bury in silence. But if you command me, I will tell you all."

"Command! you are always talking of commands."

"I have to do so very often. In such marriages as ours they must be spoken of — must be thought of. If you command me, I will tell you. If you do not, I will be silent."

Sir Henry hardly knew what answer to make to this. His object was to frighten his wife. That there had been words between her and George Bertram of which she, as his wife, would be afraid to tell, he had been thoroughly convinced. Yet she now offered to repeat to

him everything if he would only desire her to do so; and in making this offer, she seemed to be anything but afraid.

"Sit down, Caroline." She then sat down just opposite to him. "I should have thought that you would have felt that, circumstanced as he, and you, and I are, the intercourse between you and him should have been of the most restrained kind — should have had in it nothing of the old familiarity."

"Who brought us again together?"

"I did so; trusting to your judgment and good taste,"

"I did not wish to see him. I did not ask him here. I would have remained at home month after month rather than have met him had I been allowed my own way."

"Nonsense. Why should you have been so afraid to meet him?"

"Because I love him."

As she said this she still looked into his face fearlessly — we may almost say boldly; so much so that Sir Henry's eyes almost quailed before hers. On this she had at any rate resolved, that she would never quail before him.

But by degrees there came across his brow a cloud that might have made her quail had she not been bold. He had come there determined not to quarrel with her. An absolute quarrel with her would not suit him — would not further his plans, as they were connected with Mr. Bertram at Hadley. But it might be that he could not fail to quarrel with her. He was not a man without blood in his veins — without feelings at his heart. He could have loved her in his way, could she have been

content to love him. Nay, he had loved her; and while she was the acknowledged possession of another, he had thought that to obtain her he would have been willing to give up many worldly goods. Now he had obtained her; and there she sat, avowing to him that she still loved his unsuccessful rival. It was no wonder that his brow grew black, despite his own policy.

"And he has been here to-day in order that you might tell him so?"

"He has been here to-day, and I did tell him so," said Caroline, looking still full up into her husband's eyes. "What brought him here I cannot say."

"And you tell me this to my face?"

"Well, would you have me tell you a lie? Did I not tell you the same when you first asked me to marry you? Did I not repeat it you again but a week before we were married? Do you think that a few months could make the difference? Do you think that such months as these have been could have effaced his memory?"

"And you mean," then, to entertain him as your lover?"

"I mean to entertain him not at all. I mean that he shall never again enter any house in which I may be doomed to live. You brought him here; and I — though I knew that the trial would be hard, I thought that I could bear it. I find that I cannot. My memory is too clear; my thoughts of other days too vivid; my remorse —"

"Go on, madam; pray go on."

"No, I shall not go on. I have said enough."

"Ah! you said more than that to him when he was here."

"Not half so much."

"Was he not kneeling at your feet?"

"Yes, sir, he did kneel at my feet;" and as she answered the question she rose up, as though it were impossible for her any longer to sit in the presence of a man who so evidently had had a spy upon her actions.

"Well, and what then? Since you are so little ashamed of the truth, tell it all."

"I am not at all ashamed of the truth. He came to tell me that he was going — and I bade him go."

"And you allowed him to embrace you — to hold you in his arms — to kiss you?"

"Ah, me, yes — for the last time. He did kiss me. I feel his lips now upon my brow. And then I told him that I loved him; loved none but him; could love none other. Then I bade him begone; and he went. Now, sir, I think you know it all. You seem to have had two accounts of the interview; I hope they do not disagree?"

"Such audacious effrontery I never witnessed in my life — never heard of before."

"What, sir, did you think that I should lie to you?"

"I thought there was some sense of shame left in you."

"Too high a sense of shame for that. I wish you could know it all. I wish I could tell you the tone of his voice, and the look of his eye. I wish I could tell you how my heart drooped, and all but fainted, as I felt that he must leave me for ever. I am a married woman, and it was needful that he should go." After this there was a slight pause, and then she added: "Now, Sir Henry, I think you know it all. Now may I go?"

He rose from his chair and began walking the length

of the room, backwards and forwards, with quick step. As we have before said, he had a heart in his bosom; he had blood in his veins; he had those feelings of a man which make the scorn of a beautiful woman so intolerable. And then she was his wife, his property, his dependent, his own. For a moment he forgot the Hadley money-bags, sorely as he wanted them, and the true man spoke out with full, unabated anger.

"Brazen-faced harlot!" he exclaimed, as he passed her in his walk: "unmitigated harlot!"

"Yes, sir," she answered, in a low tone, coming up to him as she spoke, laying her hand upon his arm, and looking still full into his face — looking into it with such a gaze that even he cowered before her. "Yes, sir, I was the thing you say. When I came to you, and sold my woman's purity for a name, a house, a place before the world — when I gave you my hand, but could not give my heart, I was — what you have said."

"And were doubly so when he stood here slobbering on your neck."

"No, Sir Henry, no. False to him I have been; false to my own sex; false, very false to my own inner self; but never false to you."

"Madam, you have forgotten my honour."

"I have at any rate been able to remember my own."

They were now standing face to face; and as she said these last words, it struck Sir Henry that it might be well to take them as a sign of grace, and to commence from them that half-forgiveness which would be necessary to his projects.

"You have forgotten yourself, Caroline —"

"Stop a moment, Sir Henry, and let me finish, since

you will not allow me to remain silent. I have never been false to you, I say; and, by God's help, I never will be —"

"Well, well."

"Stop, sir, and let me speak. I have told you often that I did not love you. I tell you so now again. I have never loved you — never shall love you. You have called me now by a base name; and in that I have lived with you and have not loved you, I dare not say that you have called me falsely. But I will sin no more."

"What is it you mean?"

"I will not deserve the name again — even from you."

"Nonsense; I do not understand you. You do not know what you are saying."

"Yes, Sir Henry, I do know well what I am saying. It may be that I have done you some injury; if so, I regret it. God knows that you have done me much. We can neither of us now add to each other's comfort, and it will be well that we should part."

"Do you mean me to understand that you intend to leave me?"

"That is what I intend you to understand."

"Nonsense; you will do no such thing."

"What! would you have us remain together, hating each other, vilifying each other, calling each other base names as you just now called me? And do you think that we could still be man and wife? No, Sir Henry; I have made one great mistake — committed one wretched, fatal error. I have so placed myself that I must hear myself so called and bear it quietly; but I will not continue to be so used. Do you think he would have called me so?"

"Damn him!"

"That will not hurt him. Your words are impotent against him, though they may make me shudder."

"Do not speak of him, then."

"No, I will not. I will only think of him."

"By heavens! Caroline, your only wish is to make me angry."

"I may go now, I suppose?"

"Go — yes, you may go; I will speak to you to-morrow, when you will be more cool."

"To-morrow, Sir Henry, I will not speak to you; nor the day afterwards, nor the day after that. What you may wish to say now I will hear; but remember this; after what has passed to-day, no consideration on earth shall induce me to live with you again. In any other respect I will obey your orders — if I find it possible."

She stayed yet a little while longer, leaning against the table, waiting to hear whether or no he would answer her; but as he sat silent, looking before him, but not at her, with his hands thrust deep into his pockets, she without further words withdrew, and quietly closed the door after her. As she did so, the faithful John was seen moving away to the top of the kitchen stairs. She would hardly have cared had the faithful John been present during the whole interview.

Sir Henry sat silent for a quarter of an hour, meditating how he would now play his game. As regarded merely personal considerations, he was beginning to hate Caroline almost as much as she hated him. A man does not like to be told by a beautiful woman that every hair of his head is odious to her, while the very footsteps of another are music in her ears. Perhaps it does not mend the matter when the hated man is the husband.

But still Sir Henry wished to keep his wife. It has been quite clear that Caroline had thrown up her game. She had flattered herself that she could play it; but the very moment the cards went against her, she discovered her own weakness and threw them away. Sir Henry was of a stronger mind, and not so easily disgusted: he would try yet another deal. Indeed, his stakes were too high to allow of his abandoning them.

So arousing himself with some exertion, he dressed himself, went out to dine, hurried down to the House, and before the evening was over was again the happy, fortunate solicitor-general, fortune's pet, the Crichton of the hour, the rising man of his day.

CHAPTER XV.

The Return to Hadley.

WE must now return for awhile to Hadley. Since the day on which Miss Baker had written that letter to Sir Lionel, she had expressed no wish to leave her uncle's house. Littlebath had no charms for her now. The colonel was still there, and so was the colonel's first love — Miss Todd; let them forgive and forget, and marry each other at last if they so pleased. Miss Baker's fit of ambition was over, and she was content to keep her uncle's house at Hadley, and to see Caroline whenever she could spare a day and get up to London for that purpose.

And the old gentleman was less bearish than she thought he would have been. He occasionally became rusty about shillings, and sixpences, and scolded because his niece would have a second fire lighted; but by degrees he forgot even this grievance, and did not make

himself more disagreeable or exacting than old age, wealth, and suffering generally are when they come together.

And then when Adela left London, Miss Baker was allowed to ask her to stop with them at Hadley — and Adela did as she was asked. She went direct from Eaton Square to Mr. Bertram's house; and was still there at the time alluded to in the last chapter.

It was on the second morning after Sir Henry's visit to his wife that the postman brought to Miss Baker a letter from Lady Harcourt. The two ladies were sitting at the time over the breakfast-table, and old Mr. Bertram, propped up with pillows, with his crutches close to his hand, was sitting over the fire in his accustomed arm-chair. He did not often get out of it now, except when he was taken away to bed; but yet both his eye and his voice were as sharp as ever when he so pleased; and though he sat there paralyzed and all but motionless, he was still master of his house, and master also of his money.

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Miss Baker, with startled voice before her letter had been half read through.

"What's the matter?" demanded Mr. Bertram sharply.

"Oh, Miss Baker! what is it?" asked Adela.

"Goodness gracious! Oh, dear! oh, dear! oh, dear!" And Miss Baker, with her handkerchief to her eyes, began to weep most bitterly.

"What ails you? Who is the letter from?" said Mr. Bertram.

"Oh, dear! oh, dear! Read it, Adela. Oh, Mr. Bertram, here is such a misfortune."

"What is it, Miss Gauntlet? That fool will never tell me."

Adela took the letter, and read it through.

"Oh, sir," she said, "it is indeed a misfortune."

"Devil take it! what misfortune?"

"Caroline has quarrelled with Sir Henry," said Miss Baker.

"Oh, is that all?" said Mr. Bertram.

"Ah, sir; I fear this quarrel will prove serious," said Adela,

"Serious; nonsense; how serious? You never thought, did you, that he and she would live together like turtle doves? He married for money, and she for ambition; of course they'll quarrel." Such was the wisdom of Mr. Bertram, and at any rate he had experience on his side.

"But, uncle; she wishes to leave him, and hopes you'll let her come here."

"Come here — fiddlestick! What should I do here with the wife of such a man as him?"

"She declares most positively that nothing shall induce her to live with him again."

"Fiddlestick!"

"But, uncle —"

"Why, what on earth did she expect? She didn't think to have it all sunshine, did she? When she married the man, she knew she didn't care for him; and now she determines to leave him because he won't pick up her pocket-handkerchief! If she wanted that kind of thing, why did not she marry my nephew?"

This was the first time that Mr. Bertram had been heard to speak of George in a tone of affection, and both Miss Baker and Miss Gauntlet were not a little sur-

prised. They had never heard him speak of Caroline as his granddaughter.

During the whole of that day, Mr. Bertram was obdurate; and he positively refused to receive Lady Harcourt at his house unless she came there with the full permission of her husband. Miss Baker, therefore, was obliged to write by the first post, asking for a day's delay before she sent her final answer. But on the next morning a letter reached the old gentleman himself, from Sir Henry. Sir Henry suggested that the loving grandchild should take the occasion of the season being so nearly over to pay a much desired visit to her loving grandsire. He did not drop the quarrel altogether; but just alluded to it as a passing cloud — an unfortunate cloud certainly, but one that without doubt would soon pass away, and leave the horizon more bright than ever.

The matter was at last arranged by Mr. Bertram giving the desired permission. He took no notice himself of Sir Henry's letter, but desired his niece to tell Caroline that she might come there if she liked. So Caroline did come; and Sir Henry gave it out that the London season had been too much for her, and that she, to her deep regret, had been forced to leave town before it was over.

"Sir Omicron was quite imperative," said Sir Henry, speaking confidentially to his intimate parliamentary friend Mr. Madden; "and as she was to go, it was as well to do the civil to grandpapa Cræsus. I have no time myself; so I must do it by deputy."

Now Sir Omicron in those days was a great physician.

And so Caroline returned to Hadley; but no bells

rang now to greet her coming. Little more than six months had passed since those breakfast speeches had been spoken, in which so much golden prosperity had been promised to bride and bridegroom; and now that vision of gold was at an end; that solid, substantial prosperity had melted away. The bridal dresses of the maids had hardly lost their gloss, and yet all that well-grounded happiness was gone.

"So, you are come back," said Mr. Bertram.

"Yes, sir;" said Caroline, in a low voice. "I have made a mistake in life, and I must hope that you will forgive me."

"Such mistakes are very foolish. The sooner you unmake it the better."

"There will be no unmaking this mistake, sir, never — never — never. But I blame no one but myself."

"Nonsense! you will of course go back to your husband."

"Never; Mr. Bertram — never. I will obey him, or you, or both, if that be possible, in all things but in that. But in that I can obey no one."

"Psha!" said Mr. Bertram. Such was Lady Harcourt's first greeting on her return to Hadley.

Neither Miss Baker nor Adela said much to her on the matter on the first day of her arrival. Her aunt, indeed, never spoke openly to her on the subject. It seemed to be understood between them that it should be dropped. And there was occasionally a weight of melancholy about Lady Harcourt, amounting in appearance almost to savage sternness, which kept all inquiry aloof. Even her grandfather hesitated to speak to her about her husband, and allowed her to live unmolested in the quiet, still, self-controlling mood which she seemed to have adopted with a determined purpose.

For the first fortnight she did not leave the house. At the expiration of that time, on one fine sunny Sunday morning she came down dressed for church. Miss Baker remarked that the very clothes she wore were things that had belonged to her before her marriage, and were all of them of the simplest that a woman can wear without making herself conspicuous before the world — all her jewelry she had laid aside, and every brooch, and every ring that had come to her as a married woman, or as a girl about to be married — except that one ring from which an iron fate would not allow her to be parted. Ah, if she could but have laid aside that also!

And then she went to church. There were the same persons there to stare at her now, in her quiet wretchedness, who were there before staring at her in her — triumph may I say? No, there had been no triumph; little even then, except wretchedness; but that misery had not been so open to the public eye.

She went through it very well; and seemed to suffer even less than did her aunt. She had done nothing to spread abroad among the public of Hadley that fiction as to Sir Omicron's opinion which her lord had been sedulous to disseminate in London. She had said very little about herself, but she had at any rate said nothing false. Nor had she acted falsely; or so as to give false impressions. All that little world now around her knew that she had separated herself from her grand husband; and most of them had heard that she had no intention of returning to him.

She had something, therefore, to bear as she sat out that service; and she bore it well. She said her prayers, or seemed to say them, as though unconscious that she

were in any way a mark for other women's eyes. And when the sermon was over, she walked home with a steady, even step; whereas Miss Baker trembled at every greeting she received, and at every step she heard.

On that afternoon, Caroline opened her heart to Adela. Hitherto little had passed between them, but those pressings of the hand, those mute marks of sympathy which we all know so well how to give when we long to lighten the sorrows which are too deep to be probed by words. But on this evening after their dinner, Caroline called Adela into her room, and then there was once more confidence between them.

"No, no, Adela, I will never go back to him." Caroline went on protesting; "you will not ask me to do that?"

"Those whom God has joined together, let not man put asunder," said Adela, solemnly.

"Ah, yes; those whom God *has* joined. But did God join us?"

"Oh, Caroline; do not speak so."

"But, Adela, do not misunderstand me. Do not think that I want to excuse what I have done; or even to escape the penalty. I have destroyed myself as regards this world. All is over for me here. When I brought myself to stand at that altar with a man I never loved; whom I knew I never could love — whom I never tried, and never would try to love — when I did that, I put myself beyond the pale of all happiness. Do not think that I hope for any release." And Lady Harcourt looked stern enough in her resolution to bear all that fate could bring on her.

"Caroline, God will temper the wind to the shorn lamb, now as always, if you will ask him."

"I hope so, I hope so, Adela."

"Say that you trust so."

"I do trust; I trust in this; that he will do what is best. Oh, Adela! if you could know what the last month has been; since he came to the house!"

"Ah! why did he ever come?"

"Why, indeed! Did a man ever behave so madly?"

The man she here alluded to was Sir Henry Harcourt, not Mr. Bertram.

"But I am glad of it, dearest; very glad. Is it not better so? The truth has been spoken now. I have told him all."

"You mean Sir Henry?"

"Yes, I told him all the day before I left. But it was nothing new, Adela. He knew it before. He never dreamed that I loved him. He knew, he must have known that I hated him."

"Oh, Caroline, Caroline! do not speak like that."

"And would not you have hated him had you been tied to him? Now that sin will be over. I shall hate him no longer now."

"Such hatred is a crime. Say what you will, he is still your husband."

"I deny it. What! when he called me by that name, was he my husband then? Was that a husband's usage? I must carry his name, and wearily walk with that burden to the grave. Such is my penalty for that day's sin. I must abandon all hope of living as other women live. I shall have no shoulder on which to lean, hear no words of love when I am sick, have no child to comfort me. I shall be alone, and yet not master of myself. This I must bear because I was false to my own heart. But yet he is not my husband. Listen to

me, Adela; sooner than return to him again, I would put an end to all this world's misery at once. That would be sinful, but the sin would be lighter than that other sin."

When she spoke in this way, Adela no longer dared to suggest to her that she and Sir Henry might even yet again live together. In Adela's own mind, that course, and that alone, would have been the right one. She looked on such unions as being literally for better or for worse; and failing to reach the better, she would have done her best, with God's assistance, to bear the worst. But then Adela Gauntlet could never have placed herself in the position which Lady Harcourt now filled.

But greatly as they differed, still there was confidence between them. Caroline could talk to her, and to her only. To her grandfather she was all submission; to her aunt she was gentle and affectionate, but she never spoke of her fate with either of them. And so they went on till Adela left them in July; and then the three that were left behind lived together as quiet a household as might have been found in the parish of Hadley, or perhaps in the county of Middlesex.

During this time Lady Harcourt had received two letters from her husband, in both of which he urged her to return to him. In answer to the first, she assured him, in the civilest words which she knew how to use, that such a step was impossible; but, at the same time, she signified her willingness to obey him in any other particular, and suggested that as they must live apart, her present home with her grandfather would probably be thought to be the one most suitable for her. In answer to the second, she had simply told him that she must decline any further correspondence with him as to the possibility of her return.

His next letter was addressed to Mr. Bertram. In this he did not go into the matter of their difference at all, but merely suggested that he should be allowed to call at Hadley — with the object of having an interview with Mr. Bertram himself.

"There," said the old man, when he found himself alone with his granddaughter; "read that." And Caroline did read it. "What am I to say to that?"

"What do you think you ought to say, sir?"

"I suppose I must see him. He'll bring an action against me else, for keeping his wife from him. Mind, I tell you, you'll have to go back to him."

"No, sir! I shall not do that," said Caroline, very quietly, with something almost like a smile on her face. And then she left him, and he wrote his answer to Sir Henry.

And then Sir Henry came down to Hadley. A day had been named, and Caroline was sore put to it to know how she might best keep out of the way. At last she persuaded her aunt to go up to London with her for the day. This they did, both of them fearing as they got out of the train and returned to it that they might unfortunately meet the man they so much dreaded. But fortune was not so malicious to them; and when they returned to Hadley they found that Sir Henry had also returned to London.

"He speaks very fair," said Mr. Bertram, who sent for Caroline to come to him alone in the dining-room.

"Does he, sir?"

"He is very anxious that you should go back."

"Ah, sir, I cannot do that."

"He says you shall have the house in Eaton Square to yourself for the next three months."

"I shall never go back to Eaton Square, sir."

"Or he will take a small place for you anywhere at the sea-side that you may choose."

"I shall want no place if you will allow me to remain here."

"But he has all your money, you know — your fortune is now his."

"Well, sir!"

"And what do you mean to do?"

"I will do what you bid me — except going back to him."

The old man sat silent for awhile, and then again he spoke.

"Well, I don't suppose you know your own mind, as yet."

"Oh, sir! indeed I do."

"I say I suppose you don't. Don't interrupt me — I have suggested this: that you should remain here six months, and that then he should come again and see —"

"You, sir."

"Well — see me, if I'm alive: at the end of that time you'll have to go back to him. Now, good-night."

And so it was settled; and for the next six months the same dull, dreary life went on in the old house at Hadley.

CHAPTER XVI.

Cairo.

MEN and women, or I should rather say ladies and gentlemen, used long ago, when they gave signs of weakness about the chest, to be sent to the south of

Devonshire; after that, Madeira came into fashion; but now they are all despatched to Grand Cairo. Cairo has grown to be so near home, that it will soon cease to be beneficial, and then the only air capable of revigorating the English lungs will be that of Labuan or Jeddo.

But at the present moment, Grand Cairo has the vogue. Now it had so happened during the last winter, and especially in the trying month of March, that Arthur Wilkinson's voice had become weak; and he had a suspicious cough, and was occasionally feverish, and perspired o' nights; and on these accounts the Sir Omicron of the Hurst Staple district ordered him off to Grand Cairo.

This order was given in October, with reference to the coming winter, and in the latter end of November, Arthur Wilkinson started for the East. Two articles he had first to seek — the one being a necessary, and the other a luxury — and both he found. These were a curate and a companion. The Reverend Gabriel Gilliflower was his curate; and of him we need only hope that he prospered well, and lived happily under the somewhat stern surveillance of his clerical superior, Mrs. Wilkinson. His companion was George Bertram.

About the end of November they started through France, and got on board the P. and O. Company's vessel at Marseilles. It is possible that there may be young ladies so ignorant as not to know that the P. and O. is the Peninsular and Oriental Steam Navigation Company, and therefore the matter is now explained. In France they did not stop long enough to do more than observe how much better the railway carriages are there than in England, how much dearer the hotels are in Paris than in London, and how much worse they are in Marseilles than in any other known town in the world.

Nor need much be said of their journey thence to Alexandria. Of Malta I should like to write a book, and may perhaps do so some day; but I shall hardly have time to discuss its sunlight, and fortifications, and hospitality, and old magnificence here; so we will pass on to Alexandria.

Oh, Alexandria! mother of sciences! once the favoured seat of the earth's learning! Oh, Alexandria! beloved by the kings! It is of no use. No man who has seen the Alexandria of the present day can keep a seat on a high horse when he speaks of that most detestable of cities. How may it fitly be described? May we not say that it has all the filth of the East, without any of that picturesque beauty with which the East abounds; and that it has also the eternal, grasping, solemn love of lucre which pervades our western marts, but wholly unredeemed by the society, the science, and civilization of the West?

Alexandria is fast becoming a European city; but its Europeans are from Greece and the Levant! "Auri sacra fames!" is the motto of modern Greece. Of Alexandria it should be, "Auri fames sacrissima!" Poor Arabs! poor Turks! giving way on all sides to wretches so much viler than yourselves, what a destiny is before you!

"What income," I asked a resident in Alexandria, "what income should an Englishman have to live here comfortably?" "To live here *comfortably*, you should say ten thousand a year, and then let him cut his throat first!" Such was my friend's reply.

But God is good, and Alexandria will become a place less detestable than at present. Fate and circumstances must Anglicize it in spite of the huge French consulate, in spite of legions of greedy Greeks; in spite even of

sand, musquitos, bugs, and dirt, of winds from India, and of thieves from Cyprus.

The P. and O. Company will yet be the lords of Egypt; either that or some other company or set of men banded together to make Egypt a highway. It is one stage on our road to the East; and the time will soon come when of all the stages it will neither be the slowest nor the least comfortable. The railway from Alexandria to Suez is now all opened within ten miles; will be all opened before these pages can be printed. This railway belongs to the viceroy of Egypt; but his passengers are the Englishmen of India, and his paymaster is an English company.

But, for all that, I do not recommend any of my friends to make a long sojourn at Alexandria.

Bertram and Wilkinson did not do so, but passed on speedily to Cairo. They went to the Pharos and to Pompey's Pillar; inspected Cleopatra's Needle, and the newly excavated so-called Greek church; watched the high spirits of one set of passengers going out to India — young men free of all encumbrances, and pretty girls full of life's brightest hopes — and watched also the morose, discontented faces of another set returning home, burdened with babies and tawny-coloured nurses with silver rings in their toes — and then they went off to Cairo.

There is no romance now, gentle readers, in this journey from Alexandria to Cairo; nor was there much when it was taken by our two friends. Men now go by railway, and then they went by the canal boat. It is very much like English travelling, with this exception, that men dismount from their seats, and cross the Nile in a ferry-boat, and that they pay five shillings for their

luncheon instead of sixpence. This ferry does, perhaps, afford some remote chance of adventure, as was found the other day, when a carriage was allowed to run down the bank, in which was sitting a native prince, the heir to the pasha's throne. On that occasion the adventure was important, and the prince was drowned. But even this opportunity for incident will soon disappear; for Mr. Brunel, or Mr. Stephenson, or Mr. Locke, or some other British engineering celebrity, is building a railway bridge over the Nile, and then the modern traveller's heart will be contented, for he will be able to sleep all the way from Alexandria to Cairo.

Mr. Shephard's hotel at Cairo is to an Englishman the centre of Egypt, and there our two friends stopped. And certainly our countrymen have made this spot more English than England itself. If ever John Bull reigned triumphant anywhere; if he ever shows his nature plainly marked by rough plenty, coarseness, and good intention, he does so at Shephard's hotel. If there be anywhere a genuine, old-fashioned John Bull landlord now living, the landlord of the hotel at Cairo is the man. So much for the strange new faces and outlandish characters which one meets with in one's travels.

I will not trouble my readers by a journey up the Nile; nor will I even take them up a pyramid. For do not fitting books for such purposes abound at Mr. Mudie's? Wilkinson and Bertram made both the large tour and the little one in proper style. They got at least as far as Thebes, and slept a night under the shade of King Cheops.

One little episode on their road from Cairo to the Pyramids, I will tell. They had joined a party of which the conducting spirit was a missionary clergyman, who

had been living in the country for some years, and therefore knew its ways. No better conducting spirit for such a journey could have been found; for he joined economy to enterprise, and was intent that everything should be seen, and that everything should be seen cheaply.

Old Cairo is a village some three miles from the city, higher up the river; and here, close to the Nilometer, by which the golden increase of the river is measured, tourists going to the Pyramids are ferried over the river. The tourists are ferried over, as also are the donkeys on which the tourists ride. Now here arose a great financial question. The reis or master of the ferry-boat to which the clerical guide applied was a mighty man, some six feet high, graced with a turban, as Arabs are; erect in his bearing, with bold eye, and fine, free, supple limbs — a noble reis for that Nile ferry-boat. But, noble as he was, he wanted too many piastres — twopence half-penny a head too much for each donkey, with its rider.

And then there arose a great hubbub. The ordinary hubbub at this spot is worse than the worst confusion of any other Babel. For the traffic over the Nile is great, and for every man, woman, and child, for every horse and every ass, for every bundle of grass, for every cock and for every hen, a din of twenty tongues is put in motion, and a perpetual fury rages, as the fury of a hurricane. But the hubbub about the missionary's piastres rose higher than all the other hubbubs. Indeed, those who were quarrelling before about their own affairs came and stood round in a huge circle, anxious to know how the noble reis and his clerical opponent would ultimately settle this stiff financial difficulty.

In half an hour neither side would yield one point;

but then at last the Egyptian began to show that, noble as he looked, he was made of stuff compressible. He gradually gave up, para by para, till he allowed donkeys, men, and women to clamber over the sides of his boat at the exact price named by him of the black coat. Never did the church have a more perfect success.

But the battle was not yet over. No sooner was the vessel pushed off into the stream, than the noble reis declared that necessity compelled him to demand the number of piastres originally named by him. He regretted it, but he assured the clergyman that he had no other alternative.

And now how did it behove an ardent missionary to act in such a contest with a subtle Egyptian? How should the eloquence of the church prevail over this Eastern Mammon? It did prevail very signally. The soldier of peace, scorning further argument in words with such a crafty reis, mindful of the lessons of his youth, raised his right hand, and with one blow between the eyes, laid the Arab captain prostrate on his own deck.

"There," said he, turning to Wilkinson, "that is what we call a pastoral visitation in this country. We can do nothing without it."

The poor reis picked himself up, and picked up also his turban, which had been knocked off, and said not a word more about the piastres. All the crew worked with double diligence at their oars, and the party, as they disembarked from the boat, were treated with especial deference. Even the donkeys were respected. In Egypt the donkeys of a man are respected, ay, and even his donkey-boys, when he shows himself able and willing to knock down all those around him.

A great man there, a native, killed his cook one morning in a rage; and a dragoman, learned in languages, thus told the story to an Englishman: — “De sahib, him vera respectble man. Him kill him cook, Solyman, this morning. Oh, de sahib particklar respectble!” After all, it may be questioned whether this be not a truer criterion of respectability than that other one of keeping a gig.

Oh, those pyramid guides! foul, false, cowardly, bullying thieves! A man who goes to Cairo *must* see the Pyramids. Convention, and the laws of society as arranged on that point, of course require it. But let no man, and, above all, no woman, assume that the excursion will be in any way pleasurable. I have promised that I will not describe such a visit, but I must enter a loud, a screeching protest against the Arab brutes — the schieks being the very worst of the brutes — who have these monuments in their hands. Their numbers, the filthiness of their dress — or one might almost say no dress — their stench, their obscene indecency, their clattering noise, their rapacity, exercised without a moment’s intercession; their abuse, as in this wise: “Very bad English-man; dam bad; dam, dam, dam! Him want to take all him money to the grave; but no, no, no! Devil hab him, and money too!” This, be it remembered, from a ferocious, almost blackened Arab, with his face within an inch of your own. And then their flattery, as in this wise: “Good English-man — very good!” — and then a tawny hand pats your face, and your back, and the calves of your leg — “Him gib poor Arab one shilling for himself — yes, yes, yes! and then Arab no let him tumble down and break all him legs — yes, yes; break *all* him legs.” And then the patting

goes on again. These things, I say, put together, make a visit to the Pyramids no delightful recreation. My advice to my countrymen who are so unfortunate as to visit them is this: Let the ladies remain below — not that they ever will do so, if the gentlemen who are with them ascend — and let the men go armed with stout sticks, and mercilessly belabour any Arab who attempts either to bully or to wheedle.

Let every Englishman remember this also, that the ascent is not difficult, though so much noise is made about the difficulty as naturally to make a man think that it is so. And let this also be remembered, that nothing is to be gained by entering the pyramid except dirt, noise, stench, vermin, abuse, and want of air. Nothing is to be seen there — nothing to be heard. A man may sprain his ankle, and certainly will knock his head. He will encounter no other delights but these.

But he certainly will come out a wiser man than he went in. He will then be wise enough to know how wretched a place is the interior of a pyramid — an amount of wisdom with which no teaching of mine will imbue him.

Bertram and Wilkinson were sitting beneath the pyramid, with their faces toward the desert, enjoying the cool night air, when they first began to speak of Adela Gauntlet. Hitherto Arthur had hardly mentioned her name. They had spoken much of his mother, much of the house at Hurst Staple, and much also of Lady Harcourt, of whose separation from her husband they were of course aware; but Arthur had been shy of mentioning Adela's name.

They had been speaking of Mrs. Wilkinson, and the disagreeable position in which the vicar found himself

in his own house; when, after sitting silent for a moment, he said, "After all, George, I sometimes think that it would have been better for me to have married."

"Of course it would — or rather, I should say, will be better. It is what you will do when you return."

"I don't know about my health now."

"Your health will be right enough after this winter. I don't see much the matter with it."

"I am better, certainly;" and then there was another pause.

"Arthur," continued Bertram, "I only wish that I had open before me the same chance in life that you have — the same chance of happiness."

"Do not despair, George. A short time cures all our wounds."

"Yes; a short time does cure them all — and then comes chaos."

"I meant a short time in this world."

"Well, all things are possible; but I do not understand how mine are to be cured. They have come too clearly from my own folly."

"From such folly," said Arthur, "as always impedes the working of human prudence."

"Do you remember, Arthur, my coming to you the morning after the degrees came down — when you were so low in spirits because you had broken down — when I was so full of triumph?"

"I remember the morning well; but I do not remember any triumph on your part."

"Ah! I was triumphant — triumphant in my innermost heart. I thought then that all the world must give way to me, because I had taken a double-first. And now

— I have given way before all the world. What have I done with all the jewels of my youth? Thrown them before swine!”

“Come, George; you are hardly seven-and-twenty yet.”

“No, hardly; and I have no profession, no fortune, no pursuit, and no purpose. I am here, sitting on the broken stone of an old tomb, merely because it is as well for me to be here as elsewhere. I have made myself to be one as to whose whereabouts no man need make inquiry — and no woman. If that black, one-eyed brute, whom I thrashed a-top of the pyramid, had stuck his knife in me, who would have been the worse for it? You, perhaps — for six weeks or so.”

“You know there are many would have wept for you.”

“I know but one. She would have wept while it would be ten times better that she should rejoice. Yes, she would weep; for I have marred her happiness as I have marred my own. But who cares for me, of whose care I can be proud? Who is anxious for me, whom I can dare to thank, whom I may dare to love?”

“Do we not love you at Hurst Staple?”

“I do not know. But I know this, that you ought to be ashamed of me. I think Adela Gauntlet is my friend; that is, if in our pigheaded country a modest girl may love a man who is neither her brother nor her lover.”

“I am sure she is,” said Arthur; and then there was another pause. “Do you know,” he continued, “I once thought —”

“Thought what?”

“That you were fond of Adela.”

"So I am, heartily fond of her."

"But I mean more than that."

"You once thought that I would have married her if I could. That is what you mean."

"Yes," said Wilkinson, blushing to his eyes. But it did not matter; for no one could see him.

"Well; I will make a clean breast of it, Arthur. Men can talk here, sitting in the desert, who would be as mute at death at home in England. Yes; there was once a moment, once *one* moment, in which I would have married her — a moment in which I flattered myself that I could forget Caroline Waddington. Ah! if I could tell you how Adela behaved!"

"How did she behave? Tell me — what did she say?" said Arthur, with almost feverish anxiety.

"She bade me remember, that those who dare to love must dare to suffer. She told me that the wounded stag, 'that from the hunter's aim has ta'en a hurt,' must endure to live, 'left and abandoned of his velvet friends.' — And she told me true. I have not all her courage; but I will take a lesson from her and learn to suffer — quietly, without a word, if that be possible."

"Then you did propose to her?"

"No; hardly that. I cannot tell what I said myself; but 'twas thus she answered me."

"But what do you mean by taking a lesson from her? Has she any such suffering?"

"Nay! You may ask her. I did not."

"But you said so just now; at any rate you left me to infer it. Is there any one whom Adela Gauntlet really loves?"

George Bertram did not answer the question at once. He had plighted his word to her as her friend that he

would keep her secret; and then, moreover, that secret had become known to him by mere guesses. He had no right, by any law, to say it as a fact that Adela Gauntlet was not heart-whole. But still he thought that he would say so. Why should he not do something towards making these two people happy?

"Do you believe that Adela is really in love with any one?" repeated Arthur.

"If I tell you that, will you tell me this — Are you in love with any one — you yourself?"

The young clergyman was again ruby red up to his forehead. He could dare to talk about Adela, but hardly about himself.

"I in love!" he said at last. "You know that I have been obliged to keep out of that kind of thing. Circumstanced as I have been, I could not marry."

"But that does not keep a man from falling in love."

"Does not it?" said Arthur, rather innocently.

"That has not preserved me — nor, I presume, has it preserved you. Come, Arthur, be honest; if a man with thirty-nine articles round his neck can be honest. Out with the truth at once. Do you love Adela, or do you not?"

But the truth would not come out so easily. Whether it was the thirty-nine articles, or the natural modesty of the man's disposition, I will not say; but he did not find himself at the moment able to give a downright answer to this downright question. He would have been well pleased that Bertram should know the whole truth; but the task of telling it went against the grain with him.

"If you do, and do not tell her so," continued Bertram, when he found that he got no immediate reply, "I shall think you —. But no; a man must be his own

judge in such matters, and of all men I am the least fit to be a judge of others. But I would that it might be so, for both your sakes."

"Why, you say yourself that she likes some one else."

"I have never said so. I have said nothing like it. There; when you get home, do you yourself ask her whom she loves. But remember this — if it should chance that she should say that it is you, you must be prepared to bear the burden, whatever may be urged to the contrary at the vicarage. And now we will retire to roost in this hole of ours."

Arthur had as yet made no reply to Bertram's question; but as he crept along the base of the pyramid, feeling his steps among the sand and loose stones, he did manage to say a word or two of the truth.

"God bless you, George. I do love her — very dearly." And then the two cousins understood each other.

It has been said that Alexandria has nothing of an Eastern town but its filth. This cannot at all be said of Cairo. It may be doubted whether Bagdad itself is more absolutely oriental in its appurtenances. When once the Englishman has removed himself five hundred yards from Shephard's hotel, he begins to feel that he is really in the East. Within that circle, although it contains one of the numerous huge buildings appropriated to the viceroy's own purposes, he is still in Great Britain. The donkey-boys curse in English, instead of Arabic; the men you meet sauntering about, though they do wear red caps, have cheeks as red; and the road is broad and macadamized, and Britannic. But anywhere beyond that circle Lewis might begin to paint.

Cairo is a beautiful old city; so old in the realities of age that it is crumbling into dust on every side. From time to time the houses are patched up, but only patched; and, except on the Britannic soil above alluded to, no new houses are built. It is full of romance, of picturesque oriental wonders, of strange sights, strange noises, and strange smells. When one is well in the town, every little narrow lane, every turn — and the turns are incessant — every mosque and every shop creates fresh surprise. But I cannot allow myself to write a description of Cairo.

How the dervishes there spun and shook, going through their holy exercises with admirable perseverance, that I must tell. This occurred towards the latter end of the winter, when Wilkinson and Bertram had nearly completed their sojourn in Cairo. Not but what the dervishes had roared out their monotonous prayer to Allah, duly every Friday, at 1 P.M., with as much precision as a service in one of your own cathedrals; but our friends had put the thing off, as hardly being of much interest, and at last went there when they had only one Friday left for the performance.

I believe that, as a rule, a Mahomedan hates a Christian: regarding him merely as Christian, he certainly does so. Had any tidings of confirmed success on the part of the rebels in India reached the furthestmost parts of the Turkish empire, no Christian life would have been safe there. The horrid outrage perpetrated at Jaffa, and the massacre at Jeddah, sufficiently show us what we might have expected. In Syria no Christian is admitted within a mosque, for his foot and touch are considered to carry pollution.

But in Egypt we have caused ourselves to be better

respected: we thrash the Arabs and pay them, and therefore they are very glad to see us anywhere. And even the dervishes welcome us to their most sacred rites, with excellent coffee, and a loan of rush-bottomed chairs. Now, when it is remembered that a Mahomedan never uses a chair, it must be confessed that this is very civil. Moreover, let it be said to their immortal praise, that the dervishes of Cairo never ask for backsheish. They are the only people in the country that do not.

So Bertram and Wilkinson had their coffee with sundry other travelling Britons who were there; and then each, with his chair in his hand, went into the dervishes' hall. This was a large, lofty, round room, the roof of which was in the shape of a cupola; on one side, that which pointed towards Mecca, and therefore nearly due east, there was an empty throne, or tribune, in which the head of the college, or dean of the chapter of dervishes, located himself on his haunches. He was a handsome, powerful man, of about forty, with a fine black beard, dressed in a flowing gown, and covered by a flat-topped black cap.

By degrees, and slowly, in came the college of the dervishes, and seated themselves as their dean was seated; but they sat on the floor in a circle, which spread away from the tribune, getting larger and larger in its dimensions as fresh dervishes came in. There was not much attention to regularity in their arrival, for some appeared barely in time for the closing scene.

The first commencement was tame enough. Still seated, they shouted out a short prayer to Allah a certain number of times. The number was said to be ninety-nine. But they did not say the whole prayer at once, though it consisted of only three words. They took the

first word ninety-nine times; and then the second; and then the third. The only sound to be recognized was that of Allah; but the deep guttural tone in which this was groaned out by all the voices together, made even that anything but a distinct word.

And so this was completed, the circle getting ever larger and larger. And it was remarked that men came in as dervishes who belonged to various ordinary pursuits and trades; there were soldiers in the circle, and, apparently, common labourers. Indeed, any one may join; though I presume he would do so with some danger were it discovered that he were not a Mahomedan.

Those who specially belonged to the college had peculiar gowns and caps, and herded together on one side of the circle; and it appeared to our friends, that throughout the entertainment they were by far the least enthusiastic of the performers.

When this round of groaning had been completed — and it occupied probably half an hour — a young lad, perhaps of seventeen years, very handsome, and handsomely dressed in a puce-coloured cloak, or rather petticoat, with a purple hat on his head, in shape like an inverted flowerpot, slipped forth from near the tribune into the middle of the circle, and began to twirl. After about five or six minutes, two other younger boys, somewhat similarly dressed, did the same, and twirled also; so that there were three twirling together.

But the twirling of the elder boy was by far the more graceful. Let any young lady put out both her hands, so as to bring the one to the level of her waist, and the other with the crown of her head, and then go round and round, as nearly as possible on the same spot;

let her do this so that no raising of either foot shall ever be visible; and let her continue it for fifteen minutes, without any variation in the attitude of her arms, or any sign of fatigue, — and then she may go in for a twirling dervish. It is absurd to suppose that any male creature in Engand could perform the feat. During this twirling, a little black boy marked the time, by beating with two sticks on a rude gong.

This dance was kept up at first for fifteen minutes. Then there was another short spell of howling; then another dance, or twirl; and then the real game began.

The circle had now become so large as to occupy the greater part of the hall, and was especially swelled by sundry new arrivals at this moment. In particular, there came one swarthy, tall, wretched-looking creature, with wild eyes, wan face, and black hair of extraordinary length, who took up his position, standing immediately opposite to the tribune. Other new comers also stood near him, all of whom were remarkable for the length of their hair. Some of them had it tied up behind like women, and now proceeded to unloose it.

But at this period considerable toilet preparations were made for the coming work. All those in the circle who had not come in from the college with gowns and caps, and one or two even of them, deliberately took off their outer clothing, and tied it up in bundles. These bundles they removed to various corners, so that each might again find his own clothes. One or two put on calico dressing-gowns, which appeared to have been placed ready for the purpose; and among these was the cadaverous man of the black hair.

And then they all stood up, the dean standing also before his tribune, and a deep-toned murmur went round

the circle. This also was the word Allah, as was duly explained to Bertram by his dragoman; but without such explanation it would have been impossible to detect that any word was pronounced. Indeed, the sound was of such nature as to make it altogether doubtful from whence it came. It was like no human voice, or amalgamation of voices; but appeared as though it came from the very bowels of the earth. At first it was exceedingly low, but it increased gradually, till at last one might have fancied that the legions of Lucifer were groaning within the very bowels of Pandemonium.

And also, by slow degrees, a motion was seen to pervade the circle. The men, instead of standing fixedly on their legs, leaned over, first to the right and then to the left, all swaying backwards and forwards together in the same direction, so that both sound and motion were as though they came from one compact body.

And then, as the groan became louder, so did the motion become more violent, till the whole body heaved backwards and forwards with the regularity of a pendulum and the voice of a steam-engine. As the excitement became strong, the head of the dervishes walked along the inner circle, exciting those to more violence who already seemed the most violent. This he did, standing for a few minutes before each such man, bowing his own head rapidly and groaning deeply; and as he did so, the man before whom he stood would groan and swing himself with terrible energy. And the men with the long hair were especially selected.

And by degrees the lateral motion was abandoned, and the dervishes bowed their heads forwards instead of sideways. No one who has not seen the operation can conceive what men may achieve in the way of bowing

and groaning. They bowed till they swept the floor with their long hair, bending themselves double, and after each motion bringing themselves up again to an erect posture. And the dean went backwards and forwards from one to another, urging them on.

By this time the sight was terrible to behold. The perspiration streamed down them, the sounds came forth as though their very hearts were bursting, their faces were hidden by their dishevelled locks, whatever clothes they wore were reeking wet. But still they flung themselves about, the motion becoming faster and faster; and still the sounds came forth as though from the very depths of Tartarus. And still the venerable dean went backwards and forwards slowly before them, urging them on, and still urging them on.

But at last, nature with the greater number of them, had made her last effort; the dean retired to his tribune, and the circle was broken up. But those men with the long hair still persevered. It appeared, both to Bertram and Wilkinson, that with them the effort was now involuntary. They were carried on by an ecstatic frenzy; either that, or they were the best of actors. The circle had broken up, the dervishes were lying listlessly along the walls, panting with heat, and nearly lifeless with their exertions; but some four, remaining with their feet fixed in the old place, still bowed and still howled.

"They will die," said Bertram.

"Will they not be stopped?" said Wilkinson to their dragoman.

"Five minutes, five minutes!" said the dragoman.

"Look at him — look at him with the black hair!" And they did look.

Three of them had now fallen, and the one remained

still at his task. He swept the ground with his hair, absolutely striking it with his head; and the sounds came forth from him loudly, wildly, with broken gasps, with terrible exertion, as though each would be his last, and yet they did nothing to repress him.

At last it seemed as though the power of fully raising his head had left him, and also that of lowering it to the ground. But still he made as it were a quarter-circle. His hands were clutched behind his back, and with this singular motion, and in this singular attitude, he began to move his feet; and still groaning and half bowing, he made a shuffling progress across the hall.

The dervishes themselves appeared to take no notice of him. The dean stood tranquil under his tribune; those who had recovered from their exertions were dressing themselves, the others lay about collecting their breath. But the eyes of every stranger were on the still moving blackhaired devotee.

On he went, still howling and still swinging his head, right towards the wall of the temple. His pace was not fast, but it seemed as though he would inevitably knock his own brains out by the motion of his own head; and yet nobody stopped him.

"He'll kill himself," said Wilkinson.

"No, no, no!" said the dragoman; "him no kill — him head berry hard."

Bertram rushed forward as though to stay the infuriate fanatic, but one or two of the dervishes who stood around gently prevented him, without speaking a word.

And then the finale came. Crack he went against the wall, rebounded off, and went at it again, and then again. They were no mock blows, but serious, heavy

raps, as from a small battering-ram. But yet both Bertram and Wilkinson were able to observe that he did not strike the wall as he would naturally have done had there been no precaution. Had he struck it with his head in motion, as was intended to be believed, the blow would have come upon his forehead and temples, and must probably have killed him; but instead of this, just as he approached the wall, he butted at it like a ram, and saved his forehead at the expense of his pole. It may probably be surmised, therefore, that he knew what he was about.

After these three raps, the man stood, still doubled up, but looking as though he were staggered. And then he went again with his head towards the wall. But the dean, satisfied with what had been done, now interposed, and this best of dervishes was gently laid on his back upon the floor, while his long matted hair was drawn from off his face. As he so lay, the sight was not agreeable to Christian eyes, whatever a true Mahomedan might think of it.

'Twas thus the dervishes exercised their religious rites at Cairo. "I wonder how much that black fellow gets paid every Friday," said Bertram, as he mounted his donkey; "it ought to be something very handsome."

CHAPTER XVII.

The two Widows.

THE winter was now nearly over, and the travellers had determined to return to England. Whatever other good purpose the city of Cairo might or might not serve, it had restored Wilkinson to health. Bertram was sufficiently weary of living in a country in which the

women go about with their faces hidden by long dirty stripes of calico, which they call veils, and in which that little which is seen of the ladies by no means creates a wish to see more. And Wilkinson, since the conversation which they had had at the Pyramids, was anxious to assume his own rights in the vicarage house at Hurst Staple. So they decided on returning about the middle of March; but they decided also on visiting Suez before doing so.

In these days men go from Cairo to Suez as they do from London to Birmingham — by railway; in those days — some ten or twelve years back, that is — they went in wooden boxes, and were dragged by mules through the desert.

We cannot stay long at Suez, nor should I carry my reader there, even for a day, seeing how triste and dull the place is, had not our hero made an acquaintance there which for some time was likely to have a considerable effect on his future life.

Suez is indeed a triste, unhappy, wretched place. It is a small oriental town, now much be-Europeanized, and in the process of being be-Anglicized. It is not so Beelzebub-ridden a spot as Alexandria, nor falling to pieces like Cairo. But it has neither water, air, nor verdure. No trees grow there, no rivers flow there. Men drink brine and eat goats; and the thermometer stands at eighty in the shade in winter. The oranges are the only luxury. There is a huge hotel, which contains long rows of hot cells, and a vast cave in which people eat. The interest of the place consists in Pharoah's passage over the Red Sea; but its future prosperity will be caused by a transit of a different

nature. The passage of the English to and from India will turn even Suez into an important town.

Here the two travellers encountered a flood of Indians on their return home. The boat from Calcutta came in while they were there, and suddenly all the cells were tenanted, and the cave was full of spoiled children, tawny nurses, pale languid mothers, and dyspeptic fathers. These were to be fellow-travellers homewards with Bertram and Wilkinson.

Neither of our friends regarded with favour the crowd which made them even more uncomfortable than they had been before. As Englishmen in such positions generally do, they kept themselves aloof and scowled, frowned at the children who whined in the nearest neighbourhood to them, and listened in disgust to the continuous chatter about punkahs, tiffins, and bungalows.

But close to them, at the end of the long table, at the common dinner, sat two ladies, on whom it was almost impossible for them to frown. For be it known, that at these hotels in Egypt, a man cannot order his dinner when he pleases. He must breakfast at nine, and dine at six, as others do — or go without. And whether he dine, or whether he do not, he must pay. The Medes and Persians were lax and pliable in their laws in comparison with these publicans.

Both George and Arthur would have frowned if they could have done so; but on these two ladies it was impossible to frown. They were both young, and both pretty. George's neighbour was uncommonly pretty — was, indeed, one of the prettiest women that he had ever seen; that any man could see anywhere. She was full of smiles too, and her smile was heavenly; — was full of words, and her words were witty. She who sat

next Arthur was perhaps less attractive; but she had large soft eyes, which ever and anon she would raise to his face, and then let fall again to her plate in a manner which made sparks fly round the heart even of our somewhat sombre young Hampshire vicar.

The four were soon in full conversation, apparently much to the disgust of two military-looking gentlemen who sat on the other side of the ladies. And it was evident that the military gentlemen and the ladies were, or ought to be, on terms of intimacy; for proffers of soup, and mutton, and wine were whispered low, and little attempts at confidential intercourse were made. But the proffers were rejected, and the attempts were in vain. The ladies preferred to have their plates and glasses filled by the strangers, turned their shoulders on their old friends with but scant courtesy, and were quite indifferent to the frowns which at last clouded those two military brows.

And the brows of Major Biffin and Captain M'Gramm were clouded. They had been filling the plates and glasses of these two ladies all the way from Calcutta; they had walked with them every day on deck, had fetched their chairs, picked up their handkerchiefs, and looked after their bottled beer at tiffin-time with an assiduity which is more than commendable in such warm latitudes. And now to be thrown on one side for two travelling Englishmen, one in a brown coat and the other in a black one — for two muffs, who had never drunk sangaree or sat under a punkah!

This was unpleasant to Major Biffin and Captain M'Gramm. But then why had the major and the captain boasted of the favours they had daily received to that soft-looking, superannuated judge, and to their bilious

friend, Dr. O'Shaughnessy? The judge and the doctor had of course their female allies, and had of course repeated to them all the boasts of the fortunate major and of the fortunate captain. And was it not equally of course that these ladies should again repeat the same to Mrs. Cox and Mrs. Price? For she who was so divinely perfect was Mrs. Cox, and she of the soft, lustrous eyes was Mrs. Price. Those who think that such a course was not natural know little of voyages home from Calcutta to Southampton.

But the major, who had been the admirer of Mrs. Cox, had done more than this — had done worse, we may say. The world of the good ship "Lahore," which was bringing them all home, had declared ever since they had left Point de Galle, that the major and Mrs. Cox were engaged. Now, had the major in boasting of his favours boasted also of his engagement, no harm perhaps might have come of it. The sweet goodnature of the widow might have overlooked that offence. But he had boasted of the favours and pooh-poohed the engagement! "*Hinc illæ lachrymæ.*" And who shall say that the widow was wrong? And as to the other widow, Mrs. Price, she was tired of Captain M'Gramm. A little fact had transpired about Captain M'Gramm, namely, that he was going home to his wife. And therefore the two ladies, who had conspired together to be civil to the two warriors, now conspired together to be uncivil to them. In England such things are done, as it were, behind the scenes: there these little quarrels are managed in private. But a passage home from India admits of but little privacy; there is no behind the scenes. The two widows were used to this, and quarrelled with their military admirers in public without any compunction.

"Hinc illæ lachrymæ." But the major was not inclined to shed his tears without an effort. He had pooh-poohed the idea of marrying Mrs. Cox; but like many another man in similar circumstances, he was probably willing enough to enter into such an arrangement now that the facility of doing so was taken from him. It is possible that Mrs. Cox, when she turned her pretty shoulder on Major Biffin, may herself have understood this phasis of human nature.

The major was a handsome man, with well-brushed hair, well-trimmed whiskers, a forehead rather low, but very symmetrical, a well-shaped nose, and a small, pursy mouth. The worst of his face was that you could by no means remember it. But he knew himself to be a handsome man, and he could not understand how he could be laid aside for so ugly a lout as this stranger from England. Captain M'Gramm was not a handsome man, and he was aware that he fought his battle under the disadvantage of a wife. But he had impudence enough to compensate him for this double drawback.

During this first dinner, Arthur Wilkinson was not more than coldly civil to Mrs. Price; but Bertram became after a while warmly civil to Mrs. Cox. It is so very nice to be smiled on by the prettiest woman in the room; and it was long since he had seen the smile of any pretty woman! Indeed, for the last eighteen months he had had but little to do with such smiles.

Before dinner was over, Mrs. Cox had explained to Bertram that both she and her friend Mrs. Price were in deep affliction. They had recently lost their husbands — the one, by cholera; that was poor dear Cox, who had been collector of the Honourable Company's taxes at Panjabee. Whereas, Lieutenant Price, of the 71st

Native Bengal Infantry, had succumbed to — here Mrs. Cox shook her head, and whispered, and pointed to the champagne-glass which Bertram was in the act of filling for her. Poor Cox was just eight months gone; but Price had taken his last glass within six. And so Bertram knew all about it.

And then there was a great fuss in packing the travellers into the wooden boxes. It seems that they had all made up their own parties by sixes, that being the number of which one box was supposed to be capable. But pretty women are capricious, and neither Mrs. Price nor Mrs. Cox were willing to abide by any such arrangement. When the time came for handing them in, they both objected to the box pointed out to them by Major Biffin, refused to be lifted in by the arm of Captain M'Gramm; got at last into another vacant box with the assistance of our friends; summoned their dingy nurses and babies into the same box — for each was so provided; and then very prettily made way for Mr. Bertram and Mr. Wilkinson. And so they went across the desert.

Then they all stayed a night at Cairo, and then they went on to Alexandria. And by the time that they were embarked in a boat together, on their way to that gallant first-class steamer, the “Cagliari,” they were as intimate as though they had travelled round the world together, and had been as long about it as Captain Cook.

“What will you take with you, Mrs. Cox?” said Bertram, as he stood up in the boat with the baby on one arm, while with the other he handed the lady towards the ship’s ladder.

“A good ducking,” said Mrs. Cox, with a cheery

laugh, as at the moment a dashing wave covered them with its spray. "And I've got it too, with a vengeance. Ha! ha! Take care of the baby, whatever you do; and if she falls over, mind you go after her." And with another little peal of silver ringing laughter she tripped up the side of the ship, and Bertram, with the baby, followed after her.

"She is such a giddy thing," said Mrs. Price, turning her soft eyes on poor Arthur Wilkinson. "Oh, laws! I know I shall be drowned. Do hold me." And Arthur Wilkinson did hold her, and nearly carried her up into the ship. As he did so, his mind would fly off to Adela Gauntlet; but his arms and legs were not the less at the service of Mrs. Price.

"And now look after the places," said Mrs. Cox; "you haven't a moment to lose. And look here, Mr. Bertram, mind, I won't sit next to Major Biffin. And, for heaven's sake, don't let us be near that fellow M'Gramm." And so Bertram descended into the *salon* to place their cards in the places at which they were to sit for dinner. "Two and two; opposite to each other." sang out Mrs. Cox, as he went. There was a sweetness in her voice, a low, mellow cheeriness in her tone, which, combined with her beauty, went far to atone for the nature of what she said; and Bertram not unwillingly obeyed her behests.

"Oh, my blessed baby!" said Mrs. Price, as the nurse handed her the child — which, however, she immediately handed back. "How can I thank you enough, Mr. Wilkinson? What should we have done without you? I wonder whether it's near tiffin. I am so faint."

"Shall I fetch you anything?" said he.

"If you could get me a glass of porter. But I don't think they'll give it you. They are so uncivil!"

Arthur went for the beer; but went in vain. The steward said that lunch would be ready at twelve o'clock.

"They are such brutes!" said Mrs. Price. "Well, I suppose I must wait." And she again turned her eyes upon Arthur, and he again thought of Adela Gauntlet.

And then there was the ordinary confusion of a starting ship. Men and women were hurrying about after their luggage, asking all manner of unreasonable questions. Ladies were complaining of their berths, and servants asking where on *hearth* they were to sleep. Gentlemen were swearing that they had been shamefully doubled up — that is, made to lie with two or three men in the same cabin; and friends were contriving to get commodious seats for dinner. The officers of the ship were all busy, treating with apparent indifference the thousand questions that were asked them on every side; and all was bustle, confusion, hurry, and noise.

And then they were off. The pistons of the engine moved slowly up and down, the huge cranks revolved, and the waters under the bow rippled and gave way. They were off, and the business of the voyage commenced. The younger people prepared for their flirtations, the mothers unpacked their children's clothes, and the elderly gentlemen lighted their cigars.

"What very queer women they are!" said Arthur, walking the deck with his cousin.

"But very pretty, and very agreeable. I like them both."

"Don't you think them too free and easy?"

"Ah, you must not judge of them by women who have lived in England, who have always had the comfort of well-arranged homes. They have been knocked about, ill used, and forced to bear hardships as men bear them; but still there is about them so much that is charming. They are so frank!"

"Yes, very frank!" said Arthur.

"It is well to see the world on all sides," said George. "For myself, I think that we are lucky to have come across them — that is if Major Biffin does not cut my throat."

"I hope Captain M'Gramm won't cut mine. He looked as though he would."

"Did you ever see such an ass as that Biffin? I don't wonder that she has become sick of him; and then he has behaved so very badly to her. I really do pity her. She has told me all about it."

"And so has Mrs. Price told me all about Captain M'Gramm."

"Has she? Well! It seems that he, Biffin, has taken advantage of her frank, easy manner, and talked of her to every man in the ship. I think she has been quite right to cut him." And so they discussed the two ladies.

And at last Mrs. Price got her porter, and Mrs. Cox got her pale ale. "I do like pale ale," said she; "I suppose it's vulgar, but I can't help that. What amuses me is, that so many ladies drink it who are quite ashamed to say they like it."

"They take it for their health's sake," said Bertram.

"Oh, yes: of course they do. Mrs. Bangster takes

her half-pint of brandy every night for her health's sake, no doubt. Would you believe it, Mr. Bertram, the doctor absolutely had to take her out of the saloon one night in the 'Lahore?' Didn't he, Mrs. Price?"

"Indeed he did. I never was so shocked. — Just a little drop more to freshen it." And Mr. Wilkinson gave her another glass of porter.

Before they reached Malta, all the passengers from India had agreed that Mrs. Cox and Bertram would certainly make a match of it, and that Wilkinson was also in danger.

"Did you ever see such flirts?" said Mrs. Bangster to Dr. O'Shaughnessey. "What an escape Biffin has had!"

"She is a deuced pretty woman, Mrs. Bangster; and I'll tell you what: Biffin would give one of his eyes to get her back again if he could."

"Laws, doctor! You don't mean to tell me that he ever meant to marry that thing?"

"I don't know what he meant before; but he would mean it now, if he got the opportunity."

Here Captain M'Gramm joined them. "Well, Mac," said the doctor, "what news with the widow?"

"Widow! they'd all be widows if they could, I believe."

"Indeed, I wouldn't, for one," said Mrs. Bangster. "B. is a deal too well off where he is. Ha! ha! ha!"

"But what about Mrs. Price — eh, Mac?" continued the doctor.

"There she is. You'd better go and ask her yourself. You don't suppose I ever cared about such a woman as that. Only I do say this: if she goes on be-

having herself in that way, some one ought to speak to the captain."

But Mrs. Cox and Mrs. Price went on their own way, heeding such menaces not at all; and by the time they had reached Malta, they had told the whole history of their lives to the two gentlemen — and perhaps something more.

At Malta they remained about six hours, and the four dined on shore together. Bertram bought for them Maltese veils, and bad cameos; and Wilkinson, misled by such an example, was forced to do the same. These treasures were not hidden under a bushel when they returned to the ship; and Dr. O'Shaughnessey, Mrs. Bangster, the fat judge, and a host of others, were more sure than ever that both the widows were re-engaged.

And Arthur Wilkinson was becoming frightened in his mind. "Upon my word," said he, as he and George were walking the deck at sunrise the next morning, "upon my word, I am getting very tired of this woman, and I really think we are making a show of ourselves."

"Making a show of ourselves! What do you mean?"

"Why, walking with them every day, and always sitting next to them."

"As to sitting next to them, we can't help that. Everybody always sits in the same place, and one must sit next some one; and it wouldn't be kind to leave them to walk alone."

"I think we may overdo it, you know."

"Ah, well," said George, "you have some one else to think about. I have no one, unless it be this widow. She is kind to me, and as to what the world says, I care nothing about it."

On that day Wilkinson was busy with his books, and did not walk with Mrs. Price — a piece of neglect which sat uneasily on that lady's mind. But at ten o'clock, as usual, Bertram was pacing the deck with Mrs. Cox.

"What is the matter with your friend?" said she.

"Oh, nothing. He is home-sick, I suppose."

"I hope he has not quarrelled with Minnie." For the two ladies had come to call each other by their Christian names when they were in company with the gentlemen; and Bertram had once or twice used that of Mrs. Cox, not exactly in speaking to her, but in speaking of her in her presence.

"Oh dear, no," said Bertram.

"Because it is so odd he should not give her his arm as usual. I suppose you will be treating me so as we draw nearer to Southampton?" And she looked up at him with a bewitching smile, and pressed gently on his arm, and then let her eyes fall upon the deck.

My brother, when you see these tricks played upon other men, the gall rises black within your breast, and you loudly condemn wiles which are so womanly, but which are so unworthy of women. But how do you feel when they are played upon yourself? The gall is not so black, the condemnation less loud; your own merit seems to excuse the preference which is shown you; your heart first forgives and then applauds. Is it not so, my brother, with you? So it was, at least, with George Bertram.

"What! treating you with neglect, because we are soon to part?"

"Yes, exactly so; just that; because we are soon to part. That is what makes it so bitter. We have been such good friends, haven't we?"

"And why should we not remain so? Why should we talk of parting? We are both going to England."

"England! Yes, but England is a large place. Come, let us lean on the taffrail, and look at the dolphins. There is that horrid fellow eyeing me, as he always does; Major Biffin, I mean. Is he not exactly like a barber's block? I do so hate him!"

"But he doesn't hate you, Mrs. Cox."

"Doesn't he? Well then, he may if he likes. But don't let's talk of him. Talk to me about England, Mr. Bertram. Sometimes I do so long to be there — and then sometimes I don't."

"You don't — why not?"

"Do you?"

"No, I do not; I tell you frankly. I'd sooner be here with you to talk to, with you to look at."

"Psha, Mr. Bertram! what nonsense! I can't conceive that any woman can ever be worth looking at on board a ship — much less such a one as me! I know you're dying to get home."

"I might be if I had a home."

"Is your home with that uncle of yours?" She had heard so much of his family; but he had as yet spoken to her no word about Caroline. "I wonder what he would say if he could see you now leaning here and talking to me."

"If he has any knowledge of human nature, he would say that I was a very happy fellow."

"And are you?" As she asked him, she looked up into his face with such an arch smile that he could not find it in his heart to condemn her.

"What will you think of my gallantry if I say no?"

"I hate gallantry; it is all bosh. I wish I were a

man, and that I could call you Bertram, and that you would call me Cox."

"I would sooner call you Annie."

"Would you? But that wouldn't be right, would it?" And her hand, which was still within his arm, was pressed upon it with ever so light a pressure.

"I don't know why it should be wrong to call people by their Christian names. Should you be angry if I called you Annie?"

"That might depend. Tell me this, Mr. Bertram: How many other ladies do you call by their Christian names?"

"A dozen or two."

"I'll be bound you do."

"And may I add you to the number?"

"No, Mr. Bertram; certainly not."

"May I not? So intimate as we have become, I thought —"

"I will not be one of a dozen or two." And as she answered him, she dropped her tone of raillery, and spoke in a low, soft, sweet voice. It sounded so sweet on Bertram's ear.

"But if there be not one — not one other; not one other now — what then, Annie?"

"Not one other now? — Did you say now? Then there has been one."

"Yes; there has been one."

"And she — what of her?"

"It is a tale I cannot tell."

"Not to me? I should not like you the less for telling me. Do tell me." And she pressed her hand again upon his arm. "I have known there was something that made you unhappy."

"Have you?"

"Oh, yes. I have long known that. And I have so wished to be a comfort to you — if I could. I, too, have had great suffering."

"I am sure you have."

"Ah! yes. I did not suffer less because he had been unkind to me." And she put her handkerchief to her eyes, and then brought her hand again upon his arm. "But tell me of her — your one. She is not your one now — is she, Mr. Bertram?"

"No, Annie; not now."

"Is she —?" And she hesitated to ask whether the lady were dead, or married to some one else. It might, after all, only be a lovers' quarrel.

"I drove her from me — and now she is a wife."

"Drove her from you! Alas! alas!" said Mrs. Cox, with the sweetest emphasis of sympathy. But the result of her inquiries was not unsatisfactory to her.

"I don't know why I should have told you this," said he.

"I am so glad you have," she replied.

"But now that I have told you —"

"Well —"

"Now may I call you Annie?"

"You have done so two or three times."

"But may I?"

"If it please you, you may." And the words, though whispered very low, fell clearly upon his ear.

"Dearest Annie!"

"But I did not say you might call me that."

"But you are."

"Am I?"

"Dearest — all but her. Will that make you angry with me?"

"No, not angry; but —"

"But what?"

She looked up at him, pouting with her lip. There was a half-smile on her mouth, and half a tear in her eyes; and her shoulder leant against him, and her heart palpitated. She had never been so beautiful, never so attractive.

"But what —? What would you say, Annie?"

"I would say this. — But I know you will think me very bold."

"I shall not think you too bold if you will say the truth."

"Then I would say this — that if I loved a man, I could love him quite as fondly as she loved you."

"Could you, Annie?"

"I could. But he should not drive me from him, as you say you did to her; never — never — never. He might kill me if he would; but if I once had told him that I loved him, I would never leave him afterwards."

"Tell me so, Annie."

"No, Mr. Bertram. We have not known each other long enough." And now she took her hand from his arm, and let it drop by her side.

"Tell me so, dear Annie," he repeated; and he tried to regain her hand.

"There is the luncheon-bell; and since Mr. Wilkinson won't go to Mrs. Price, I must do so."

"Shall I go;" said he.

"Do; I will go down by myself."

"But you love me, Annie — say that you love me."

"Nonsense. Here is that fellow, Biffin. Do you go for Mrs. Price — leave me to myself."

"Don't go down stairs with him."

"You may be sure I won't — nor with you either, this morning. I am half inclined to be angry with you." And so saying, she moved away.

"Ah, me! what I have done!" said Bertram to himself, as he went upon his mission. "But she is a sweet creature; as beautiful as Hebe; and why should I be wretched for ever?"

She had moved towards the companion-ladder, and as she did so, Major Biffin followed her.

"Will you not allow me to give you an arm down stairs?" said he.

"Thank you, Major Biffin. It is rather crowded, and I can go better alone."

"You did not find the stairs in the 'Lahore' too crowded."

"Oh, yes, I did; very often. And the 'Lahore' and the 'Cagliari' are different things."

"Very different it seems. But the sea itself is not so fickle as a woman." And Major Biffin became a picture of injured innocence.

"And the land is not so dry as a man, Major Biffin; that is, some men. Ha! ha! ha! Good-morning, Major Biffin." And so saying, she went down by herself.

On the next day, Arthur still preferred his book to walking with Mrs. Price; and that lady was once again seen with her arm in that of Captain M'Gramm. This made a considerable consternation in the ship; and in the afternoon there was a slight quarrel between the two ladies.

"And so, Minnie, you are going to take up with that fellow again?"

"No; I am not. But I don't choose to be left altogether to myself."

"I never would have anything to say to a married man that drops his wife as he does."

"I don't care two straws for him, or his wife. But I don't want to make myself conspicuous by a quarrel."

"I'm sure Wilkinson will be annoyed," said Mrs. Cox.

"He's a muff," said Mrs. Price. "And, if I am not mistaken, I know some one else who is another."

"Who do you mean, Mrs. Price?"

"I mean Mr. Bertram, Mrs. Cox."

"Oh, I dare say he is a muff; that's because he's attentive to me instead of leaving me to myself, as somebody does with somebody else. I understand all about that, my dear."

"You understand a great deal, I have no doubt," said Mrs. Price. "I always heard as much."

"It seems to me you understand nothing, or you wouldn't be walking about with Captain M'Gramm," said Mrs. Cox. And then they parted before blood was absolutely drawn between them.

At dinner that day they were not very comfortable together. Mrs. Price accepted Mr. Wilkinson's ordinary courtesies in a stately way, thanking him for filling her glass and looking after her plate, in a tone and with a look which made it plain to all that things were not progressing well between them. George and his Annie did get on somewhat better; but even they were not quite at their ease. Mrs. Cox had said, before luncheon, that she had not known Mr. Bertram long enough to declare her love for him. But the hours between luncheon and dinner might have been a sufficient prolongation of the

period of their acquaintance. George, however, had not repeated the question; and had, indeed, not been alone with her for five minutes during the afternoon.

That evening, Wilkinson again warned his friend that he might be going too far with Mrs. Cox; that he might say that which he could neither fulfil nor retract. For Wilkinson clearly conceived it to be impossible that Bertram should really intend to marry this widow.

"And why should I not marry her?" said George.

"She would not suit you, nor make you happy."

"What right have I to think that any woman will suit me? or what chance is there that any woman will make me happy? Is it not all leather and prunella? She is pretty and clever, soft and feminine. Where shall I find a nicer toy to play with? You forget, Arthur, that I have had my day-dreams, and been roused from them somewhat roughly. With you, the pleasure is still to come."

After this they turned in and went to bed.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Reaching Home.

EARLY in their journeyings together, Mrs. Cox had learned from George that he was possessed of an eccentric old uncle; and not long afterwards, she had learned from Arthur that this uncle was very rich, that he was also childless, and that he was supposed to be very fond of his nephew. Putting all these things together, knowing that Bertram had no profession, and thinking that therefore he must be a rich man, she had considered herself to be acting with becoming prudence in dropping Major Biffin for his sake.

But on the day after the love scene recorded in the last chapter, a strange change came over the spirit of her dream. "I am a very poor man," Bertram had said to her, after making some allusion to what had taken place.

"If that were all, that would make no difference with me," said Mrs. Cox, magnanimously.

"If that were all, Annie! What does that mean?"

"If I really loved a man, I should not care about his being poor. But your poverty is what I should call riches, I take it."

"No, indeed. My poverty is absolute poverty. My own present income is about two hundred a year."

"Oh, I don't understand the least about money myself. I never did. I was such a child when I was married to Cox. But I thought, Mr. Bertram, your uncle was very rich."

"So he is; as rich as a gold-mine. But we are not very good friends — at any rate, not such friends as to make it probable that he will leave me a farthing. He has a granddaughter of his own."

This, and a little more of the same kind, taught Mrs. Cox that it behoved her to be cautious. That Major Biffin had a snug little income over and above that derived from his profession was a fact that had been very well ascertained. That he was very dry, as dry as a barber's block, might be true. That George Bertram was an amusing fellow, and made love in much better style than the major, certainly was true. But little as she might know about money, Mrs. Cox did know this — than when poverty comes in at the door, love flies out at the window; that eating and drinking are stern necessities; that love in a cottage is supposed to be, what

she would call, bosh; and that her own old home used to be very unpleasant when Cox was in debt, and those eastern Jewish harpies would come down upon him with his overdue bills. Considering all this, Mrs. Cox thought it might be well not to ratify her engagement with Mr. Bertram till after they should reach Southampton. What if Biffin — the respectable Biffin — should again come forward!

And so they went on for a few days longer. Bertram, when they were together, called her Annie, and once again asked her whether she loved him. "Whether I do, or whether I do not, I shall give you no answer now," she had said, half laughing. "We have both been very foolish already, and it is time that we should begin to humour senses. Isn't it?" But still she sat next him at dinner, and still she walked with him. Once, indeed, he found her saying a word to Major Biffin, as that gentleman stood opposite to her chair upon the deck. But as soon as the major's back was turned, she said to Bertram, "I think the barber's block wants to be new curled, doesn't it? I declare the barber's man has forgotten to comb out its whiskers." So that Bertram had no ground for jealousy on behalf of the major.

Somewhere about this time, Mrs. Price deserted them at dinner. She was going to sit, she said, with Mrs. Bangster, and Dr. Shaughnessey, and the judge. Mrs. Bangster had made a promise to old Mr. Price in England to look after her; and, therefore, she thought it better to go back to Mrs. Bangster before they reached Southampton. They were now already past Gibraltar. So on that day, Mrs. Price's usual chair at dinner was vacant, and Wilkinson, looking down the tables, saw that room had been made for her next to Dr. Shaugh-

nessey. And on her other side, sat Captain M'Gramm in despite of Mrs. Bangster's motherly care and of his, own wife at home. On the following morning, Mrs. Price and Captain M'Gramm were walking the deck together just at they had been used to do on the other side of Suez.

And so things went on till the day before their arrival at Southampton. Mrs. Cox still kept her seat next to Bertram, and opposite to Wilkinson, though no other lady remained to countenance her. She and Bertram still walked the deck arm in arm; but their whisperings were not so low as they had been, nor were their words so soft, nor, indeed, was the temper of the lady so sweet. What if she should have thrown away all the advantages of the voyage! What if she had fallen between two stools! She began to think that it would be better to close with one or with the other — with the one despite his poverty, or with the other despite his head.

And now it was the evening of the last day. They had sighted the coast of Devonshire, and the following morning would see them within the Southampton waters. Ladies had packed their luggage; subscriptions had been made for the band; the captain's health had been drunk at the last dinner; and the mail boxes were being filled between the decks.

"Well, it is nearly over," said Mrs. Cox, as she came upon deck after dinner, warmly cloaked. "How cold we all are!"

"Yes; it is nearly over," answered Bertram. "What an odd life of itself one of these voyages is! How intimate people are who will never see each other again!"

"Yes; that is the way, I suppose. Oh, Mr. Bertram!"

"Well, what would you have?"

"Ah, me! I hardly know. Fate has ever been against me, and I know that it will be so to the last."

"Is it not cold?" said Bertram, buttoning up a greatcoat as he spoke.

"Very cold! very cold!" said Mrs. Cox. "But there is something much colder than the weather — very much colder."

"You are severe, Mrs. Cox."

"Yes. It is Mrs. Cox here. It was Annie when we were off Gibraltar. That comes of being near home. But I knew that it would be so. I hate the very idea of home." And she put her handkerchief to her eyes.

She had had her chance as far as Bertram was concerned, and had let it pass from her. He did not renew his protestations; but in lieu of doing so, lit a cigar, and walked away into the fore-part of the vessel. "After all, Arthur is right," said he to himself; "marriage is too serious a thing to be arranged in a voyage from Alexandria to Southampton."

But luckily for Mrs. Cox, everybody did not think as he did. He had gone from her ruthlessly, cruelly, falsely, with steps which sounded as though there were triumph in his escape, and left her seated alone near the skylights. But she was not long alone. As she looked after him along the deck, the head of Major Biffin appeared to her, emerging from the saloon stairs. She said nothing to herself now about barber's blocks or uncurled whiskers.

"Well, Mrs. Cox," said the major, accosting her.

"Well, Major Biffin;" and the major thought that he saw in her eye some glimpse of the smile as of old.

"We are very near home now, Mrs. Cox," said the major.

"Very near indeed," said Mrs. Cox. And then there was a slight pause, during which Major Biffin took an opportunity of sitting down not very far from his companion.

"I hope you have enjoyed your voyage," said he.

"Which voyage?" she asked.

"Oh! your voyage home from Alexandria — your voyage since you made the acquaintance of Mr. — what's his name, the parson's cousin?"

"Mr. What's-his-name, as you call him, is nothing to me, I can assure you, Major Biffin. His real name, however, is Bertram. He has been very civil when some other people were not inclined to be so, that is all."

"Is that all? The people here do say —"

"Then I tell you what, Major Biffin, I do not care one straw what people say — not one straw. You know whose fault it has been if I have been thrown with this stranger. Nobody knows it as well. And mind this, Major Biffin, I shall always do as I like in such matters without reference to you or to any one else. I am my own mistress."

"And do you mean to remain so?"

"Ask no questions, and then you'll be told no stories."

"That's civil."

"If you don't like it, you had better go, for there's more to follow of the same sort."

"You are very sharp to-night."

"Not a bit sharper than I shall be to-morrow."

"One is afraid even to speak to you now."

"Then one had better hold one's tongue."

Mrs. Cox was receiving her suitor rather sharply; but she probably knew his disposition. He did not answer her immediately, but sat biting the top of his cane. "I'll tell you what it is, Mrs. Cox," he said at last; "I don't like this kind of thing."

"Don't you, Mr. Biffin? And what kind of thing do you like?"

"I like you."

"Psha! Tell me something new, if you must tell me anything."

"Come, Annie; do be serious for a moment. There isn't much time left now, and I've come to you in order that I may get a plain answer."

"If you want a plain answer, you'd better ask a plain question. I don't know what you mean."

"Will you have me? That's a plain question, or the deuce is in it."

"And what should I do with you?"

"Why, to be Mrs. Biffin, of course."

"Ha! ha! ha! And it has come to that, has it? What was it you said to Dr. O'Shaughnessey when we were off Point de Galle?"

"Well, what did I say?"

"I know what you said well enough. And so do you, too. If I served you right, I should never speak to you again."

"A man doesn't like to be humbugged, you know, before a whole shipful of people," said the major, defending himself.

"And a woman likes it just as little, Major Biffin; please to remember that."

"Well; I'm sure you've been down upon me long enough."

"Not a bit longer than you deserved. You told O'Shaughnessey, that it was all very well to amuse yourself, going home. I hope you like your amusement now. I have liked mine very well, I can assure you."

"I don't think so bad of you as to believe you care for that fellow."

"There are worse fellows than him, Major Biffin. But there, I have had my revenge; and now if you have anything to say, I'll give you an answer."

"I've only to say, Annie, that I love you better than any woman in the world."

"I may believe as much of that as I like."

"You may believe it all. Come, there's my hand."

"Well, I suppose I must forgive you. There's mine. Will that please you?"

Major Biffin was the happiest man in the world, and Mrs. Cox went to her berth that night not altogether dissatisfied. Before she did so, she had the major's offer in writing in her pocket; and had shown it to Mrs. Price, with whom she was now altogether reconciled.

"I only wish, Minnie, that there was no Mrs. M'Gramm," said she.

"He wouldn't be the man for me at all, my dear; so don't let that fret you."

"There's as good fish in the sea as ever were caught yet; eh, Minnie?"

"Of course there are. Though of course you think there never was such a fish as Biffin."

"He'll do well enough for me, Minnie; and when you catch a bigger, and a better, I won't begrudge him you."

That night Mrs. Cox took her evening modicum of creature-comforts sitting next to her lover, the major; and our two friends were left alone by themselves. The

news had soon spread about the ship, and to those ladies who spoke to her on the subject, Mrs. Cox made no secret of the fact. Men in this world catch their fish by various devices; and it is necessary that these schemes should be much studied before a man can call himself a fisherman. It is the same with women; and Mrs. Cox was an Izaak Walton among her own sex. Had she not tied her fly with skill, and thrown her line with a steady hand, she would not have had her trout in her basket. There was a certain amount of honour due to her for her skill, and she was not ashamed to accept it.

"Good-night, Mrs. Cox," Bertram said to her that evening, with a good-humoured tone; "I hear that I am to congratulate you."

"Good-night," said she, giving him her hand. "And I'll say good-bye, too, for we shall all be in such a flurry to-morrow morning. I'm sure you think I've done the right thing — don't you? And, mind this, I shall hope to see you some day." And so saying, she gave him a kindly grasp, and they parted. "Done right!" said Bertram; "yes, I suppose she has; right enough at least as far as I am concerned. After all, what husband is so convenient as a barber's block?"

On the following morning they steamed up the Southampton river, and at nine o'clock they were alongside the quay. All manner of people had come on board in boats, and the breakfast was eaten in great confusion. But few of the ladies were to be seen. They had tea and rolls in their own cabins, and did not appear till the last moment. Among these were Mrs. Cox and Mrs. Price.

These ladies during their journey home had certainly not been woe-begone, either in personal appearance or in

manner. And who would have the heart to wish that they should be so? They had been dressed as young ladies on board ship usually do dress, so that their widowhood had been forgotten; and, but for their babies, their wifeness might have been forgotten also.

But now they were to be met by family friends — by friends who were thinking of nothing but their bereavements. Old Mr. Price came to meet them on board, and Mrs. Cox's uncle; old gentlemen with faces prepared for sadness, and young ladies with sympathetic handkerchiefs. How signally surprised the sad old gentlemen and the sympathetic young ladies must have been!

Not a whit! Just as our friends were about to leave the ship that morning, with all their luggage collected round them, they were startled by the apparition of two sombre female figures, buried in most sombre tokens of affliction. Under the deep crape of their heavy black bonnets were to be seen that chiefest sign of heavy female woe — a widow's cap. What signal of sorrow that grief holds out ever moves so much as this! Their eyes were red with weeping, as could be seen when, for a moment, their deep bordered handkerchiefs were allowed to fall from their faces. Their eyes were red with weeping, and the agonizing grief of domestic bereavement sat chiselled on every feature. If you stood near enough, your heart would melt at the sound of their sobs.

Alas! that forms so light, that creatures so young, should needs be shrouded in such vestments! They were all crape, that dull, weeping, widow's crape, from the deck up to their shoulders. There they stood, monuments of death, living tombs, whose sign of life was in their tears. There they stood, till they might fall,

vanquished by the pangs of memory, into the arms of their respective relations.

They were Mrs. Cox and Mrs. Price. Bertram and Wilkinson, as they passed them, lifted their hats and bowed, and the two ladies observing them, returned their salutation with the coldest propriety.

CHAPTER XIX.

I could put a Codicil.

ON their journey up from Southampton, George and Arthur parted from each other. George went on direct to London, whereas Arthur turned off from Basingstoke towards his own home.

"Take my advice now, if you never do again," said Bertram, as they parted; "make yourself master of your own house, and as soon after as possible make her the mistress of it."

"That's easily said, old fellow," repeated the other.

"Make the attempt, at any rate. If I am anything of a prophet, it won't be in vain;" and so they parted.

At Southampton they had learnt that there had been a partial crash in the government. The prime minister had not absolutely walked forth, followed by all his satellites, as is the case when a successful turn in the wheel gives the outs a full whipland over the ins, but it had become necessary to throw overboard a brace or two of Jonahs, so that the ship might be lightened to meet a coming storm; and among those so thrown over had been our unfortunate friend Sir Henry Harcourt.

And this, as regards him, had hardly been the worst of it. We all know that bigwigs are never dismissed. When it becomes necessary to get rid of them, they re-

sign. Now resignation is clearly a voluntary act, and it seemed that Sir Henry, having no wish that way, had not at first performed this act of volition. His own particular friends in the cabinet, those to whom he had individually attached himself, were gone, but, nevertheless he made no sign; he was still ready to support the government, and as the attorney-general was among those who had shaken the dust from their feet and gone out, Sir Henry expected that he would as a matter of course walk into that gentleman's shoes.

But another learned gentleman was appointed, and then at last Sir Henry knew that he must go. He had resigned; but no resignation had ever appeared to have less of volition in it. And how could it be otherwise? Political success was everything to him; and, alas! he had so played his cards that it was necessary to him that that success should be immediate. He was not as those are who, in losing power, lose a costly plaything, which they love indeed over well, but the loss of which hurts only their pride. Place to him was everything; and feeling that he had committed that most grievous of political sins, he had endeavoured to hold his place longer than he was wanted. Now, however, he was out. So much, in some sort of way, Bertram had learnt before he left Southampton.

His first business in London was to call on Mr. Pritchett.

"Oh, master George! oh, master George!" began that worthy man, as soon as he saw him. His tone had never been so lachrymose, nor his face so full of woe. "Oh, master George!"

Bertram in his kindest way asked after his uncle.

"Oh, master George! you shouldn't be going to

them furren parts — indeed you shouldn't; and he is such a state."

"Is he worse than when I last saw him, Mr. Pritchett?"

"Gentlemen at this time of life don't get much better, master George — nor yet at mine. It's half a million of money; half — a — million — of — money! But it's no use talking to you, sir — it never was."

By degrees Bertram gathered from him that his uncle was much weaker, that he had had a second and a much more severe attack of paralysis, and that according to all the doctors, the old gentleman was not much longer for this world. Sir Omicron himself had been there. Miss Baker had insisted on it, much in opposition to her uncle's wishes. But Sir Omicron had shaken his head and declared that the fiat had gone forth.

Death had given his order; the heavy burden of the half-million must be left behind, and the soul must walk forth, free from all its toils, to meet such æthereal welcome as it could find.

Mr. Bertram had been told, and had answered, that he supposed as much. "A man when he was too old to live must die," he had said, "though all the Sir Omicrons in Europe should cluster round his bed. It was only throwing money away. What, twenty pounds!" And being too weak to scold, he had turned his face to the wall in sheer vexation of spirit. Death he could encounter like a man; but why should he be robbed in his last moments?

"You'll go down to him, master George," wheezed out poor Pritchett. "Though it's too late for any good. It's all arranged now, of course."

Bertram said that he would go down immediately,

irrespective of any such arrangements. And then, remembering of whom that Hadley household had consisted when he left England in the early winter, he asked as to the two ladies.

"Miss Baker is there, of course?"

"Oh, yes, Miss Baker is there. She doesn't go to any furren parts, master George."

"And — and —"

"Yes, she's in the house, too — poor creature — poor creature!"

"Then how am I to go there?" said George, speaking rather to himself than to Mr. Pritchett.

"What! you wouldn't stay away from him now because of that? You ought to go to him, master George, though there were ten Lady Harcourts there—or twenty." This was said in a tone that was not only serious, but full of melancholy. Mr. Pritchett had probably never joked in his life, and had certainly never been less inclined to do so than now, when his patron was dying, and all his patron's money was to go into other and into unknown hands.

Some other information Bertram received from his most faithful ally. Sir Henry had been three times to Hadley, but he had only once succeeded in seeing Mr. Bertram, and then the interview had been short, and, as Mr. Pritchett surmised, not very satisfactory. His last visit had been since that paid by Sir Omicron, and on that occasion the sick man had sent out to say that he could not see strangers. All this Mr. Pritchett had learnt from Miss Baker. Sir Henry had not seen his wife since that day — now nearly twelve months since — on which she had separated herself from him. He had made a formal application to her to return to him, but nothing

had come of it; and Mr. Pritchett took upon himself to surmise again, that Sir Henry was too anxious about the old gentleman's money to take any steps that could be considered severe, until —. And then Mr. Pritchett wheezed so grievously that what he said was not audible.

George immediately wrote to Miss Baker, announcing his return, and expressing his wish to see his uncle. He did not mention Lady Harcourt's name; but he suggested that perhaps it would be better, under existing circumstances, that he should not remain at Hadley. He hoped, however, that his uncle would not refuse to see him, and that his coming to the house for an hour or so might not be felt to be an inconvenience. By return of post he got an answer from Miss Baker, in which she assured him that his uncle was most anxious for his presence, and had appeared to be more cheerful since he had heard of his nephew's return than he had been for the last two months. As for staying at Hadley, George could do as he liked, Miss Baker said. But it was but a sad household, and perhaps it would be more comfortable for him to go backwards and forwards by the railway.

This correspondence caused a delay of two days, and in one of them Bertram received a visit which he certainly did not expect. He was sitting in his chamber alone, and was sad enough, thinking now of Mrs. Cox and his near escape, then of Adela and his cousin's possible happiness, and then of Caroline and the shipwreck of her hopes, when the door opened, and Sir Henry Harcourt was standing before him.

"How d'ye do, Bertram?" said the late solicitor-general, putting out his hand. The attitude and the

words were those of friendship, but his countenance was anything but friendly. A great change had come over him. His look of youth had deserted him, and he might have been taken for a care-worn, middle-aged man. He was thin, and haggard, and wan; and there was a stern, harsh frown upon his brow, as though he would wish to fight if he only dared. This was the successful man — fortune's pet, who had married the heiress of the millionaire, and risen to the top of his profession with unexampled rapidity.

"How are you, Harcourt?" said Bertram, taking the proffered hand. "I had no idea that you had heard of my return."

"Oh, yes, I heard of it. I supposed you'd be back quick enough when you knew that the old man was dying."

"I am glad, at any rate, to be here in time to see him," said George, disdaining to defend himself against the inuendo.

"When are you going down?"

"To-morrow, I suppose. But I expect to have a line from Miss Baker in the morning."

Sir Henry, who had not sat down, began walking up and down the room, while Bertram stood with his back to the fire watching him. The lawyer's brow became blacker and blacker, and as he rattled his half-crowns in his trousers-pockets, and kept his eyes fixed upon the floor, Bertram began to feel that the interview did not promise to be one of a very friendly character.

"I was sorry to hear, Harcourt, that you are among the lot that have left the Government," said Bertram, hardly knowing what else to say.

"D — the Government. But I didn't come here to

talk about the Government. That old man down there will be gone in less than a week's time. Do you know that?"

"I hear that in all probability he has not long to live."

"Not a week. I have it from Sir Omicron himself. Now I think you will admit, Bertram, that I have been very badly used."

"Upon my word, my dear fellow, I know nothing about it."

"Nonsense!"

"But it isn't nonsense. I tell you that I know nothing about it. I suppose you are alluding to my uncle's money; and I tell you that I know nothing — and care nothing."

"Psha! I hate to hear a man talk in that way. I hate such humbug."

"Harcourt, my dear fellow —"

"It is humbug. I am not in a humour now to stand picking my words. I have been infernally badly used — badly used on every side."

"By me, among others?"

Sir Henry, in his present moody mind, would have delighted to say, "Yes," by him, Bertram, worse, perhaps, than by any other. But it did not suit him at the present moment to come to an open rupture with the man whom he had been in such a hurry to visit.

"I treated that old man with the most unbounded confidence when I married his granddaughter —"

"But how does that concern me? She was not my granddaughter. I, at least, had nothing to do with it. Excuse me, Harcourt, if I say that I, of all men, am the last to whom you should address yourself on such a subject."

"I think differently. You are his nearest relative — next to her; next to her, mind —"

"Well! What matter is it whether I am near or distant? Lady Harcourt is staying with him. Did it suit her to do so, she could fight your battle, or her own battle, or any battle that she pleases."

"Yours, for instance?"

"No, Sir Henry. That she could not do. From doing that she is utterly debarred. But I tell you once for all that I have no battle. You shall know more — if the knowledge will do you any good. Not very long since my uncle offered to settle on me half his fortune if I would oblige him in one particular. But I could not do the thing he wanted; and when we parted, I had his positive assurance that he would leave me nothing. That was the last time I saw him." And as Bertram remembered what that request was to which he had refused to accede, his brow also grew black.

"Tell me honestly, then, if you can be honest in the matter, who is to have his money?"

"I can be very honest, for I know nothing. My belief is that neither you nor I will have a shilling of it."

"Well, then; I'll tell you what. Of course you know that Lady Harcourt is down there?"

"Yes; I know that she is at Hadley."

"I'll not submit to be treated in this way. I have been a deuced sight too quiet, because I have not chosen to disturb him in his illness. Now I will have an answer from him. I will know what he means to do; and if I do not know by to-morrow night, I will go down, and will, at any rate, bring my wife away with me. I wish you to tell him that I want to know what his intentions are. I have a right to demand as much."

"Be that as it may, you have no right to demand anything through me."

"I have ruined myself — or nearly so, for that woman."

"I wonder, Harcourt, that you do not see that I am not the man you should select to speak to on such a subject."

"You are the man, because you are her cousin. I went to enormous expense to give her a splendid home, knowing, of course, that his wealth would entitle her to it. I bought a house for her, and furnished it as though she were a duchess —"

"My heavens, Harcourt! Is this anything to me? Did I bid you buy the house? If you had not given her a chair to sit on, should I have complained? I tell you fairly, I will have nothing to do with it."

"Then it will be the worse for her — that's all."

"May God help her! She must bear her lot, as must I mine, and you yours."

"And you refuse to take my message to your uncle?"

"Certainly. Whether I shall see him or no, I do not yet know. If I do, I certainly shall not speak to him about money unless he begins. Nor shall I speak about you, unless he shall seem to wish it. If he asks about you, I will tell him that you have been with me."

After some further discussion, Harcourt left him. George Bertram found it difficult to understand what motive could have brought him there. But drowning men catch at straws. Sir Henry was painfully alive to the consideration, that if anything was to be done about the rich man's money, if any useful step could be taken, it must be done at once; the step must be taken now. In another week, perhaps in another day, Mr. Bertram

would be beyond the power of will-making. No bargain could then be driven in which it should be stipulated that after his death his grandchild should be left unmolested — for a consideration. The bargain, if made at all, must be made now — now at once.

It will be thought that Sir Henry would have played his game better by remaining quiet; that his chance of being remembered in that will would be greater if he did not now make himself disagreeable. Probably so. But men running hither and thither in distress do not well calculate their chances. They are too nervous, too excited to play their game with judgment. Sir Henry Harcourt had now great trouble on his shoulders; he was in debt, was pressed for money on every side, had brought his professional bark into great disasters — nearly to utter shipwreck — and was known to have been abandoned by his wife. The world was not smiling on him. His great hope, his once strong hope, was now buried in those Hadley coffers; and it was not surprising that he did not take the safest way in his endeavours to reach those treasures which he so coveted.

On the following morning, George received Miss Baker's letter, and very shortly afterwards he started for Hadley. Of course he could not but remember that Lady Harcourt was staying there; that she would naturally be attending upon her grandfather, and that it was all but impossible that he should not see her. How were they to meet now? When last they had been together, he had held her in his arms, had kissed her forehead, had heard the assurance of her undying love. How were they to meet now?

George was informed by the servant who came to the door that his uncle was very ill. "Weaker to-day,"

the girl said, "than ever he had been." "Where was Miss Baker?" George asked. The girl said that Miss Baker was in the dining-room. He did not dare to ask any further question. "And her ladyship is with her grandfather," the girl added; upon hearing which George walked with quicker steps to the parlour door.

Miss Baker met him as though there had been no breach to their former intimacy. With her, for the moment, Lady Harcourt and her troubles were forgotten, and she thought only of the dying man upstairs.

"I am so glad you have come!" she said. "He does not say much about it. You remember he never did talk about such things. But I know that he will be delighted to see you. Sometimes he has said that he thought you had been in Egypt quite long enough."

"Is he so very ill, then?"

"Indeed he is; very ill. You'll be shocked when you see him: you'll find him so much altered. He knows that it cannot last long, and he is quite reconciled."

"Will you send up to let him know that I am here?"

"Yes, now — immediately. Caroline is with him;" and then Miss Baker left the room.

Caroline is with him! It was so singular to hear her mentioned as one of the same family with himself; to have to meet her as one sharing the same interests with him, bound by the same bonds, anxious to relieve the same suffering. She had said that they ought to be as far as the poles asunder; and yet fortune, unkind fortune, would bring them together! As he was thinking of this, the door opened gently, and she was in the room with him.

She, too, was greatly altered. Not that her beauty had faded, or that the lines of her face were changed; but her gait and manners were more composed; her dress was so much more simple, that, though not less lovely, she certainly looked older than when he had last seen her. She was thinner too, and, in the light-gray silk which she wore, seemed to be taller, and to be paler too.

She walked up to him, and putting out her hand. said some word or two which he did not hear; and he uttered something which was quite as much lost on her, and so their greeting was over. Thus passed their first interview, of which he had thought so much in looking forward to it for the last few hours, that his mind had been estranged from his uncle.

"Does he know I am here?"

"Yes. You are to go up to him. You know the room?"

"The same he always had?"

"Oh, yes; the same." And then, creeping on tip-toe, as men do in such houses, to the infinite annoyance of the invalids whom they wish to spare, he went upstairs, and stood by his uncle's bed.

Miss Baker was on the other side, and the sick man's face was turned towards her. "You had better come round here, George," said she. "It would trouble Mr. Bertram to move."

"She means that I can't stir," said the old man, whose voice was still sharp, though no longer loud. "I can't turn round that way. Come here." And so George walked round the bed.

He literally would not have known his uncle, so completely changed was the face. It was not only that

it was haggard, thin, unshorn, and gray with coming death; but the very position of the features had altered. His cheeks had fallen away; his nose was contracted; his mouth, which he could hardly close altogether, was on one side. Miss Baker told George afterwards that the left side was altogether motionless. George certainly would not have known his uncle — not at the first glance. But yet there was a spark left in those eyes of the old fire; such a spark as had never gleamed upon him from any other human head. That look of sharpness, which nothing could quench, was still there. It was not the love of lucre which was to be read in those eyes so much as the possessor's power of acquiring it. It was as though they said, "Look well to all you have; put lock and bar to your stores; set dragons to watch your choice gardens; fix what man-traps you will for your own protection. In spite of everything, I will have it all! When I go forth to rob, no one can stay me!" So had he looked upon men through all his long life, and so now did he look upon his nephew and his niece as they stood by, to comfort him in his extremity.

"I am sorry to see you in this state," said George, putting his hand on to that of his uncle's, which was resting on the bed.

"Thank'ee, George, thank'ee. When men get to be as old as I am, they have nothing for it but to die. So you've been to Egypt, have you? What do you think about Egypt?"

"It is not a country I should like to live in, sir."

"Nor I to die in, from all that I hear of it. Well, you're just in time to be in at the last gasp — that's all, my boy."

"I hope it has not come to that yet, sir."

"Ah, but it has. How long a time did that man give, me, Mary — he that got the twenty pounds? They gave a fellow twenty pounds to come and tell me that I was dying! as if I didn't know that without him."

"We thought it right to get the best advice we could, George," said poor Miss Baker.

"Nonsense!" said the old man, almost in his olden voice. "You'll find by-and-by that twenty pounds are not so easy to come by. George, as you are here, I might as well tell you about my money."

George begged him not to trouble himself about such a matter at present; but this was by no means the way in which to propitiate his uncle.

"And if I don't talk of it now, when am I to do it? Go away, Mary — and look here: come up again in about twenty minutes. What I have got to say won't take me long." And so Miss Baker left the room.

"George," said his uncle, "I wonder whether you really care about money? sometimes I have almost thought that you don't."

"I don't think I do very much, sir."

"Then you must be a great fool."

"I have often thought I am, lately."

"A very great fool. People preach against it, and talk against it, and write against it, and tell lies against it; but don't you see that everybody is fighting for it? The parsons all abuse it; but did you ever know one who wouldn't go to law for his tithes? Did you ever hear of a bishop who didn't take his dues?"

"I am quite fond enough of it, sir, to take all that I can earn."

"That does not seem to be much, George. You haven't played your cards well — have you, my boy?"

"No, uncle; not very well. I might have done better."

"No man is respected without money — no man. A poor man is always thrust to the wall — always. Now you will be a poor man, I fear, all your life."

"Then I must put up with the wall, sir."

"But why were you so harsh with me when I wanted you to marry her? Do you see now what you have done? Look at her, and what she might have been. Look at yourself, and what you might have been. Had you done that, you might have been my heir in everything."

"Well, sir, I have made my bed, and I must lie upon it. I have cause enough for regret — though, to tell the truth, it is not about your money."

"Ah, I knew you would be stiff to the last," said Mr. Bertram, angry that he could not move his nephew to express some sorrow about the half-million.

"Am I stiff, sir? Indeed, I do not mean it."

"No, it's your nature. But we will not quarrel at the last; will we, George?"

"I hope not, sir. I am not aware that we have ever quarrelled. You once asked me to do a thing which, had I done it, would have made me a happy man —"

"And a rich man also."

"And I fairly tell you now, that I would I had done as you would have had me. That is not being stiff, sir."

"It is too late now, George."

"Oh, yes, it is too late now; indeed it is."

"Not but that I could put a codicil."

"Ah, sir, you can put no codicil that can do me a service. No codicil can make her a free woman. There are sorrows, sir, which no codicil can cure."

"Psha!" said his uncle, trying in his anger to turn himself on his bed, but failing utterly. "Psha! Then you may die a pauper."

George remained standing at the bedside; but he knew not what to do, or what answer to make to this ebullition of anger.

"I have nothing further to say," continued his uncle.

"But we shall part in friendship, shall we not?" said George. "I have so much to thank you for, that I cannot bear that you should be angry with me now."

"You are an ass — a fool!"

"You should look on that as my misfortune, sir." And then he paused a moment. "I will leave you now, shall I?"

"Yes, and send Mary up."

"But I may come down again to-morrow?"

"What! haven't they a bed for you in the house?"

Bertram hummed and hawed, and said he did not know. But the conference ended in his promising to stay there. So he went up to look, and returned again, bringing down his carpet-bag, and preparing to remain till all should be over.

That was a strange household which was now collected together in the house at Hadley. The old man was lying upstairs, daily expecting his death? and he was attended, as it was seemly that he should be, by his nearest relatives. His brother's presence he would not have admitted; but his grandchild was there, and his nephew, and her whom he had always regarded as his niece. Nothing could be more fitting than this. But not the less did Caroline and George feel that it was not fitting that they should be together.

And yet the absolute awkwardness of the meeting

was soon over. They soon found themselves able to sit in the same room, conversing on the one subject of interest which the circumstances of the moment gave, without any allusion to past times. They spoke only of the dying man, and asked each other questions only about him. Though they were frequently alone together while Miss Baker was with Mr. Bertram, they never repeated the maddening folly of that last scene in Eaton Square.

"She has got over it now," said Bertram to himself; and he thought that he rejoiced that it was so. But yet it made his heart sad.

It has passed away like a dream, thought Lady Harcourt; and now he will be happy again. And she, too, strove to comfort herself in thinking so, but the comfort was very cold.

And now George was constantly with his uncle. For the first two days nothing further was said about money. Mr. Bertram seemed to be content that matters should rest as they were then settled, and his nephew certainly had no intention of recurring to the subject on his own behalf. The old man, however, had become much kinder in his manner to him — kinder to him than to any one else in the house; and exacted from him various little promises of things to be done — of last wishes to be fulfilled.

"Perhaps it is better as it is, George," he said, as Bertram was sitting by his bedside late one night.

"I am sure it is, sir," said George, not at all, however, knowing what was the state of things which his uncle described as being better.

"All men can't be made alike," continued the uncle.

"No, uncle; there must be rich men, and there must be poor men."

"And you prefer the latter."

Now George had never said this; and the assertion coming from his uncle at such a moment, when he could not contradict it, was rather hard on him. He had tried to prove to Mr. Bertram, not so much then as in their former intercourse, that he would in no way subject his feelings to the money-bags of any man; that he would make no sacrifice of his aspirations for the sake of wealth; that he would not, in fact, sell himself for gold. But he had never said, or intended to say, that money was indifferent to him. Much as his uncle understood, he had failed to understand his nephew's mind. But George could not explain it to him now; — so he merely smiled, and let the assertion pass.

"Well; be it so," said Mr. Bertram. "But you will see, at any rate, that I have trusted you. Why father and son should be so much unlike, God only can understand." And from that time he said little or nothing more about his will.

But Sir Omicron had been wrong. Mr. Bertram overlived the week, and overlived the fortnight. We must now leave him and his relatives in the house of sickness, and return to Arthur Wilkinson.

CHAPTER XX.

Mrs. Wilkinson's troubles.

ARTHUR WILKINSON was received at home with open arms and warm embraces. He was an only son, an only brother, the head and stay of his family; and of course he was beloved. His mother wept for joy as she saw the renewed plumpness of his cheeks, and declared that Egypt must indeed be a land of fatness; and his

sisters surrounded him, smiling and kissing him, and asking questions, as though he were another Livingstone. This was very delightful; but a cloud was soon to come across all this sunshine.

Mrs. Wilkinson, always excepting what care she may have had for her son's ill health, had not been unhappy during his absence. She had reigned the female vicaress, without a drawback, praying daily, and in her heart almost hourly, for the continuance in the land of such excellent noblemen as Lord Stapledean. The curate who had taken Arthur's duty had been a very mild young man, and had been quite contented that Mrs. Wilkinson should leave to him the pulpit and the reading-desk. In all other matters he had been satisfied not to interfere with her power, or to contradict her edicts.

"Mr. Gilliflower has behaved excellently," she said to her son, soon after his return; "and has quite understood my position here. I only wish we could keep him in the parish; but that, of course, is impossible."

"I shouldn't want him at all, mother," Arthur had replied. "I am as strong as a horse now."

"All the same; I should like to have him here," said Mrs. Wilkinson, in a tone which was the beginning of the battle. How sweet it would have been to her if Arthur could have gone to some good neighbouring parish, leaving her, with Gabriel Gilliflower as her assistant, to manage the souls of Hurst Staple! And why, as she almost asked herself — why should she not be addressed as the Reverend Mrs. Wilkinson?

But the battle had to be fought, and there was to be an end to these sweet dreams. Her son had been meek enough, but he was not as meek as Mr. Gilliflower;

and now he was sharpening his arrows, and looking to his bow, and preparing for the war.

"Is Adela at Littlebath?" he asked of one of his sisters, on the third or fourth day after his arrival.

"Yes," said Mary. "She is with her aunt. I had a letter from her yesterday."

"I wonder whether she would come here if you were to ask her."

"Oh, that she would," said Mary.

"I doubt it very much," said the more prudent Sophia.

Mrs. Wilkinson heard the conversation, and pondered over it. At the moment she said nothing, pressing down her grief in her deep heart; but that evening, in the book-room, she found Arthur alone; and then she began.

"You were not in earnest just now about Adela, were you, Arthur?"

"Indeed I was, mother; quite in earnest."

"She has been very much away from Littlebath since her aunt came back from Italy to make a home for her. She was with us; and with the Harcourts, in London; and, since the break-up there, she was at Hadley. It would not be right to Miss Gauntlet to ask her away so soon."

"I don't think Miss Gauntlet would mind her coming here; and even if she does —"

"And then my time is so much taken up — what with the schools, and what with the parish visiting —"

"Adela will do the visiting with you."

"I really had rather not have her just at present; that is, unless you have some very particular reason."

"Well, mother; I have a particular reason. But if you had rather that she did not come here, I will go to Littlebath instead."

There was nothing more said on this occasion; but

that was the beginning of the battle. Mrs. Wilkinson could not but know what her son meant; and she now knew that all that she dreaded was to come upon her. It was not that she did not wish to see her son happy, or that she did not think that his being married and settled would tend to his happiness; but she was angry, as other mothers are angry, when their foolish, calf-like boys will go and marry without any incomes on which to support a wife. She said to herself over and over again that night, "I cannot have a second family here in the parsonage; that's certain. And where on earth they're to live, I don't know; and how they're to live when his fellowship is gone, I can't think." And then she shook her head, clothed as it was in her nightcap, and reposing as it was on her pillow. "Two thousand pounds is every shilling she has — every shilling." And then she shook her head again. She knew that that ecclesiastical income was her own; for had not the good Lord Stapledean given it to her? But she had sad thoughts, and feared that even on this point there might be a contest between her and her son.

Two mornings after this the blow came very suddenly. It was now her habit to go into the book-room after breakfast, and set herself down to work — as her husband, the former vicar, had done in his time — and as Arthur, since his return, usually did the same, they naturally found themselves alone together. On the morning in question, she had no sooner seated herself, with her papers before her, than Arthur began. And, alas! he had to tell her, not what he was going to do, but what he had done.

"I spoke to you, mother, of going to Littlebath the other day."

"Yes, Arthur," said she, taking her spectacles off, and laying them beside her.

"I have written to her, instead."

"And you have made her an offer of marriage!"

"Exactly so. I was sure you must have known how my heart stood towards her. It is many years now since I first thought of this; but I was deterred, because I feared that my income — our income, that is — was insufficient."

"Oh, Arthur, and so it is. What will you do? How will you live? Adela has got just two thousand pounds — about seventy or eighty pounds a year. And your fellowship will be gone. Oh, Arthur, how will all the mouths be fed when you have six or seven children round you?"

"I'll tell you what my plans are. If Adela should accept me —"

"Oh, accept you! She'll accept you fast enough," said Mrs. Wilkinson, with the venom with which mothers will sometimes speak of the girls to whom their sons are attached.

"It makes me very happy to hear you say so. But I don't know. When I did hint at the matter once before, I got no encouragement."

"Psha!" said Mrs. Wilkinson.

This sound was music to her son's ears, so he went on with the more cheerfulness to describe his plans.

"You see, mother, situated as I am, I have no right to expect any increase of income, or to hope that I shall ever be better able to marry than I am now."

"But you might marry a girl who had something to help. There is Miss Glunter —"

"But it so happens that I am attached to Adela, and not to Miss Glunter."

"Attached! But, of course, you must have your own way. You are of age, and I cannot prevent your marrying the cook-maid if you like. What I want to know is, where do you mean to live?"

"Here, certainly."

"What! in this house?"

"Certainly. I am bound to live here, as the clergyman of the parish."

Mrs. Wilkinson drew herself up to her full height, put her spectacles on, and looked at the papers before her; then put them off again, and fixed her eyes on her son. "Do you think there will be room in the house," she said. "I fear you would be preparing great discomfort for Adela. Where on earth would she find room for a nursery! But, Arthur, you have not thought of these things."

Arthur, however, had thought of them very often. He knew where to find the nursery, and the room for Adela. His difficulty was as to the rooms for his mother and sisters. It was necessary now that this difference of opinion should be explained.

"I suppose that my children, if I have any —"

"Clergymen always have large families," said Mrs. Wilkinson.

"Well, I suppose they'll have the same nursery that we had."

"What, and turn Sophy and Mary out of it!" And then she paused, and began to rearrange her papers. "That will not do at all, Arthur," she continued. "It would be unjust in me to allow that; much as I think of your interests, I must of course think of theirs as well."

How was he to tell her that the house was his own? It was essentially necessary that he should do so, and that he should do so now. If he gave up the point at the present moment, he might give it up for ever. His resolve was, that his mother and sisters should go elsewhere; but in what words could he explain this resolution to her?

"Dear mother, I think we should understand each other —"

"Certainly," said Mrs. Wilkinson, laying her hands across each other on the table, and preparing for the onslaught.

"It is clearly my duty, as clergyman, to live in this parish, and to live in this house."

"And it is my duty also, as was excellently explained by Lord Stapledean after your poor father's death."

"My idea is this —" and then he paused, for his heart misgave him when he attempted to tell his mother that she must pack up and turn out. His courage all but failed him. He felt that he was right, and yet he hardly knew how to explain that he was right without appearing to be unnatural.

"I do not know that Lord Stapledean said anything about the house; but if he did, it could make no difference."

"Not the least I should think," said the lady. "When he appointed me to the income of the parish, it could hardly be necessary that he should explain that I was to have the house also."

"Mother, when I accepted the living, I promised him that I would give you three hundred and fifty pounds out of the proceeds; and so I will. Adela and I will

be very poor, but I shall endeavour to eke out our income; that is, of course, if she consents to marry me —”

“Psha!”

“—To eke out our income by taking pupils. To do that, I must have the house at my own disposal.”

“And you mean to tell me,” said the female vicarress, rising to her feet in her wrath, “that I — that I — am to go away?”

“I think it will be better, mother.”

“And the poor girls!”

“For one or two of them there would be room here,” said Arthur, trying to palliate the matter.

“One or two of them! Is that the way you would treat your sisters? I say nothing about myself, for I have long seen that you are tired of me. I know how jealous you are because Lord Stapledean has thought proper to —” she could not exactly remember what phrase would best suit her purpose, “to — to — to place me here, as he placed your poor father before. I have have seen it all, Arthur. But I have my duty to do, and I shall do it. What I have undertaken in this parish I shall go through with, and if you oppose me I shall apply to his lordship.”

“I think you have misunderstood Lord Stapledean.”

“I have not misunderstood him at all. I know very well what he meant, and I quite appreciate his motives. I have endeavoured to act up to them, and shall continue to do so. I had thought that I had made the house as comfortable to you as any young man could wish.”

“And so you have.”

“And yet you want to turn me out of it — out of my own house.”

"Not to turn you out, mother. If it suits you to remain here for another year —"

"It will suit me to remain here for another ten years, if I am spared so long. Little viper! I suppose this comes from her. After warming her in my bosom when her father died!"

"It can hardly have come from her, seeing that there has never yet been a word spoken between us on the subject. I fear that you greatly mistake the footing on which we stand together. I have no reasonable ground for hoping for a favourable answer."

"Psha! viper!" exclaimed Mrs. Wilkinson, in dire wrath. Mothers are so angry when other girls, not their own, will get offers; so doubly angry when their own sons make them.

"You will make me very unhappy if you speak ill of her," said Arthur.

"Has it ever come into your head to think where your mother and sisters are to live when you turn them out?" said she.

"Littlebath," suggested Arthur.

"Littlebath!" said Mrs. Wilkinson, with all the scorn that she could muster to the service. "Littlebath! I am to put up with the aunt, I suppose, when you take the niece. But I shall not go to Littlebath at your bidding, sir." And so saying, she gathered up her spectacles, and stalked out of the room.

Arthur was by no means satisfied with the interview, and yet had he been wise he might have been. The subject had been broached, and that in itself was a great deal. And the victory had by no means been with Mrs. Wilkinson. She had threatened, indeed, to appeal to Lord Stapledean; but that very threat showed how con-

scious she was she had no power of her own to hold her place where she was. He ought to have been satisfied; but he was not so.

And now he had to wait for his answer from Adela. Gentlemen who make offers by letter must have a weary time of it, waiting for the return of post, or for the return of two posts, as was the case in this instance. And Arthur had a weary time of it. Two evenings he had to pass, after the conversation above recounted, before he got his letter; and dreadful evenings they were. His mother was majestic, glum, and cross; his sisters were silent and dignified. It was clear to him that they had all been told; and so told as to be leagued in enmity against him. What account their mother may have given to them of their future poverty, he knew not; but he felt certain that she had explained to them how cruelly he meant to turn them out on the wide world; unnatural ogre that he was.

Mary was his favourite, and to her he did say a few words. "Mamma has told you what I have done, hasn't she?"

"Yes, Arthur," said Mary, demurely.

"And what do you think about it?"

"Think about it!"

"Yes. Do you think she'll accept me?"

"Oh! she'll accept you. I don't doubt about that." How cheap girls do make themselves when talking of each other!

"And will it not be an excellent thing for me?" said he.

"But about the house, Arthur!" And Mary looked very glum. So he said nothing further to any of them.

On the day after this he got his answer; and now

we will give the two letters. Arthur's was not written without much trouble and various copies; but Adela's had come straight from her heart at once.

"Hurst Staple, April, 184—.

"My dear Adela,

"You will be surprised to receive a letter from me, and more so, I am sure, when you read its contents. You have heard, I know, of my return home, from Mary. Thank God, I am quite strong again. I enjoyed my trip very much. I had feared that it would be very dull before I knew that George Bertram would go with me.

"I wonder whether you recollect the day when I drove you to Ripley Station. It is eighteen months ago now, I believe; and indeed the time seems much longer. I had thought then to have said to you what I have to say now; but I did not. Years ago I thought to do the same, and then also I did not. You will know what I mean. I did not like to ask you to share such poverty, such a troubled house as mine will be.

"But I have loved you, Adela, for years and years. Do you remember how you used to comfort me at that grievous time, when I disappointed them all so much about my degree? I remember it so well. It used to lie on my tongue then to tell you that I loved you; but that would have been folly. Then came my poor father's death, and the living which I had to take under such circumstances. I made up my mind then that it was my duty to live single. I think I told you, though I am sure you forget that.

"I am not richer now, but I am older. I seem to care less about poverty on my own behalf; and — though I don't know whether you will forgive me for

this — I feel less compunction in asking you to be poor with me. Do not imagine from this that I feel confident as to your answer. I am very far from that. But I know that you used to love me as a friend — and I now venture to ask you to love me as my wife.

“Dearest Adela! I feel that I may call you so now, even if I am never to call you so again. If you will share the world with me, I will give you whatever love can give — though I can give but little more. I need not tell you how we should be circumstanced. My mother must have three hundred and fifty pounds out of the living as long as she lives; and should I survive her, I must, of course, maintain the girls. But I mean to explain to my mother that she had better live elsewhere. There will be trouble about this; but I am sure that it is right. I shall tell her of this letter to-morrow. I think she knows what my intention is, though I have not exactly told it to her.

“I need not say how anxious I shall be till I hear from you. I shall not expect a letter till Thursday morning; but, if possible, do let me have it then. Should it be favourable — though I do not allow myself to have any confidence — but should it be favourable, I shall be at Littlebath on Monday evening. Believe me, that I love you dearly.

“Yours, dear Adela,

“ARTHUR WILKINSON.”

Aunt Penelope was a lady addicted to very early habits, and consequently she and Adela had usually left the breakfast-table before the postman had visited them. From this it resulted that Adela received her letter by herself. The first words told her what it contained, and

her eyes immediately became suffused with tears. After all, then, her patience was to be rewarded. But it had not been patience so much as love; love that admitted of no change; love on which absence had had no effect; love which had existed without any hope; which had been acknowledged by herself, and acknowledged as a sad misfortune. But now —. She took the letter up, but she could not read it. She turned it over, and at the end, through her tears, she saw those words — “Believe me, that I love you dearly.” They were not like the burning words, the sweet violent protestations of a passionate lover. But coming from him, they were enough. At last she was to be rewarded.

And then at length she read it. Ah! yes; she recollected the day well when he had driven her to Ripley Station, and asked her those questions as he was persuading Dumpling to mount the hill. The very words were still in her ears. “Would *you* come to such a house, Adela?” Ay, indeed, would she — if only she were duly asked. But he —! Had it not seemed then as if he almost wished that the proffer should come from her? Not to that would she stoop. But as for sharing such a house as his — any house with him! What did true love mean, if she were not ready to do that?

And she remembered, too, that comforting of which he spoke. That had been the beginning of it all, when he took those walks along the river to West Putford; when she had learned to look for his figure coming through the little wicket at the bottom of their lawn. Then she had taxed her young heart with imprudence — but in doing so she had found that it was too late. She had soon told the truth — to herself that is; and throughout she had been true. Now she had her reward;

there in her hands, pressing it to her heart. He had loved her for years and years, he said. Yes, and so had she loved him; and now he should know it. But not quite at once — in some sweet hour of fullest confidence she would whisper it all to him.

“I think I told you; though, I am sure, you have forgotten that.”

Forget it! no, not a word, not one of his tones, not a glance of his eyes, as he sat there in her father's drawing-room that morning, all but unable to express his sorrows. She could never forget the effort with which she had prevented the tell-tale blood from burning in her cheeks, or the difficulty with which she had endured his confidence. But she had endured it, and now had come her reward. Then he had come to tell her that he was too poor to marry. Much as she loved him, she had then almost despised him. But the world had told him to be wiser. The world, which makes so many niggards, had taught him to be freer of heart. Now he was worthy of her, now that he cared nothing for poverty. Yes, now she had her reward.

He had allowed her till the second post for her reply. That was so kind of him, as it was necessary that she could tell her aunt. As to the nature of her reply — as to that she never doubted for a moment. She would consult her aunt; but she would do so with her mind fully made up as to the future. No aunt, no Mrs. Wilkinson should rob her of her happiness now that he had spoken. No one should rob him of the comfort of her love!

In the evening, after thinking of it for hours, she told her aunt; or, rather, handed to her Arthur's letter, that she might read it. Miss Penelope's face grew very

long as she did read it; and she made this remark —
“Three hundred and fifty pounds! why, my dear, there will be only one hundred and fifty left.”

“We can’t keep our carriage, certainly, aunt.”

“Then you mean to accept him?”

“Yes, aunt.”

“Oh, dear! oh, dear! What will you do when the children come?”

“We must make the best of it, aunt.”

“Oh, dear! oh, dear! And you will have his mother with you always.”

“If so, then we should not be so very poor; but I do not think that is what Arthur means.”

There was not much more said about it between them; and at last, in the seclusion of her own bedroom, Adela wrote her letter.

“Littlebath, Tuesday night.

“Dear Arthur,

“I received your letter this morning; but as you were so kind as to give me a day to answer it, I have put off doing so till I could be quite alone. It will be a very simple answer. I value your love more than anything in the world. You have my whole heart. I hope, for your sake, that the troubles which you speak of will not be many; but whatever they may be, I will share them. If I can, I will lessen them.

“I hope it is not unmaidenly to say that I have received your dear letter with true delight; I do not know why it should be. We have known each other so long, that it is almost natural that I should love you. I do love you dearly, dearest Arthur; and with a heart thankful for God’s goodness to me, I will put my hand in

yours with perfect trust — fearing nothing then, as far as this world is concerned.

“I do not regard the poverty of which you speak, at least not for my own sake. What I have of my own is, I know, very little. I wish now that I could make it more for you. But, no; I will wish for nothing more, seeing that so much has been given to me. Everything has been given to me when I have your love.

“I hope that this will not interfere with your mother’s comfort. If anything now could make me unhappy, it would be that she should not be pleased at our prospects. Give her my kindest, kindest love; and tell her that I hope she will let me look on her as a mother.

“I will write to Mary very soon; but bid her write to me first. I cannot tell her how happy, how very happy I really am, till she has first wished me joy.

“I have, of course, told aunt Penelope. She, too, says something about poverty. I tell her it is croaking. The honest do not beg their bread; do they, Arthur? But in spite of her croaking, she will be very happy to see you on Monday, if it shall suit you to come. If so, let me have one other little line. But I am so contented now, that I shall hardly be more so even to have you here.

“God bless you, my own, own, own dearest.

“Ever yours with truest affection,

“ADELA.”

And I also hope that Adela’s letter will not be considered unmaidenly; but I have my fears. There will be those who will say that it is sadly deficient in reserve. Ah! had she not been reserved enough for the

last four or five years? Reserve is beautiful in a maiden if it be rightly timed. Sometimes one would fain have more of it. But when the heart is full, and when it may speak out; when time, and circumstances, and the world permit — then we should say that honesty is better than reserve. Adela's letter was honest on the spur of the moment. Her reserve had been the work of years.

Arthur, at any rate, was satisfied. Her letter seemed to him to be the very perfection of words. Armed with that he would face his mother, though she appeared armed from head to foot in the Stapledean panoply. While he was reading his letter he was at breakfast with them all; and when he had finished it for the second time, he handed it across the table to his mother.

"Oh! I suppose so," was her only answer, as she gave it him back.

The curiosity of the girls was too great now for the composure of their silent dignity. "It is from Adela," said Mary; "what does she say?"

"You may read it," said Arthur, again handing the letter across the table.

"Well, I do wish you joy," said Mary, "though there will be so very little money."

Seeing that Arthur, since his father's death, had, in fact, supported his mother and sisters out of his own income, this reception of his news was rather hard upon him. And so he felt it.

"You will not have to share the hardships," he said, as he left the room; "and so you need not complain."

There was nothing more said about it that morning; but in the evening, when they were alone, he spoke to his sister again. "You will write to her, Mary, I hope?"

"Yes, I will write to her," said Mary, half ashamed of herself.

"Perhaps it is not surprising that my mother should be vexed, seeing the false position in which both she and I have been placed; partly by my fault, for I should not have accepted the living under such conditions."

"Oh, Arthur, you would not have refused it?"

"I ought to have done so. But, Mary, you and the girls should be ready to receive Adela with open arms. What other sister could I have given you that you would have loved better?"

"Oh, no one; not for her own sake — no one half so well."

"Then tell her so, and do not cloud her prospects by writing about the house. You have all had shelter and comfort hitherto, and be trustful that it will be continued to you."

This did very well with his sister; but the affair with his mother was much more serious. He began by telling her that he should go to Littlebath on Monday, and be back on Wednesday.

"Then I shall go to Bowes on Thursday," said Mrs. Wilkinson. Now we all know that Bowes is a long way from Hurst Staple. The journey has already been made once in these pages. But Mrs. Wilkinson was as good as her word. She did go to Bowes.

"To Bowes!" said Arthur.

"Yes, to Bowes, sir; to Lord Stapledean. That is, if you hold to your scheme of turning me out of my own house."

"I think it would be better, mother, that we should have two establishments."

"And, therefore, I am to make way for you and that —" viper, she was going to say again; but looking into her son's face, she became somewhat more merciful — "for you," she said, "and that chit!"

"As clergyman of the parish, I think that I ought to live in the parsonage. You, mother, will have so much the larger portion of the income."

"Very well. There need be no more words about it. I shall start for Bowes on next Wednesday." And so she did.

Arthur wrote his "one other little line." As it was three times as long as his first letter, it shall not be printed. And he did make his visit to Littlebath. How happy Adela was as she leant trustingly on his arm, and felt that it was her own! He stayed, however, but one night, and was back at Hurst Staple before his mother started for Bowes.

CHAPTER XXI.

Another Journey to Bowes.

MRS. WILKINSON did not leave her home for her long and tedious journey without considerable parade. Her best new black silk dress was packed up in order that due honour might be done to Lord Stapledean's hospitality, and so large a box was needed that Dumpling and the four-wheeled carriage were hardly able to take her to the railway-station. Then there arose the question who should drive her. Arthur offered to do so; but she was going on a journey of decided hostility as regarded him, and under such circumstances she could not bring herself to use his services even over a portion of the road. So the stable-boy was her charioteer.

She talked about Lord Stapledean the whole evening before she went. Arthur would have explained to her something of the lord's character if she would have permitted it. But she would not. When he hinted that she would find Lord Stapledean austere in his manner, she answered that his lordship no doubt had had his reasons for being austere with so very young a man as Arthur had been. When he told her about the Bowes hotel, she merely shook her head significantly. A nobleman who had been so generous to her and hers as Lord Stapledean would hardly allow her to remain at the inn.

"I am very sorry that the journey is forced upon me," she said to Arthur, as she sat with her bonnet on, waiting for the vehicle.

"I am sorry that you are going, mother, certainly," he had answered; "because I know that it will lead to disappointment."

"But I have no other course left open to me," she continued. "I cannot see my poor girls turned out houseless on the world." And then, refusing even to lean on her son's arm, she stepped up heavily into the carriage, and seated herself beside the boy.

"When shall we expect you, mamma?" said Sophia.

"It will be impossible for me to say; but I shall be sure to write as soon as I have seen his lordship. Good-bye to you, girls." And then she was driven away.

"It is a very foolish journey," said Arthur.

"Mamma feels that she is driven to it," said Sophia.

Mrs. Wilkinson had written to Lord Stapledean two days before she started, informing his lordship that it had become very necessary that she should wait upon

him on business connected with the living, and therefore she was aware that her coming would not be wholly unexpected. In due process of time she arrived at Bowes, very tired and not a little disgusted at the great expense of her journey. She had travelled but little alone, and knew nothing as to the cost of hotels, and not a great deal as to that of railways, coaches, and post-chaises. But at last she did arrive at Bowes, and found herself in the same little inn which had previously received Arthur when he made the same journey.

"The lady can have a post-chaise, of course," said the landlady, speaking from the bar. "Oh, yes, Lord Stapledean is at home, safe enough. He's never very far away from it to the best of my belief."

"It's only a mile or so, is it?" said Mrs. Wilkinson.

"Seven long miles, ma'am," said the landlady.

"Seven miles! dear, dear. I declare I never was so tired in my life. You can put the box somewhere behind in the post-chaise, can't you?"

"Yes, ma'am; we can do that. Be you a-going to stay at his lordship's, then?"

To this question Mrs. Wilkinson made an ambiguous answer. Her confidence was waning, now that she drew near to the centre of her aspirations. But at last she did exactly as her son had done before her. She said she would take her box; but that it was possible she might want a bed that evening. "Very possible," the landlady said to herself.

"And you'll take a bite of something before you start, ma'am," she said, out loud. But, no; it was only now twelve o'clock, and she would be at Bowes Lodge a very little after one. She had still sufficient confidence in Lord Stapledean to feel sure of her lunch.

When people reached Hurst Staple Vicarage about that hour, there was always something for them to eat. And so she started.

It was April now; but even in April that bleak northern fell was very cold. Nothing more inhospitable than that road could be seen. It was unsheltered, swept by every blast, very steep, and mercilessly oppressed by turnpikes. Twice in those seven miles one-and-sixpence was inexorably demanded from her.

"But I know one gate always clears the other, when they are so near," she argued.

"Noa, they doant," was all the answer she received from the turnpike woman, who held a baby under each arm.

"I am sure the woman is robbing me," said poor Mrs Wilkinson.

"No, she beant," said the post-boy. They are good hearty people in that part of the world; but they do not brook suspicion, and the courtesies of life are somewhat neglected. And then she arrived at Lord Stapledean's gate.

"Be you she what sent the letter?" said the woman at the lodge, holding it only half open.

"Yes, my good woman; yes," said Mrs. Wilkinson, thinking that her troubles were now nearly over. "I am the lady; I am Mrs. Wilkinson."

"Then my lord says as how you're to send up word what you've got to say." And the woman still stood in the gateway.

"Send up word!" said Mrs. Wilkinson.

"Yees. Just send up word. Here's Jock can rin up."

"But Jock can't tell his lordship what I have to say

to him. I have to see his lordship on most important business," said she, in her dismay.

"I'm telling you no more than what the lord said his ain sell. He just crawled down here his ain sell. 'If a woman comes,' said he, 'don't let her through the gate till she sends up word what she's got to say to me.'" And the portress looked as though she were resolved to obey her master's orders.

"Good heavens! There must be some mistake in this, I'm sure. I am the clergyman of Hurst Staple — I mean his widow. Hurst Staple, you know; his lordship's property."

"I didna know nothing aboot it."

"Oh, drive on, post-boy. There must be some mistake. The woman must be making some dreadful mistake."

At last the courage of the lodge-keeper gave way before the importance of the post-chaise, and she did admit Mrs. Wilkinson to proceed.

"Mither," said the woman's eldest hope, "you'll cotch it noo."

"Eh, lad; weel. He'll no hang me." And so the woman consoled herself.

The house called Bowes Lodge looked damper and greener, more dull, silent, and melancholy even than it had done when Arthur made his visit. The gravel sweep before the door was covered by weeds, and the shrubs looked as though they had known no gardener's care for years. The door itself did not appear to be even for purposes of ingress and egress, and the post-boy had to search among the boughs and foliage with which the place was overgrown before he could find the bell. When found, it sounded with a hoarse, rusty, jangling

noise, as though angry at being disturbed in so unusual a manner.

But, rusty and angry as it was, it did evoke a servant — though not without considerable delay. A cross old man did come at last, and the door was slowly opened. "Yes," said the man. "The marquis was at home, no doubt. He was in the study. But that was no rule why he should see folk." And then he looked very suspiciously at the big trunk, and muttered something to the post-boy, which Mrs. Wilkinson could not hear.

"Will you oblige me by giving my card to his lordship — Mrs. Wilkinson. I want to see him on very particular business. I wrote to his lordship to say that I should be here."

"Wrote to his lordship, did you? Then it's my opinion he won't see you at all."

"Yes, he will. If you'll take him my card, I know he'll see me. Will you oblige me, sir, by taking it in to his lordship?" And she put on her most imperious look.

The man went, and Mrs. Wilkinson sat silent in the post-chaise for a quarter of an hour. Then the servant returned, informing her that she was to send in her message. His lordship had given directions at the lodge that she was not to come up, and could not understand how it had come to pass that the lady had forced her way to the hall-door. At any rate, he would not see her till he knew what it was about.

Now it was impossible for Mrs. Wilkinson to explain the exact nature of her very intricate case to Lord Stapledean's butler, and yet she could not bring herself to give up the battle without making some further effort.

"It is about the vicarage at Hurst Staple," said she; "the vicarage at Hurst Staple" she repeated, impressing the words on the man's memory. "Don't forget, now." The man gave a look of ineffable scorn, and then walked away, leaving Mrs. Wilkinson still in the post-chaise.

And now came on an April shower, such as April showers are on the borders of Westmoreland. It rained and blew; and after a while the rain turned to sleet. The post-boy buttoned up his coat, and got under the shelter of the portico; the horses drooped their heads, and shivered. Mrs. Wilkinson wished herself back at Hurst Staple — or even comfortably settled at Littlebath, as her son had once suggested.

"His lordship don't know nothing about the vicarage," bellowed out the butler, opening the hall-door only half way, so that his face just appeared above the lock.

"Oh, dear! oh, dear!" said Mrs. Wilkinson. "Just let me down into the hall, and then I will explain it to you."

"Them 'orses 'll be foundered as sure as heggs," said the post-boy.

Mrs. Wilkinson at last succeeded in making her way into the hall, and the horses were allowed to go round to the yard. And then at last, also, after half a dozen more messages to and fro, she was informed that Lord Stapledean would see her. So dreadful had been the contest hitherto, that this amount of success was very grateful. Her feeling latterly had been one of intense hostility to the butler rather than to her son. Now that she had conquered that most savage Cerberus, all would be pleasant with her. But, alas! she soon found that in

passing Cerberus she had made good her footing in a region as little desirable as might be.

She was ushered into the same book-room in which Arthur had been received, and soon found herself seated in the same chair, and on the same spot. Lord Stapledean was thinner now even than he had been then; he had a stoop in his shoulders, and his face and hair were more gray. His eyes seemed to his visitor to be as sharp and almost as red as those of ferrets. As she entered, he just rose from his seat and pointed to the chair on which she was to sit.

"Well, ma'am," said he; "what's all this about the clergyman's house at Hurst Staple? I don't understand it at all."

"No, my lord; I'm sure your lordship can't understand. That's why I have thought it my duty to come all this way to explain it."

"All what way?"

"All the way from Hurst Staple, in Hampshire, my lord. When your lordship was so considerate as to settle what my position in the parish was to be —"

"Settle your position in the parish!"

"Yes, my lord — as to my having the income and the house."

"What does the woman mean?" said he, looking down towards the rug beneath his feet, but speaking quite out loud. "Settle her position in the parish! Why, ma'am, I don't know who you are, and what your position is, or anything about you."

"I am the widow of the late vicar, Lord Stapledean; and when he died —"

"I was fool enough to give the living to his son. I remember all about it. He was an imprudent man, and

lived beyond his means, and there was nothing left for any of you — wasn't that it?"

"Yes, my lord," said Mrs. Wilkinson, who was so troubled in spirit that she hardly knew what to say. "That is, we never lived beyond our means at all, my lord. There were seven children; and they were all educated most respectably. The only boy was sent to college; and I don't think there was any imprudence — indeed I don't, my lord. And there was something saved; and the insurance was always regularly paid; and —"

The marquiss absolutely glared at her, as she went on with her domestic defence. The household at Hurst Staple had been creditably managed, considering the income; and it was natural that she should wish to set her patron right. But every word that she said carried her further away from her present object.

"And what on earth have you come to me for?" said Lord Stapledean.

"I'll tell your lordship, if you'll only allow me five minutes. Your lordship remembers when poor Wilkinson died?"

"I don't remember anything about it."

"Your lordship was good enough to send for Arthur."

"Arthur!"

"Yes, my lord."

"Who's Arthur?"

"My boy, my lord. Don't you remember. He was just in orders then, and so you were good enough to put him into the living — that is to say, not exactly into the living; but to make him curate, as it were; and you allocated the income to me; and —"

"Allocated the income!" said Lord Stapledean, putting up his hands in token of unlimited surprise.

"Yes, my lord. Your lordship saw just how it was; and, as I could not exactly hold the living myself—"

"Hold the living yourself! Why, are you not a woman, ma'am?"

"Yes, my lord, of course; that was the reason. So you put Arthur into the living, and you allocated the income to me. That is all settled. But now the question is about the house."

"The woman's mad," said Lord Stapledean, looking again to the carpet, but speaking quite out loud. "Stark mad. I think you'd better go home, ma'am; a great deal better."

"My lord, if you'd only give yourself the trouble to understand me —"

"I don't understand a word you say. I have nothing to do with the income, or the house, or with you, or with your son."

"Oh, yes, my lord, indeed you have."

"I tell you I haven't, ma'am; and what's more, I won't."

"He's going to marry, my lord," continued Mrs. Wilkinson, beginning to whimper; "and we are to be turned out of the house, unless you will interfere to prevent it. And he wants me to go and live at Littlebath. And I'm sure your lordship meant me to have the house when you allocated the income."

"And you've come all the way to Bowes, have you, because your son wants to enjoy his own income?"

"No, my lord; he doesn't interfere about that. He knows he can't touch that, because your lordship allocated it to me — and, to do him justice, I don't think

he would if he could. And he's not a bad boy, my lord; only mistaken about this."

"Oh, he wants his own house, does he?"

"But it isn't his own house, you know. It has been my house ever since his father died. And if your lordship will remember —"

"I tell you what, Mrs. Wilkinson; it seems to me that your son should not let you come out so far by yourself —"

"My lord!"

"And if you'll take my advice, you'll go home as fast as you can, and live wherever he bids you."

"But, my lord —"

"At any rate, I must beg you not to trouble me any more about the matter. When I was a young man your husband was with me for a few months, and I really think that two presentations to the living has been a sufficient payment for that. I know nothing about your son, and I don't want to know anything. I dare say he's as good as most other clergymen —"

"Oh, yes; he is, my lord."

"But I don't care a straw who lives in the house."

"Don't you, my lord?" said Mrs. Wilkinson, very despondently.

"Not one straw. I never heard such a proposition from a woman in my life — never. And now, if you'll allow me, I'll wish you good-morning, ma'am. Good-morning to you." And the marquis made a slight feint, as though to raise himself from his chair.

Mrs. Wilkinson got up, and stood upright before him, with her handkerchief to her eyes. It was very grievous to her to have failed so utterly. She still felt sure that if Lord Stapledean would only be made to understand

the facts of the case, he would even yet take her part. She had come so far to fight her battle, that she could not bring herself to leave the ground as long as a chance of victory remained to her. How could she put the matter in the fewest words, so as to make the marquis understand the very — very truth?

"If your lordship would only allow me to recall to your memory the circumstances of the case, — how you, yourself, allocated —"

Lord Stapledean turned suddenly at the bell-rope, and gave it a tremendous pull — then another — and then a third, harder than the others. Down came the rope about his ears, and the peal was heard ringing through the house.

"Thompson," he said to the man, as he entered, "show that lady the door."

"Yes, my lord."

"Show her the door immediately."

"Yes, my lord," said Thompson, standing irresolute. "Now, ma'am; the post-chaise is waiting."

Mrs. Wilkinson had still strength enough to prevent collapse, and to gather herself together with some little feminine dignity. "I think I have been very badly treated," she said, as she prepared to move.

"Thompson," shrieked the marquis, in his passion; "show that lady the door."

"Yes, my lord;" and Thompson gracefully waved his hand, pointing down the passage. It was the only way in which he could show Mrs. Wilkinson the way out.

And then, obedient to necessity, she walked forth. Never had she held her head so high, or tossed her bonnet with so proud a shake, as she did in getting into

that post-chaise. Thompson held the handle of the carriage-door: he also offered her his arm, but she despised any such aid. She climbed in unassisted; the post-boy mounted his jade; and so she was driven forth, not without titters from the woman at the lodge-gate. With heavy heart she reached the inn, and sat herself down to weep alone in her bedroom.

"So, you've come back?" said the landlady.

"Ugh!" exclaimed Mrs. Wilkinson.

We will not dwell long on her painful journey back to Hurst Staple; nor on the wretched reflections with which her mind was laden. She sent on a line by post to her eldest daughter, so that she was expected; and Dumpling and the phaëton, and the stable-boy were there to meet her. She had feared that Arthur would come: but Arthur had dreaded the meeting also; and, having talked the matter over with his sisters, had remained at home. He was in the book-room, and hearing the wheels, as the carriage drew up to the door, he went out to greet his mother on the steps.

At the first moment of meeting there was nothing said, but she warmly pressed the hand which he held out to her,

"What sort of a journey have you had?" said Sophia.

"Oh, it is a dreadful place," said Mrs. Wilkinson.

"It is not a nice country," said Arthur.

By this time they were in the drawing-room, and the mother was seated on a sofa, with one of her girls on each side of her.

"Sophy," she said, "get up for a moment; I want Arthur to come there." So Sophy did get up, and her son immediately taking her place, put his arm round his mother's waist.

"Arthur," she whispered to him, "I fear I have been foolish about this."

That was all that was ever said to him about the journey to Bowes. He was not the man to triumph over his mother's failure. He merely kissed her when her little confession was made, and pressed her slightly with his arm. From that time it was understood that Adela was to be brought thither, as soon as might be, to reign the mistress of the vicarage; and that then, what further arrangements might be necessary, were to be made by them all at their perfect leisure. That question of the nursery might, at any rate, remain in abeyance for twelve months.

Soon after that, it was decided in full conclave, that if Adela would consent, the marriage should take place in the summer. Very frequent letters passed between Hurst Staple and Littlebath, and Mrs. Wilkinson no longer alluded to them with severity, or even with dislike. Lord Stapledean had, at any rate, thoroughly convinced her that the vicarage-house belonged to the vicar — to the vicar male, and not to the vicar female; and now that her eyes had been opened on this point, she found herself obliged to confess that Adela Gauntlet would not make a bad wife.

"Of course we shall be poor, mother; but we expect that."

"I hope you will, at least, be happy," said Mrs. Wilkinson, not liking at present to dwell on the subject of their poverty, as her conscience began to admonish her with reference to the three hundred and fifty pounds per annum.

"I should think I might be able to get pupils," con-

tinued Arthur. "If I had two at one hundred and fifty pounds each, we might be comfortable enough."

"Perhaps Adela would not like to have lads in the house."

"Ah, mother, you don't know Adela. She will not object to anything because she does not herself like it." And in this manner that affair was so far settled.

And then Adela was invited to Hurst Staple, and she accepted the invitation. She was not coy in declaring the pleasure with which she did so, nor was she bashful or shamefaced in the matter. She loved the man that she was to marry — had long loved him; and now it was permitted to her to declare her love. Now it was her duty to declare it, and to assure him, with all the pretty protestations in her power, that her best efforts should be given to sweeten his cup, and smooth his path. Her duty now was to seek his happiness, to share his troubles, to be one with him. In her mind it was not less her duty now than it would be when by God's ordinance, they should be one bone and one flesh.

While their mother had held her seat on her high horse, with reference to that question of the house, Sophia and Mary had almost professed hostility to Adela. They had given in no cordial adherence to their brother's marriage; but now they were able to talk of their coming sister with interest and affection. "I know that Adela would like this, Arthur," and "I'm sure that Adela would prefer that;" and "when we're gone, you know, Adela will do so and so." Arthur received all this with brotherly love and the kindest smiles, and thanked God in his heart that his mother had taken that blessed journey to Bowes Hall.

"Adela," he once said to her, as they were walking

together, one lonely spring evening, along the reedy bank of that river, "Adela, had I had your courage, all this would have been settled long since."

"I don't know," she said; "but I am sure of this, that it is much better as it is. Now we may fairly trust that we do know our own minds. Love should be tried, perhaps, before it is trusted."

"I should have trusted yours at the first word you could have spoken, the first look you would have given me."

"And I should have done so too; and then we might have been wrong. Is it not well as it is, Arthur?"

And then he declared that it was very well; very well, indeed. Ah, yes! how could it have been better with him? He thought now of his past sorrows, his deep woes, his great disappointments; of that bitter day at Oxford when the lists came down; of the half-broken heart with which he had returned from Bowes; of the wretchedness of that visit to West Putford. He thought of the sad hours he had passed, seated idle and melancholy in the vicarage book-room, meditating on his forlorn condition. He had so often wailed over his own lot, droning out a dirge, a melancholy *væ victis* for himself! And now, for the first time, he could change the note. Now, his song was *Io triumphe*, as he walked along. He shouted out a joyful *pæan* with the voice of his heart. Had he taken the most double of all firsts, what more could fate have given to him? or, at any rate, what better could fate have done for him?

And to speak sooth, fate had certainly given to him quite as much as he had deserved.

And then it was settled that they should be married early in the ensuing June. "On the first," said Arthur.

"No; the thirtieth," said Adela, laughing. And then, as women always give more than they claim, it was settled that they should be married on the eleventh. Let us trust that the day may always be regarded as propitious.

CHAPTER XXII.

Mr. Bertram's Death.

SIR HENRY HARCOURT had certainly played his hand badly, considering the number of trumps that he had held, and that he had turned up an honour in becoming solicitor-general. He was not now in a happy condition. He was living alone in his fine house in Eaton Square; he was out of office; he was looked on with an evil eye by his former friends, in that he had endeavoured to stick to office too long; he was deeply in debt, and his once golden hopes with reference to Mr. Bertram were becoming fainter and fainter every day. Nor was this all. Not only did he himself fear that he should get but little of the Hadley money, but his creditors had begun to have the same fears. They had heard that he was not to be the heir, and were importunate accordingly. It might be easy to stave them off till Mr. Bertram should be under the ground; but then — what then? His professional income might still be large, though not increasing as it should have done. And what lawyer can work well if his mind be encumbered by deep troubles of his own?

He had told George Bertram that he would go down to Hadley and claim his wife if he did not receive a favourable message from his wife's grandfather; and he now determined to take some such step. He felt himself driven to do something; to bring about some arrange-

ment; to make some use of the few remaining grains of sand which were still to run through the glass that was measuring out the lees of life for that old man.

So thinking, but not quite resolved as to what he would do when he reached the house, he started for Hadley. He knew that George was still there, that his wife was there, and that Mr. Bertram was there; and he trusted that he should not fail at any rate in seeing them. He was not by nature a timid man, and had certainly not become so by education; but, nevertheless, his heart did not beat quite equably within his bosom when he knocked at the rich man's door.

Of course he was well known to the servant. At first he asked after Mr. Bertram, and was told that he was much the same — going very fast; the maid did not think that Sir Henry could see him. The poor girl, knowing that the gentleman before her was not a welcome visitor, stood in the doorway, as though to guard the ladies who were in the drawing-room.

"Who is here now?" said Sir Henry. "Who is staying here?"

"Mr. George," said the girl, thinking that she would be safest in mentioning his name, "and Miss Baker, sir."

"Lady Harcourt is here, I suppose?"

"Yes, sir; her ladyship is in the drawing-room," and she shook in her shoes before him as she made the announcement.

"For a moment Sir Henry was inclined to force his way by the trembling young woman, and appear before the ladies. But then, what would he get by it? Angry as he was with all the Hadley people, he was still able to ask himself that question. Supposing that he was

there, standing before his wife; supposing even that he were able to bring her to his feet by a glance, how much richer would that make him? What bills would that pay? He had loved his wife once with a sort of love; but that day was gone. When she had been at such pains to express her contempt for him, all tenderness had deserted him. It might be wise to make use of her — not to molest her, as long as her grandfather lived. When the old miser should have gone, it would be time for him to have his revenge. In the meantime, he could gain nothing by provoking her. So he told the servant that he wished to see Mr. George Bertram.

As it happened, George and Lady Harcourt were together, and Miss Baker was keeping watch with the sick man upstairs. The drawing-room was close to the hall, and Caroline's eager ear caught the tones of her husband's voice.

"It is Sir Henry," she said, becoming suddenly pale, and rising to her feet, as though prepared to retreat to some protection. Bertram's duller ear could not hear him, but he also rose from his chair. "Are you sure it is he?"

"I heard his voice plainly," said Caroline, in a tremulous whisper. "Do not leave me, George. Whatever happens, do not leave me." They called each other now by their Christian names, as cousins should do; and their intercourse with each other had never been other than cousinly since that parting in Eaton Square.

And then the door was opened, and the maid-servant, in the glummiest of voices, announced that Sir Henry wanted to see Mr. George.

"Show him into the dining-room," said George; and

then following the girl after a minute's interval, he found himself once more in the presence of his old friend.

Sir Henry was even darker looking, and his brow still more forbidding than at that last interview at George's chambers. He was worn and care-marked, and appeared to be ten years older than was really the case. He did not wait till George should address him, but began at once: —

"Bertram," said he, with a voice intended to be stern, "there are two persons here I want to see, your uncle and my wife."

"I make no objection to your seeing either, if they are willing to see you."

"Yes; but that won't do for me. My duty compels me to look after them both, and I mean to do so before I leave Hadley."

"I will send your name to them at once," said George; "but it must depend on them whether they will see you." And so saying, he rang the bell, and sent a message up to his uncle.

Nothing was said till the girl returned. Sir Henry paced the room backward and forward, and George stood leaning with his back against the chimney-piece. "Mr. Bertram says that he'll see Sir Henry, if he'll step up stairs," said the girl.

"Very well. Am I to go up now?"

"If you please, sir."

Bertram followed Sir Henry to the door, to show him the room; but the latter turned round on the stairs, and said that he would prefer to have no one present at the interview.

"I will only open the doors for you," said the other. This he did, and was preparing to return, when his uncle

called him. "Do not go away, George," said he. "Sir Henry will want you to show him down again." And so they stood together at the bedside.

"Well, Sir Henry, this is kind of you," said he, putting his thin, bony hand out upon the coverlid, by way of making an attempt at an Englishman's usual greeting.

Sir Henry took it gently in his, and found it cold and clammy. "It is nearly all over now, Sir Henry," said the old man.

"I hope not," said the visitor, with the tone usual on such occasions. "You may rally yet, Mr. Bertram."

"Rally!" And there was something in the old man's voice that faintly recalled the bitter railing sound of other days. "No; I don't suppose I shall ever rally much more."

"Well; we can only hope for the best. That's what I do, I can assure you."

"That is true. We do hope for the best — all of us. I can still do that, if I do nothing else."

"Of course," said Sir Henry. And then he stood still for a while, meditating how best he might make use of his present opportunity. What could he say to secure some fraction of the hundreds of thousands which belonged to the dying man? That he had a right to at least a moiety of them his inmost bosom told him; but how should he now plead his rights? Perhaps after all it would have been as well for him to have remained in London.

"Mr. Bertram," at last he said, "I hope you won't think it unbecoming in me if I say one word about business in your present state?"

"No — no — no," said the old man. "I can't do much, as you see; but I'll endeavour to listen."

"You can't be surprised that I should be anxious about my wife."

"Umph!" said Mr. Bertram. "You haven't treated her very well, it seems."

"Who says so?"

"A woman wouldn't leave a fine house in London, to shut herself up with a sick old man here, if she were well treated. I don't want any one to tell me that."

"I can hardly explain all this to you now, sir; particularly —"

"Particularly as I am dying. No, you cannot. George, give me a glass of that stuff. I am very weak, Sir Henry, and can't say much more to you."

"May I ask you this one question, sir? Have you provided for your granddaughter?"

"Provided for her!" and the old man made a sadly futile attempt to utter the words with that ominous shriek which a few years since would have been sure to frighten any man who would have asked such a question. "What sort of man can he be, George, to come to me now with such a question?" And so saying, he pulled the clothes over him as though resolved to hold no further conversation.

"He is very weak," said George. "I think you had better leave him."

A hellish expression came across the lawyer's face. "Yes," he said to himself; "go away, that I may leave you here to reap the harvest by yourself. Go away, and know myself to be a beggar." He had married this man's grandchild, and yet he was to be driven from his bedside like a stranger.

"Tell him to go," said Mr. Bertram. "He will know it all in a day or two."

"You hear what he says," whispered George.

"I do hear," muttered the other, "and I will remember."

"He hardly thinks I would alter my will now, does he? Perhaps he has pen and ink in his pocket, ready to do it."

"I have only spoken in anxiety about my wife," said Sir Henry; "and I thought you would remember that she was your child's daughter."

"I do remember it. George, why doesn't he leave me?"

"Harcourt, it will be better that you should go," said Bertram; "you can have no idea how weak my uncle is;" and he gently opened the door.

"Good-bye, Mr. Bertram. I had not intended to disturb you." And so saying, Sir Henry slunk away.

"You know what his will is, of course," said Sir Henry, when they were again in the dining-room.

"I have not the slightest idea on the subject," said the other; "not the remotest conception. He never speaks to me about it."

"Well; and now for Lady Harcourt. Where shall I find her?"

To this question George gave no answer; nor was he able to give any. Caroline was no longer in the drawing-room. Sir Henry insisted that he would see her, and declared his intention of staying in the house till he did so. But Miss Baker at last persuaded him that all his efforts would be useless. Nothing but force would induce Lady Harcourt to meet him.

"Then force shall be used," said Sir Henry.

"At any rate not now," said George.

"What, sir! do you set yourself up as her protector? Is she base enough to allow you to interfere between her and her husband?"

"I am her protector at the present moment, Sir Henry. What passed between us long since has been now forgotten. But we are still cousins; and while she wants protection, I shall give it to her."

"Oh, you will; will you?"

"Certainly. I look upon her as though she were my sister. She has no other brother."

"That's very kind of you, and very complaisant of her. But what if I say that I don't choose that she should have any such brother? Perhaps you think that as I am only her husband, I ought not to have any voice in the matter?"

"I do not suppose that you can care for her much, after the word you once used to her."

"And what the devil is it to you what word I used to her? That's the tack you go on, is it? Now, I'll tell you fairly what I shall do. I will wait till the breath is out of that old man's body, and then I shall take my wife out of this house — by force, if force be necessary." And so saying, Sir Henry turned to the front door, and took his departure, without making any further adieu.

"What dreadful trouble we shall have," whimpered Miss Baker, almost in tears.

Things went on at Hadley for three days longer without any change, except that Mr. Bertram became weaker, and less inclined to speak. On the third morning, he did say a few words: — "George, I begin to think I have done wrong about you; but I fear it is too late."

His nephew declared that he was sure that things would turn out well, muttering any platitude which might quiet the dying man.

"But it is too late, isn't it?"

"For any change in your will, sir? Yes, it is too late. Do not think of it."

"Ah, yes; it would be very troublesome — very troublesome. Oh, me! It has nearly come now, George; very nearly."

It had very nearly come. He did not again speak intelligibly to any of them. In his last hours he suffered considerably, and his own thoughts seemed to irritate him. But when he did mutter a few words, they seemed to refer to trivial matters — little plagues which dying men feel as keenly as those who are full of life. To the last he preferred George either to his niece or to his granddaughter; and was always best pleased when his nephew was by him. Once or twice he mentioned Mr. Pritchett's name; but he showed his dissent when they proposed to send for his man of business.

On the afternoon of that day, he breathed his last in the presence of his three relatives. His nearest relative, indeed, was not there; nor did they dare to send for him. He had latterly expressed so strong a disgust at the very name of Sir Lionel, that they had ceased by common consent to mention Bertram's father. He seemed to be aware that his last moments were approaching, for he would every now and then raise his withered hand from off the bed, as though to give them warning. And so he died, and the eyes of the rich man were closed.

He died full of years, and perhaps in one, and that the most usual acceptation of the word, full of honour. He owed no man a shilling, had been true to all his en-

gements, had been kind to his relatives with a rough kindness; he had loved honesty and industry, and had hated falsehood and fraud; to him the herd born only to consume the fruits, had ever been odious; that he could be generous, his conduct in his nephew's earliest years had plainly shown; he had carried, too, in his bosom a heart not altogether hardened against his kind, for he had loved his nephew, and, to a certain extent, his niece also, and his granddaughter.

But in spite of all this, he had been a bad man. He had opened his heart to that which should never find admittance to the heart of man. The iron of his wealth had entered into his very soul. He had made half a million of money, and that half-million had been his god — his only god — and, indeed, men have but one god. The true worship of the one loved shrine prevents all other worship. The records of his money had been his deity. There, in his solitude at Hadley, he had sat and counted them as they grew, mortgages and bonds, deeds and scrip, shares in this and shares in that, thousands in these funds and tens of thousands in those. To the last, he had gone on buying and selling, buying in the cheap market and selling in the dear; and everything had gone well with him.

Everything had gone well with him! Such was the city report of old Mr. Bertram. But let the reader say how much, or rather how little, had gone well. Faustus-like, he had sold himself to a golden Mephistopheles, and his Margaret had turned to stone within his embrace.

How many of us make Faust's bargain? The bodily attendance of the devil may be mythical; but in the spirit he is always with us. And how rarely have we the power to break the contract! The London merchant

had so sold himself. He had given himself body and soul to a devil. The devil had promised him wealth, and had kept his word. And now the end had come, though the day of his happiness had not yet arrived.

But the end had not come. All this was but the beginning. If we may believe that a future life is to be fitted to the desires and appetites as they are engendered here, what shall we think of the future of a man whose desire has been simply for riches, whose appetite has been for heaps of money? How miserably is such a poor wretch cheated! How he gropes about, making his bargain with blind eyes; thinking that he sees beyond his neighbours! Who is so green, so soft, so foolishly the victim of the sorriest sharper as this man? Weigh out all his past, and what has it been? Weigh out his future — if you can — and think what it must be. Poor, dull Faustus! What! thou hast lost everything among the thimble-riggers? Poor, dull, stupid wretch!

Mr. Bertram had not been a good man, nor had he been a wise man. But he had been highly respectable, and his memory is embalmed in tons of marble and heaps of monumental urns. Epitaphs, believed to be true, testify to his worth; and deeds, which are sometimes as false as epitaphs, do the same. He is a man of whom the world has agreed to say good things; to whom fame, that rich city fame, which speaks with a cornet-a-piston made of gold, instead of a brazen trumpet, has been very kind. — But, nevertheless, he was not a good man. As regards him, it will only remain for us to declare what was his will, and that shall be done in the next chapter.

It was settled that he should be buried on the sixth day after his death, and that his will should be read after his funeral. George had now to manage every-

thing, and to decide who should be summoned to the reading. There were two whom he felt bound to call thither, though to them the reading he knew would be a bitter grief. There was, in the first place, his father, Sir Lionel, whose calls for money had not of late decreased in urgency. It would be seemly that he should come; but the opening of the will would not be a pleasant hour for him. Then there would be Sir Henry. He also was, of course, summoned, painful as it was to his wife to have to leave the house at such a time. Nor, indeed, did he wait to be invited; for he had written to say that he should be there before he received George Bertram's note. Mr. Pritchett also was sent for, and the old man's attorney.

And then, when these arrangements had been made, the thoughts of the living reverted from the dead to themselves. How should those three persons who now occupied that house so lovingly provide for themselves? and where should they fix their residence? George's brotherly love for his cousin was very well in theory: it was well to say that the past had been forgotten; but there are things for which no memory can lose its hold. He and Caroline had loved each other with other love than that of a brother and a sister; and each knew that they two might not dwell under the same roof. It was necessary to talk over these matters, and in doing so it was very hard not to touch on forbidden subjects.

Caroline had made up her mind to live again with her aunt — had made up her mind to do so, providing that her husband's power was not sufficient to prevent it. Miss Baker would often tell her that the law would compel her to return to her lord; that she would be forced to be again the mistress of the house in Eaton

Square, and again live as the prosperous wife of the prosperous politician, To this Caroline had answered but little; but that little had been in a manner that had thoroughly frightened Miss Baker. Nothing, Lady Harcourt had said, nothing should induce her to do so.

"But if you cannot help yourself, Caroline?"

"I will help myself. I will find a way to prevent, at any rate, that —" So much she had said, but nothing further: and so much Miss Baker had repeated to George Bertram, fearing the worst.

It was not till the day before the funeral that Caroline spoke to her cousin on the subject.

"George," she said to him, "shall we be able to live here? — to keep on this house?"

"You and Miss Baker, you mean?"

"Yes; aunt and I. We should be as quiet here as anywhere, — and I am used to these people now."

"It must depend on the will. The house was his own property; but, doubtless, Miss Baker could rent it."

"We should have money enough for that, I suppose."

"I should hope so. But we none of us know anything yet. All your own money — the income, at least, coming from it — is in Sir Henry's hands."

"I will never condescend to ask for that," she said. And then there was a pause in their conversation.

"George," she continued, after a minute or two, "you will not let me fall into his hands?"

He could not help remembering that his own mad anger had already thrown her into the hands which she now dreaded so terribly. Oh, if those two last years might but pass away as a dream, and leave him free to clasp her to his own bosom as his own! But the errors

of past years will not turn themselves to dreams. There is no more solid stuff in this material world than they are. They never melt away, or vanish into thin air.

"Not if it can be avoided," he replied.

"Ah! but it can be avoided; can it not? Say that you know it can. Do not make me despair. It cannot be that he has a right to imprison me."

"I hardly know what he has a right to do. But he is a stern man, and will not easily be set aside."

"But you will not desert me?"

"No; I will not desert you. But —"

"But what?"

"For your sake, Caroline, we must regard what people will say. Our names have been mixed together; but not as cousins."

"I know, I know. But, George, you do not suppose I intended you should live here. I was not thinking of that. I know that that may not be."

"For myself, I shall keep my chambers in London. I shall just be able to starve on there; and then I shall make one more attempt at the bar."

"And I know you will succeed. You are made for success at last; I have always felt that."

"A man must live somehow. He must have some pursuit; and that is more within my reach than any other: otherwise I am not very anxious for success. What is the use of it all? Of what use will it be to me now?"

"Oh, George!"

"Well, is it not true?"

"Do not tell me that I have made shipwreck of all your fortune!"

"No; I do not say that you have done it. It was I

that drove the bark upon the rocks; I myself. But the timbers on that account are not the less shattered."

"You should strive to throw off that feeling. You have so much before you in the world."

"I have striven. I have thought that I could love other women. I have told others that I did love them; but my words were false, and they and I knew that they were false. I have endeavoured to think of other things — of money, ambition, politics; but I can care for none of them. If ever a man cut his own throat, I have done so."

She could not answer him at once, because she was now sobbing, and the tears were streaming from her eyes. "And what have I done?" she said at last. "If your happiness is shattered, what must mine be? I sometimes think that I cannot live and bear it. With him," she added, after another pause, "I will not live and bear it. If it comes to that, I will die, George;" and rising from her chair, she walked across the room, and took him sharply by the arm. "George," she said, "you will protect me from that; say that you will save me from that."

"Protect you!" said he, repeating her words, and hardly daring to look into her face. How could he protect her? how save her from the lord she had chosen for herself? It might be easy enough for him to comfort her now with promises; but he could not find it in his heart to hold out promises which he could not fulfil. If, after the reading of the will, Sir Henry Harcourt should insist on taking his wife back with him, how could he protect her — he, of all men in the world?

"You will not give me up to him!" she said, wildly. "If you do, my blood will lie upon your head. George!"

George! say that you will save me from that! To whom can I look now but to you?"

"I do not think he will force you away with him."

"But if he does? Will you stand by and see me so used?"

"Certainly not; but, Caroline —"

"Well."

"It will be better that I should not be driven to interfere. The world will forget that I am your cousin, but will remember that I was once to have been your husband."

"The world! I am past caring for the world. It is nothing to me now if all London knows how it is with me. I have loved, and thrown away my love, and tied myself to a brute. I have loved, and do love; but my love can only be a sorrow to me. I do not fear the world; but God and my conscience I do fear. Once, for one moment, George, I thought that I would fear nothing. Once, for one moment, I was still willing to be yours; but I remembered what you would think of me if I should so fall, and I repented my baseness. May God preserve me from such sin! But, for the world — why should you or I fear the world?"

"It is for you that I fear it. It would grieve me to hear men speak lightly of your name."

"Let them say what they please; the wretched are always trodden on. Let them say what they please. I deserved it all when I stood before the altar with that man; when I forbade my feet to run, or my mouth to speak, though I knew that I hated him, and owned it to my heart. What shall I do, George, to rid me of that sin?"

She had risen and taken hold of his arm when first

she asked him to protect her, and she was still standing beside the chair on which he sat. He now rose also, and said a few gentle words, such as he thought might soothe her.

"Yes," she continued, as though she did not heed him, "I said to myself almost twenty times during that last night that I hated him in my very soul, that I was bound in honour even yet to have him — in honour, and in truth, and in justice. But my pride forbade it — my pride and my anger against you."

"It is useless to think of it now, dear."

"Ah, yes! quite useless. Would that I had done it then — then, at the last moment. They asked me whether I would love that man. I whispered inwardly to myself that I loathed him; but my tongue said 'Yes,' out loud. Can such a lie as that, told in God's holy temple, sworn before his own altar — can such perjury as that ever be forgiven me?

"But I shall sin worse still if I go back to him," she continued, after a while. "I have no right, George, to ask anything from your kindness as a cousin; but for your love's sake, your old love, which you cannot forget, I do ask you to save me from this. But it is this rather that I ask, that you will save me from the need of saving myself."

That evening George sat up late alone, preparing for the morrow's work, and trying to realize the position in which he found himself. Mr. Pritchett, had he been there, would have whispered into his ears, again and again, those ominous and all-important words, Half a million of money, Mr. George; half a million of money. And, indeed, though Mr. Pritchett was not there, the remembrances of those overflowing coffers did force them-

selves upon his mind. Who can say that he, if placed as Bertram then was, would not think of them?

He did think of them — not over deeply, nor with much sadness. He knew that they were not to be his; neither the whole of them, nor any part of them. So much his uncle had told him with sufficient plainness. He knew also that they might all have been his: and then he thought of that interview in which Mr. Bertram had endeavoured to beg from him a promise to do that for which his own heart so strongly yearned. Yes; he might have had the bride, and the money too. He might now have been sitting in privacy, with the wife of his bosom, laying out in gorgeous plans the splendour of their future life. It would be vain to say that there was no disappointment at his heart.

But yet there was within his breast a feeling of gratified independence which sufficed to support him. At least he might boast that he had not sold himself; not out loud, but with that inward boasting which is so common with most of us. There was a spirit within him endowed with a greater wealth than any which Mr. Pritchett might be able to enumerate; and an inward love, the loss of which could hardly have been atoned for even by the possession of her whom he had lost. Nor was this the passion which men call self-love. It was rather a vigorous knowledge of his own worth as a man; a strong will, which taught him that no price was sufficient to buy from his assent that black should be reckoned white, or white be reckoned black.

His uncle, he knew, had misunderstood him. In rejecting the old man's offers, he had expressed his contempt for riches — for riches that is as any counter-balance for independence. Mr. Bertram had taken what

he said for more than it was worth; and had supposed that his nephew, afflicted with some singular lunacy, disliked money for its own sake. George had never cared to disabuse his uncle's mind. Let him act as he will, he had said to himself, it is not for me to dictate to him, either on the one side or the other. And so the error had gone on.

To-morrow morning the will would be read out loud, and George would have to listen to the reading of it. He knew well enough that the world looked on him as his uncle's probable heir, and that he should have to bear Mr. Pritchett's hardly expressed pity, Sir Henry's malignant pleasure, and Sir Lionel's loud disgust. All this was nearly as bad to him as the remembrance of what he had lost; but by degrees he screwed his courage up to the necessary point of endurance.

"What is Pritchett to me, with his kind, but burdensome solicitude? what Sir Henry's mad anger? How can they affect my soul? or what even is my father? Let him rave. I care not to have compassion on myself; why should his grief assail me — grief which is so vile, so base, so unworthy of compassion?"

And thus schooling himself for the morrow, he betook himself to bed.

CHAPTER XXIII.

The Will.

THE only attendants at old Mr. Bertram's funeral were his nephew, Mr. Pritchett, and the Hadley doctor. The other gentlemen were to be present only at the more interesting ceremony of reading the will. Sir Lionel had written to say that he was rather unwell:

that he certainly would come up from Littlebath so as to be present at the latter performance; but that the very precarious state of his health, and the very inconvenient hours of the trains, unhappily prevented him from paying the other last sad duty to his brother's remains. Sir Henry Harcourt had plainly demanded at what hour the will would be read; and Mr. Stickatit, junior — Mr. George Stickatit — of the firm of Dry and Stickatit, had promised to be at Hadley punctually at 2·8 P. M. And he kept his word.

Mr. Pritchett came down by an early train, and, as was fit on such an occasion, was more melancholy than usual. He was very melancholy and very sad, for he felt that that half-million of money was in a great jeopardy; and, perhaps, even the death of his old friend of forty years standing may have had some effect on him. It was a mingled feeling that pervaded him. "Oh! Mr. George," he said, just before they went to the churchyard, "We are grass of the field, just grass of the field; here to-day, and gone to-morrow; flourishing in the morning, and cast into the oven before night! It behoves such frail, impotent creatures to look close after their interests — half a million of money! I'm afraid you didn't think enough about it, Mr. George."

And then the Hadley bells were rung again; but they were not rung loudly. It seemed to Bertram that no one noticed that anything more than usually sad was going on. He could hardly realise it to himself that he was going to put under the ground almost his nearest relative. The bells rang out a dirge, but they did it hardly above their breath. There were but three boys gathered at the little gate before the door to see the body of the rich man carried to his last home. George

stood with his back to the empty dining-room fireplace; on one side stood Mr. Pritchett, and on the other the Barnet doctor. Very few words passed between them, but they were not in their nature peculiarly lugubrious. And then there was a scuffling heard on the stairs — a subdued, decent undertaker's scuffling — as some hour or two before had been heard the muffled click of a hammer. Feet scuffled down the stairs, outside the dining-room door, and along the passage. And then the door was opened, and in low, decent undertaker's voice, red-nosed, sombre, well-fed Mr. Mortmain told them that they were ready.

"These are yours, sir," and he handed a pair of black gloves to George. "And these are yours, sir," and he gave another pair to the doctor. But the doctor held them instead of putting them on; otherwise Mr. Mortmain could not be expected to change them after the ceremony for a pair of lighter colour. They understood each other; and what could a country doctor do with twenty or thirty pairs of black gloves a year? "And these yours, Mr. Pritchett."

"Oh! Mr. George," sighed Pritchett. "To think it should come to this! But he was a good gentleman; and very successful — very successful."

"There were not ten people in the church or in the churchyard during the whole time of the funeral. To think that a man with half a million of money could die and be got rid of with so little parade! What money could do — in a moderate way — was done. The coffin was as heavy as lead could make it. The cloth of the best. The plate upon it was of silver, or looked like it. There was no room for an equipage of hearses and black coaches, the house was so unfortunately near

to the churchyard. It was all done in a decent, sombre, useful, money-making way, as beseemed the remains of such a man.

But it was on 'Change that he was truly buried; in Capel Court that his funeral sermon was duly preached. These were the souls that knew him, the ears to which his name loomed large. He had been true and honest in all his dealings — there, at least. He had hurt no body by word or deed — excepting in the way of trade. And had kept his hands from picking and stealing — from all picking that is not warranted by city usage, and from all stealing that the law regards as such. Therefore, there, on 'Change, they preached his funeral sermon loudly, and buried him with all due honours.

Two had been named for the reading of the will, seeing that a train arrived at 1.45 P. M. And, therefore, when the ceremony was over, George and Mr. Pritchett had to sit together in the dining-room till that time arrived. The doctor, who did not expect much from the will, had gone away, perhaps to prepare other friends for similar occupation. It was a tedious hour that they so passed, certainly; but at last it did make itself away. Lunch was brought in; and the sherry, which had been handed round with biscuits before the funeral, was again put on the table. Mr. Pritchett liked a glass of sherry, though it never seemed to have other effect on him than to make his sadness of a deeper dye. But at last, between this occupation and the muttering of a few scraps of a somewhat wordly morality, the hour did wear itself away, and the hand of the old clock pointed to two.

The three gentlemen had come down by the same train, and arrived in a fly together. Mr. George Stickatit,

junior, paid for the accommodation; which was no more than right, for he would put it in the bill, and Sir Lionel could not. The mind of Sir Henry was too much intent on other things to enable him to think about the fly.

"Well, George," said Sir Lionel; "so it's all over at last. My poor brother! I wish I could have been with you at the funeral; but it was impossible. The ladies are not here?" — This he added in a whisper. He could not well talk about Lady Harcourt, and he was not at the present moment anxious to see Miss Baker.

"They are not here to-day," said George, as he pressed his father's hand. He did not think it necessary to explain that they were staying at good old Mrs. Jones's, on the other side of the green.

"I should have been down for the funeral," said Mr. Stickatit; "but I have been kept going about the property, ever since the death, up to this moment, I may say. There's the document, gentlemen." And the will was laid on the table. "The personalty will be sworn under five. The real will be about two more. Well, Pritchett, and how are you this morning?"

Sir Henry said but little to anybody. Bertram put out his hand to him as he entered, and he just took it, muttering something; and then, having done so, he sat himself down at the table. His face was not pleasant to be seen; his manner was ungracious, nay, more than that, uncourteous — almost brutal; and it seemed as though he were prepared to declare himself the enemy of all who were there assembled. To Sir Lionel he was known, and it may be presumed that some words had passed between them in the fly; but there in the room he said no word to any one, but sat leaning back in an

arm-chair, with his hands in his pockets, scowling at the table before him.

"A beautiful day, is it not, Mr. Pritchett?" said Sir Lionel, essaying to make things pleasant, after his fashion.

"A beautiful day — outwardly, Sir Lionel," sighed Mr. Pritchett. "But the occasion is not comfortable. We must all die, though; all of us, Mr. George."

"But we shall not all of us leave such a will as that behind us," said Mr. Stickatit. "Come, gentlemen, are we ready? Shall we sit down?"

George got a chair for his father, and put it down opposite to that of Sir Henry. Mr. Pritchett humbly kept himself in one corner. The lawyer took the head of the table, and broke open the envelope which contained the will with a degree of gusto which showed that the occupation was not disagreeable to him. "Mr. Bertram," said he, "will you not take a chair?"

"Thank you, no; I'll stand here, if you please," said George. And so he kept his position with his back to the empty fireplace.

All of them, then, were somewhat afraid of having their disappointment read in their faces, and commented upon by the others. They were all of them schooling themselves to bear with an appearance of indifference the tidings which they dreaded to hear. All of them, that is, except the attorney. He hoped nothing, and feared nothing.

Mr. Pritchett nearly closed his eyes, and almost opened his mouth, and sat with his hands resting on his stomach before him, as though he were much too humble to have any hopes of his own.

Sir Lionel was all smiles. What did he care? Not he. If that boy of his should get anything, he, as an

affectionate father, would, of course, be glad. If not, why then his dear boy could do without it. That was the intended interpretation of his look. And judging of it altogether, he did not do it badly; only he deceived nobody. On such occasions, one's face, which is made up for deceit, never does deceive any one. But, in truth, Sir Lionel still entertained a higher hope than any other of the listeners there. He did not certainly expect a legacy himself, but he did think that George might still be the heir. As Sir Henry was not to be, whose name was so likely? And, then, if his son, his dear son George, should be lord of two, nay, say only one, of those many hundred thousand pounds, what might not a fond father expect?

Sir Henry was all frowns; and yet he was not quite hopeless. The granddaughter, the only lineal descendant of the dead man, was still his wife. Anything left to her must in some sort be left to him, let it be tied up with ever so much care. It might still be probable that she might be named the heiress — perhaps the sole heiress. It might still be probable that the old man had made no new will since Caroline had left his home in Eaton Square. At any rate, there would still be a ground on which to fight within his reach, if Lady Harcourt should be in any way enriched under the will. And if so, no tenderness on his part should hinder him from fighting out that fight as long as he had an inch on which to stand.

Bertram neither hoped anything, nor feared anything, except this — that they would look at him as a disappointed man. He knew that he was to have nothing; and although, now that the moment had come, he felt that wealth might possibly have elated him, still the

absence of it did not make him in any degree unhappy. But it did make him uncomfortable to think that he should be commiserated by Mr. Pritchett, sneered at by Harcourt, and taunted by his father.

"Well, gentlemen, are we ready?" said Mr. Stickatit again. They were all ready, and so Mr. Stickatit began.

I will not give an acute critic any opportunity for telling me that the will, as detailed by me, was all illegal. I have not by me the ipsissima verba; nor can I get them now, as I am very far from Doctors' Commons. So I will give no verbal detail at all.

The will, moreover, was very long — no less than fifteen folios. And that amount, though it might not be amiss in a three volume edition, would be inconvenient when the book comes to be published for eighteen-pence. But the gist of the will was as follows.

It was dated in the October last gone by, at the time when George was about to start for Egypt, and when Lady Harcourt had already left her husband. It stated that he, George Bertram, senior, of Hadley, being in full use of all his mental faculties, made this as his last will and testament. And then he willed and devised —

Firstly, that George Stickatit, junior, of the firm of Day and Stickatit, and George Bertram, junior, his nephew, should be his executors; and that a thousand pounds each should be given to them, provided they were pleased to act in that capacity.

When Sir Lionel heard that George was named as one of the executors, he looked up at his son triumphantly; but when the thousand pounds were named, his face became rather long, and less pleasant than usual. A man

feels no need to leave a thousand pounds to an executor if he means to give him the bulk of his fortune.

Secondly, he left three hundred pounds a year for life to his dear, old, trusty servant, Samuel Pritchett. Mr. Pritchett put his handkerchief up to his face, and sobbed audibly. But he would sooner have had two or three thousand pounds; for he also had an ambition to leave money behind him.

Thirdly, he bequeathed five hundred pounds a year for life to Mary Baker, late of Littlebath, and now of Hadley; and the use of the house at Hadley if she chose to occupy it. Otherwise, the house was to be sold, and the proceeds were to go to his estate.

Sir Lionel, when he heard this, made a short calculation in his mind whether it would now be worth his while to marry Miss Baker; and he decided that it would not be worth his while.

Fourthly, he gave to his executors above-named a sum of four thousand pounds, to be invested by them in the Three per Cent. Consols, for the sole use and benefit of his granddaughter, Caroline Harcourt. And the will went on to say, that he did this, although he was aware that sufficient provision had already been made for his granddaughter, because he feared that untoward events might make it expedient that she should have some income exclusively her own.

Sir Henry, when this paragraph was read — this paragraph from which his own name was carefully excluded — dashed his fist down upon the table, so that the ink leaped up out of the inkstand that stood before the lawyer, and fell in sundry blots upon the document. But no one said anything. There was blotting-paper at hand, and Mr. Stickatit soon proceeded.

In its fifth proviso, the old man mentioned his nephew George. "I wish it to be understood," he said, "that I love my nephew, George Bertram, and appreciate his honour, honesty, and truth." Sir Lionel once more took heart of grace, and thought that it might still be all right. And George himself felt pleased; more pleased than he had thought it possible that he should have been at the reading of that will. "But," continued the will, "I am not minded, as he is himself aware, to put my money into his hands for his own purposes." It then went on to say, that a further sum of four thousand pounds was given to him as a token of affection.

Sir Lionel drew a long breath. After all, five thousands pounds was the whole sum total that was rescued out of the fire. What was five thousand pounds? How much could he expect to get from such a sum as that? Perhaps, after all, he had better take Miss Baker. But then her pittance was only for her life. How he did hate his departed brother at that moment!

Poor Pritchett wheezed and sighed again. "Ah!" said he to himself. "Half a million of money gone; clean gone! But he never would take my advice!"

But George felt now that he did not care who looked at him, who commiserated him. The will was all right. He did not at that moment wish it to be other than that the old man had made it. After all their quarrels, all their hot words and perverse thoughts towards each other, it was clear to him now that his uncle had, at any rate, appreciated him. He could hear the remainder of it quite unmoved.

There were some other legacies to various people in the City, none of them being considerable in amount. Five hundred pounds to one, one thousand pounds to

another, fifty pounds to a third, and so on. And then came the body of the will — the very will indeed.

And so Mr. George Bertram willed, that after the payment of all his just debts, and of the legacies above recapitulated, his whole property should be given to his executors, and by them expended in building and endowing a college and almshouse, to be called "The Bertram College," for the education of the children of London fishmongers, and for the maintenance of the widows of such fishmongers as had died in want. Now Mr. Bertram had been a member of the Honourable Company of Fishmongers.

And that was the end of the will. And Mr. Stickatit, having completed the reading, folded it up, and put it back into the envelope. Sir Henry, the moment the reading was over, again dashed his fist upon the table. "As heir-at-law," said he, "I shall oppose that document."

"I think you'll find it all correct," said Mr. Stickatit, with a little smile.

"And I think otherwise, sir," said the late solicitor-general, in a voice that made them all start. "Very much otherwise. That document is not worth the paper on which it is written. And now, I warn you two, who have been named as executors, that such is the fact."

Sir Lionel began to consider whether it would be better for him that the will should be a will, or should not be a will. Till he had done so, he could not determine with which party he would side. If that were no will, there might be a previous one; and if so, Bertram might, according to that, be the heir. "It is a very singular document," said he; "very singular."

But Sir Henry wanted no allies — wanted no one in that room to side with him. Hostility to them all was

his present desire; to them and to one other — that other one who had brought upon him all this misfortune; that wife of his bosom, who had betrayed his interests and shattered his hopes.

"I believe there is nothing further to detain us at the present moment," said Mr. Stickatit. "Mr. Bertram, perhaps you can allow me to speak to you somewhere for five minutes?"

"I shall act," said George.

"Oh, of course. That's of course," said Stickatit. "And I also."

"Stop one moment, gentlemen," shouted Harcourt again. "I hereby give you both warning that you have no power to act."

"Perhaps, sir," suggested Stickatit, "your lawyer will take any steps he may think necessary?"

"My lawyer, sir, will do as I bid him, and will require no suggestion from you. And now I have another matter to treat of. Mr. Bertram, where is Lady Harcourt?"

Bertram did not answer at once, but stood with his back still against the chimney-piece, thinking what answer he would give.

"Where, I say, is Lady Harcourt? Let us have no juggling, if you please. You will find that I am in earnest."

"I am not Lady Harcourt's keeper," said George, in a very low tone of voice.

"No, by G—! Nor shall you be. Where is she? If you do not answer my question, I shall have recourse to the police at once."

Sir Lionel, meaning to make things pleasant, now got up, and went over to his son. He did not know on what footing, with reference to each other, his son and

Lady Harcourt now stood; but he did know that they had loved each other, and been betrothed for years; he did know, also, that she had left her husband, and that that husband and his son had been the closest friends. It was a great opportunity for him to make things pleasant. He had not the slightest scruple as to sacrificing that "dear Caroline" whom he had so loved as his future daughter-in-law.

"George," said he, "if you know where Lady Harcourt is, it will be better that you should tell Sir Henry. No properly-thinking man will countenance a wife in disobeying her husband."

"Father," said George, "Lady Harcourt is not in my custody. She is the judge of her own actions in this matter."

"Is she?" said Sir Henry. "She must learn to know that she is not; and that very shortly. Do you mean to tell me where she is?"

"I mean to tell you nothing about her, Sir Henry."

"George, you are wrong," said Sir Lionel. "If you know where Lady Harcourt is, you are bound to tell him. I really think you are."

"I am bound to tell him nothing, father; nor will I. I will have no conversation with him about his wife. It is his affair and hers—and that, perhaps, of a hundred other people; but it certainly is not mine. Nor will I make it so."

"Then you insist on concealing her?" said Sir Henry.

"I have nothing to do with her. I do not know that she is concealed at all."

"You know where she is?"

"I do. But, believing as I do that she would rather not be disturbed, I shall not say where you would find her."

"I think you ought, George."

"Father, you do not understand this matter."

"You will not escape in that way, sir. Here you are named as her trustee in this will —"

"I am glad that you acknowledge the will, at any rate," said Mr. Stickatit.

"Who says that I acknowledge it? I acknowledge nothing in the will. But it is clear, from that document, that she presumes herself to be under his protection. It is manifest that that silly fool intended that she should be so. Now I am not the man to put up with this. I ask you once more, Mr. Bertram, will you tell me where I shall find Lady Harcourt?"

"No, I will not."

"Very well; then I shall know how to act. Gentlemen, good-morning. Mr. Stickatit, I caution you not to dispose, under that will, of anything of which Mr. Bertram may have died possessed." And so saying, he took up his hat, and left the house.

And what would he have done had Bertram told him that Lady Harcourt was staying at Mr. Jones's, in the red brick house on the other side of the Green? What can any man do with a recusant wife? We have often been told that we should build a golden bridge for a flying enemy. And if any one can be regarded as a man's enemy, it is a wife who is not his friend.

After a little while, Sir Lionel went away with Mr. Pritchett. Bertram asked them both to stay for dinner, but the invitation was not given in a very cordial manner. At any rate, it was not accepted.

"Good-bye, then, George," said Sir Lionel. "I suppose I shall see you before I leave town. I must say, you have made a bad affair of this will."

"Good-bye, Mr. George; good-bye," said Mr. Pritchett. "Make my dutiful compliments to Miss Baker — and to the other lady."

"Yes, I will, Mr. Pritchett."

"Ah, dear! well. You might have had it all, instead of the fishmongers' children, if you had chosen, Mr. George."

And we also will say good-bye to the two gentlemen, as we shall not see them again in these pages. That Mr. Pritchett will live for the remainder of his days decently, if not happily, on his annuity, may be surmised. That Sir Lionel, without any annuity, but with a fair income paid from the country's taxes, and with such extra pecuniary aid as he may be able to extract from his son, will continue to live indecently at Littlebath — for he never again returned to active service — that also may be surmised. And thus we will make our bows to these old gentlemen — entertaining, however, very different feelings for the colonel and the clerk.

And soon afterwards Mr. Stickatit also went. Some slight, necessary legal information as to the executorship was first imparted; Sir Henry's threats were ridiculed; the good fortune of the fishmongers was wondered at, and then Mr. Stickatit took his hat. The four gentlemen no doubt went up to London by the same train.

In the evening, Miss Baker and Lady Harcourt came back to their own house. It was Miss Baker's own house now. When she heard what her old friend had done for her, she was bewildered by his generosity. She, at any rate, had received more than she had expected.

"And what does he mean to do?" said Caroline.

"He says that he will dispute the will. But that, I take it, is nonsense."

"But about — you know what I mean, George?"

"He means to insist on your return. That, at least, is what he threatens."

"He shall insist in vain. No law that man ever made shall force me to live with him again."

Whether or no the husband was in earnest, it might clearly be judged, from the wife's face and tone, that she was so. On the next morning, George went up to London, and the two women were left alone in their dull house at Hadley.

CHAPTER XXIV.

Eaton Square.

SIR HENRY HARCOURT had walked forth first from that room in which the will had been read, and he had walked forth with a threat in his mouth. But he knew when making it that that threat was an empty bravado. The will was as valid as care and law could make it, and the ex-solicitor-general knew very well that it was valid.

He knew, moreover, that the assistance of no ordinary policeman would suffice to enable him to obtain possession of his wife's person; and he knew also that if he had such possession, it would avail him nothing. He could not pay his debts with her, nor could he make his home happy with her, nor could he compel her to be in any way of service to him. It had all been bravado. But when men are driven into corners — when they are hemmed in on all sides, so that they have no escape, to what else than bravado can they have recourse? With Sir Henry the game was up; and no one knew this better than himself.

He was walking up and down the platform, with his hat over his brows, and his hands in his trousers-pockets,

when Mr. Stickatit came up. "We shall have a little rain this afternoon," said Mr. Stickatit, anxious to show that he had dropped the shop, and that having done so, he was ready for any of the world's ordinary converse.

Sir Henry scowled at him from under the pent-house lid of his hat, and passed on in his walk, without answering a word. The thing had gone too far with him for affectation. He did not care to make sacrifice now to any of the world's graces. His inner mind was hostile to that attorney of Bucklersbury, and he could dare to show that it was so. After that, Mr. Stickatit made no further remark to him.

Yes; he could afford now to be forgetful of the world's graces, for the world's heaviest cares were pressing very heavily on him. When a man finds himself compelled to wade through miles of mud, in which he sinks at every step up to his knees, he becomes forgetful of the blacking on his boots. Whether or no his very skin will hold out, is then his thought. And so it was now with Sir Henry. Or we may perhaps say that he had advanced a step beyond that. He was pretty well convinced now that his skin would not hold out.

He still owned his fine house in Eaton Square, and still kept his seat for the Battersea Hamlets. But Baron Brawl, and such like men, no longer came willingly to his call; and his voice was no longer musical to the occupants of the Treasury bench. His reign had been sweet, but it had been very short. Prosperity he had known how to enjoy, but adversity had been too much for him.

Since the day when he had hesitated to resign his high office, his popularity had gone down like a leaden plummet in the salt water. He had become cross-grained, ill-tempered, and morose. The world had spoken evil of

him regarding his wife; and he had given the world the lie in a manner that had been petulant and injudicious. The world had rejoined, and Sir Henry had in every sense got the worst of it. Attorneys did not worship him as they had done, nor did vice-chancellors and lords-justices listen to him with such bland attention. No legal luminary in the memory of man had risen so quickly and fallen so suddenly. It had not been given to him to preserve an even mind when adversity came upon him.

But the worst of his immediate troubles were his debts. He had boldly resolved to take a high position in London; and he had taken it. It now remained that the piper should be paid, and the piper required payment not in the softest language. While that old man was still living, or rather still dying, he had had an answer to give to all pipers. But that answer would suffice him no longer. Every clause in that will would be in the "Daily Jupiter" of the day after to-morrow — the "Daily Jupiter" which had already given a wonderfully correct biography of the deceased great man.

As soon as he reached the London station; he jumped into a cab, and was quickly whirled to Eaton Square. The house felt dull, and cold, and wretched to him. It was still the London season, and Parliament was sitting. After walking up and down his own dining-room for half an hour, he got into another cab, and was whirled down to the House of Commons. But there it seemed as though all the men round him already knew of his disappointment — as though Mr. Bertram's will had been read in a Committee of the whole House. Men spoke coldly to him, and looked coldly at him; or at any rate, he thought that they did so. Some debate was going on about the Ballot, at which members were repeating their

last year's speeches with new emphasis. Sir Henry twice attempted to get upon his legs, but the Speaker would not have his eye caught. Men right and left of him, who were minnows to him in success, found opportunities for delivering themselves; but the world of Parliament did not wish at present to hear anything further from Sir Henry. So he returned to his house in Eaton Square.

As soon as he found himself again in his own dining-room, he called for brandy, and drank off a brimming glass; he drank off one, and then another. The world and solitude together were too much for him, and he could not bear them without aid. Then, having done this, he threw himself into his arm-chair, and stared at the fire-place. How tenfold sorrowful are our sorrows when borne in solitude! Some one has said that grief is half removed when it is shared. How little that some one knew about it! Half removed! When it is duly shared between two loving hearts, does not love fly off with eight-tenths of it? There is but a small remainder left for the two to bear between them.

But there was no loving heart here. All alone he had to endure the crushing weight of his misfortunes. How often has a man said, when evil times have come upon him, that he could have borne it all without complaint, but for his wife and children? The truth, however, has been that, but for them, he could not have borne it at all. Why does any man suffer with patience "the sting and arrows of outrageous fortune," or put up with "the whips and scorns of time," but that he does so for others, not for himself? It is not that we should all be ready, each to make his own quietus with a bare bodkin; but that we should run from wretchedness when it comes in our path. Who fights for himself alone?

Who would not be a coward, if none but himself saw the battle — if none other were concerned in it?

With Sir Henry, there was none other to see the battle, none to take concern in it. If solitude be bad in times of misery, what shall we say of unoccupied solitude? of solitude, too, without employment for the man who has been used to labour?

Such was the case with him. His whole mind was out of time. There was nothing now that he could do; no work to which he could turn himself. He sat there gazing at the empty fireplace till the moments became unendurably long to him. At last his chief suffering arose, not from his shattered hopes and lost fortunes, but from the leaden weight of the existing hour.

What could he do to shake this off? How could he conquer the depression that was upon him? He reached his hand to the paper that was lying near him, and tried to read; but his mind would not answer to the call. He could not think of the right honourable gentleman's speech, or of the very able leading article in which it was discussed. Though the words were before his eyes, he still was harping back on the injustice of that will, or the iniquity of his wife; on the imperturbable serenity of George Bertram, or the false, fleeting friends who had fawned on him in his prosperity, and now threw him over, as a Jonah, with so little remorse.

He dropped the paper on the ground, and then again the feeling of solitude and of motionless time oppressed him with a weight as of tons of lead. He jumped from his chair, and paced up and down the room; but the room was too confined. He took his hat, and pressing it on his brow, walked out into the open air. It was a beautiful spring evening in May, and the twilight still

lingered, though the hour was late. He paced three times round the square, regardless of the noise of carriages and the lights which flashed forth from the revelries of his neighbours. He went on and on, not thinking how he would stem the current that was running against him so strongly; hardly trying to think; but thinking that it would be well for him if he could make the endeavour. Alas! he could not make it!

And then again he returned to the house, and once more sat himself down in the same arm-chair. Was it come to this, that the world was hopeless for him? One would have said not. He was in debt, it is true; had fallen somewhat from a high position; had lost the dearest treasure which a man can have; not only the treasure, but the power of obtaining such treasure; for the possession of a loving wife was no longer a possibility to him. But still he had much; his acknowledged capacity for law pleadings, his right to take high place among law pleaders, the trick of earning money in that fashion of life; all these were still his. He had his gown and wig, and forensic brow-beating, brazen scowl; nay, he still had his seat in Parliament. Why should he have despaired?

But he did despair — as men do when they have none to whom they can turn them trustingly in their miseries. This man had had friends by hundreds; good, serviceable, parliamentary, dinner-eating, dinner-giving friends; fine, pleasant friends, as such friends go. He had such friends by hundreds; but he had failed to prepare for stormy times a leash or so of true hearts on which, in stress of weather, he could throw himself with undoubting confidence. One such friend he may have had once; but he now was among his bitterest enemies. The horizon round him was all black, and he did despair.

How many a man lives and dies without giving any sign whether he be an arrant coward, or a true-hearted, brave hero! One would have said of this man, a year since, that he was brave enough. He would stand up before a bench of judges, with the bar of England round him, and shout forth, with brazen trumpet, things that were true, or things that were not true; striking down a foe here to the right, and slaughtering another there to the left, in a manner which, for so young a man, filled beholders with admiration. He could talk by the hour among the Commons of England, and no touch of modesty would ever encumber his speech. He could make himself great, by making others little, with a glance. But, for all that, he was a coward. Misfortune had come upon him, and he was conquered at once.

Misfortune had come upon him, and he found it unendurable — yes, utterly unendurable. The grit and substance of the man within was not sufficient to bear the load which fate had put upon them. As does a deal-table in similar case, they were crushed down, collapsed, and fell in. The stuff there was not good mahogany, or sufficient hard wood, but an unseasoned, soft, porous, deal-board, utterly unfit to sustain such pressure. An unblushing, wordy barrister may be very full of brass and words, and yet be no better than an unseasoned porous deal-board, even though he have a seat in Parliament.

He rose from his chair, and again took a glass of brandy. How impossible it is to describe the workings of a mind in such a state of misery as that he then endured! What — what! was there no release for him? no way, spite of this black fit, to some sort of rest — to composure of the most ordinary kind? Was there nothing that he could do which would produce for him, if

not gratification, then at least quiescence? To the generality of men of his age, there are resources in misfortune. Men go to billiard-tables, or to cards, or they seek relief in woman's society, from the smiles of beauty, or a laughter-moving tongue. But Sir Henry, very early in life, had thrown those things from him. He had discarded pleasure, and wedded himself to hard work at a very early age. If, at the same time, he had wedded himself to honesty also, and had not discarded his heart, it might have been well with him.

He again sat down, and then he remained all but motionless for some twenty minutes. It had now become dark, but he would have no lights lit. The room was very gloomy with its red embossed paper and dark ruby curtains. As his eye glanced round during the last few moments of the dusk, he remembered how he had inquired of his Caroline how many festive guests might sit at their ease in that room, and eat the dainties which he, with liberal hand, would put before them. Where was his Caroline now? where were his guests? what anxiety now had he that they should have room enough? what cared he now for their dainties?

It was not to be borne. He clasped his hand to his brow, and rising from his chair, he went up stairs to his dressing-room. For what purpose, he had not even asked himself. Of bed, and rest, and sleep he had had no thought. When there, he again sat down, and mechanically dressed himself — dressed himself as though he were going out to some gay evening-party — was even more than ordinarily particular about his toilet. One white handkerchief he threw aside as spoiled in the tying. He looked specially to his boots, and with scrupulous care brushed the specks of dust from the sleeve

of his coat. It was a blessing, at any rate, to have something to do. He did this, and then —

When he commenced his work, he had, perhaps, some remote intention of going somewhere. If so, he had quickly changed his mind, for, having finished his dressing, he again sat himself down in an arm-chair. The gas in his dressing-room had been lighted, and here he was able to look around him and see what resources he had to his hand. One resource he did see.

Ah, me! Yes, he saw it, and his mind approved — such amount of mind as he had then left to him. But he waited patiently awhile — with greater patience than he had hitherto exhibited that day. He waited patiently, sitting in his chair for some hour or so; nay, it may have been for two hours, for the house was still, and the servants were in bed. Then, rising from his chair, he turned the lock of his dressing-room door. It was a futile precaution, if it meant anything, for the room had another door, which opened to his wife's chamber, and the access on that side was free and open.

Early on the following morning, George Bertram went up to town, and was driven directly from the station to his dull, dingy, dirty chambers in the Temple. His chambers were not as those of practising lawyers. He kept no desk there, and no servant peculiar to himself. It had suited him to have some resting-place for his foot, that he could call his home; and when he was there, he was waited upon by the old woman who called herself the laundress — probably from the fact of her never washing herself or anything else.

When he reached this sweet home on the morning in question, he was told by the old woman that a very

express messenger had been there that morning, and that, failing to find him, the express messenger had gone down to Hadley. They had, therefore, passed each other upon the road. The express messenger had left no message, but the woman had learned that he had come from Eaton Square.

"And he left no letter?"

"No, sir; no letter. He had no letter; but he was very eager about it. It was something of importance sure—ly."

It might have been natural that, under such circumstances, George should go off to Eaton Square; but it struck him as very probable that Sir Henry might desire to have some communication with him, but that he, when he should know what that communication was, would in no degree reciprocate that desire. The less that he had to say to Sir Henry Harcourt at present, perhaps, the better. So he made up his mind that he would not go to Eaton Square.

After he had been in his rooms for about half an hour, he was preparing to leave them, and had risen with that object, when he heard a knock at his door, and quickly following the knock, the young attorney who had read the will was in his room.

"You have heard the news, Mr. Bertram?" said he.

"No, indeed! What news? I have just come up."

"Sir Henry Harcourt has destroyed himself. He shot himself in his own house yesterday, late at night, after the servants had gone to bed!"

George Bertram fell back, speechless, on to the sofa behind him, and stared almost unconsciously at the lawyer.

"It is too true, sir. That will of Mr. Bertram's was too much for him. His reason must have failed him, and now he is no more." And so was made clear what

were the tidings with which that express had been laden.

There was little or nothing more to be said on the matter between George Bertram and Mr. Stickatit. The latter declared that the fact had been communicated to him on authority which admitted of no doubt; and the other, when he did believe, was but little inclined to share his speculations on it with the lawyer.

Nor was there much for Bertram to do — not at once. The story had already gone down to Hadley — had already been told there to her to whom it most belonged; and Bertram felt that it was not at present his province to say kind things to her, or seek to soften the violence of the shock. No, not at present.

CHAPTER XXV.

Conclusion.

METHINKS it is almost unnecessary to write this last chapter. The story, as I have had to tell it, is all told. The object has been made plain — or, if not so, can certainly not be made plainer in these last six or seven pages. The results of weakness and folly — of such weakness and such folly as is too customary among us — have been declared. What further fortune fate had in store for those whose names have been familiar to us, might be guessed by all. But, nevertheless, custom, and the desire of making an end of the undertaken work, and in some sort completing it, compel me to this concluding chapter.

Within six weeks after the death of Sir Henry Harcourt, the vicar of Hurst Staple was married to Adela Gauntlet. Every critic who weighs the demerits of these

pages — nay, every reader, indulgent or otherwise, who skims through them, will declare that the gentleman was not worthy of the lady. I hope so, with all my heart. I do sincerely trust that they will think so. If not, my labour has been in vain.

Mr. Arthur Wilkinson was not worthy of the wife with whom a kind Providence had blessed him — was not worthy of her in the usual acceptation of the word. He was not a bad man, as men go; but she was —. I must not trust myself to praise her, or I shall be told, not altogether truly, that she was of my own creating.

He was not worthy of her. That is, the amount of wealth of character which he brought into that life partnership was, when counted up, much less than her contribution. But that she was fully satisfied with her bargain — that she was so then and so continued — was a part of her worthiness. If ever she weighed herself against him, the scale in which he was placed never in her eyes showed itself to be light. She took him for her lord, and with a leal heart and a loving bosom she ever recognized him as her head and master, as the pole-star to which she must turn, compelled by laws of adamant. Worthy or unworthy, he was all that she expected, all that she desired, bone of her bone, flesh of her flesh, the father of her bairns, the lord of her bosom, the staff of her maintenance, the prop of her house.

And what man was ever worthy, perfectly worthy, of a pure, true and honest girl? Man's life admits not of such purity and honesty; rarely of such truth. But one would not choose that such flowers should remain unplucked because no hands are fit to touch them.

As to the future life of the vicar of Hurst Staple and his wife, it is surely unnecessary to say much —

or perhaps anything. It cannot be told that they became suddenly rich. No prime minister, won by her beauty or virtue, placed him upon the bench, or even offered him a deanery. Vicar of Hurst Staple he is still, and he still pays the old allowance out of his well-earned income to his mother, who lives with her daughters at Littlebath. One young lad after another, or generally two at a time, share the frugal meals at the parsonage; and our friend is sometimes heard to boast that none of these guests of his have as yet been plucked. Of the good things of the world, there is quite enough for her; and we may perhaps say nearly enough for him. Who, then, shall croak that they are poor?

And now and then they walk along the river to West Putford; for among their choicest blessings is that of having a good neighbour in the old rectory. And walking there, how can they but think of old sorrows and present joys?

"Ah!" she whispered to him one day, as they crept along the reedy margin in the summer evening, not long after their marriage. "Ah! dearest, it is better now than it was when you came here once."

"Is it, love?"

"Is it not? But you misbehaved then — you know you did. You would not trust me then."

"I could not trust myself."

"I should have trusted you; — in all things, in everything. As I do now."

And then he cut at the rushes with his walking-stick, as he had done before; and bethought himself that in those days he had been an ass.

And so we will leave them. May they walk in those quiet paths for long days yet to come; and may

he learn to know that God has given him an angel to watch at his side.

Of the rosy Miss Todd, there is nothing to be said but this, that she is still Miss Todd, and still rosy. Whether she be now at Littlebath, or Baden, or Dieppe, or Harrowgate, at New York, Jerusalem, or Frazer's River, matters but little. Where she was last year, there she is not now. Where she is now, there she will not be next year. But she still increases the circle of her dearly-loved friends; and go where she will, she, at any rate, does more good to others than others do to her. And so we will make our last bow before her feet.

We have only now to speak of George Bertram and of Lady Harcourt — of them and of Miss Baker, who need hardly now be considered a personage apart from her niece. No sooner was the first shock of Sir Henry Harcourt's death past, than Bertram felt that it was impossible for him at the present moment to see the widow. It was but a few days since she had declared her abhorrence of the man to whom her fate was linked, apparently for life, and who was now gone. And that declaration had implied also that her heart still belonged to him — to him, George Bertram — him to whom it had first been given — to him, rather, who had first made himself master of it almost without gift on her part. Now, as regarded God's laws, her hand was free again, and might follow her heart.

But death closes many a long account, and settles many a bitter debt. She could remember now that she had sinned against her husband, as well as he against her; that she had sinned the first, and perhaps the

deepest. He would have loved her, if she would have permitted it; have loved her with a cold, callous, worldly love; but still with such love as he had to give. But she had married him resolving to give no love at all, knowing that she could give none; almost boasting to herself that she had told him that she had none to give.

The man's blood was, in some sort, on her head, and she felt that the burden was very heavy. All this Bertram understood, more thoroughly, perhaps, than she did; and for many weeks he abstained altogether from going to Hadley. He met Miss Baker repeatedly in London, and learned from her how Lady Harcourt bore herself. How she bore herself outwardly, that is. The inward bearing of such a woman in such a condition it was hardly given to Miss Baker to read. She was well in health, Miss Baker said, but pale and silent, stricken, and for hours motionless. "Very silent," Miss Baker would say. "She will sit for a whole morning without speaking a word; thinking — thinking — thinking." Yes; she had something of which to think. It was no wonder that she should sit silent.

And then after a while he went down to Hadley, and saw her.

"Caroline, my cousin," he said to her.

"George, George." And then she turned her face from him, and sobbed violently. They were the first tears she had shed since the news had reached her.

She did feel, in very deed, that the man's blood was on her head. But for her, would he not be sitting among the proud ones of the land? Had she permitted him to walk his own course by himself, would this utter destruction have come upon him? Or, having

sworn to cherish him as his wife, had she softened her heart towards him, would this deed have been done? No; fifty times a day she would ask herself the question; and as often would she answer it by the same words. The man's blood was upon her head.

For many a long day Bertram said nothing to her of her actual state of existence. He spoke neither of her past life as a wife nor her present life as a widow. The name of that man, whom living they had both despised and hated, was never mentioned between them during all these months.

And yet he was frequently with her. He was with her aunt, rather, and thus she became used to have him sitting in the room beside her. When in her presence, he would talk of their money-matters, of the old man and his will, in which, luckily, the name of Sir Henry Harcourt was not mentioned; and at last they brought themselves to better subjects, higher hopes — hopes that might yet be high, and solace that was trust-worthy, in spite of all that was come and gone.

And she would talk to him of himself; of himself as divided from her in all things, except in cousinhood. And, at her instigation, he again put himself to work in the dusky purlieus of Chancery Lane. Mr. Die had now retired, and drank his port and counted his per cents. in the blessed quiet of his evening days; but a Gamaliel was not wanting, and George sat himself down once more in the porch. We may be sure that he did not sit altogether in vain.

And then Adela — Mrs. Wilkinson we should now call her — visited the two ladies in their silent retirement at Hadley. What words were uttered between her and Lady Harcourt were heard by no other human

ear; but they were not uttered without effect. She who had been so stricken could dare again to walk to church, and bear the eyes of the little world around her. She would again walk forth and feel the sun, and know that the fields were green, and that the flowers were sweet, and that praises were to be sung to God. — For His mercy endureth for ever.

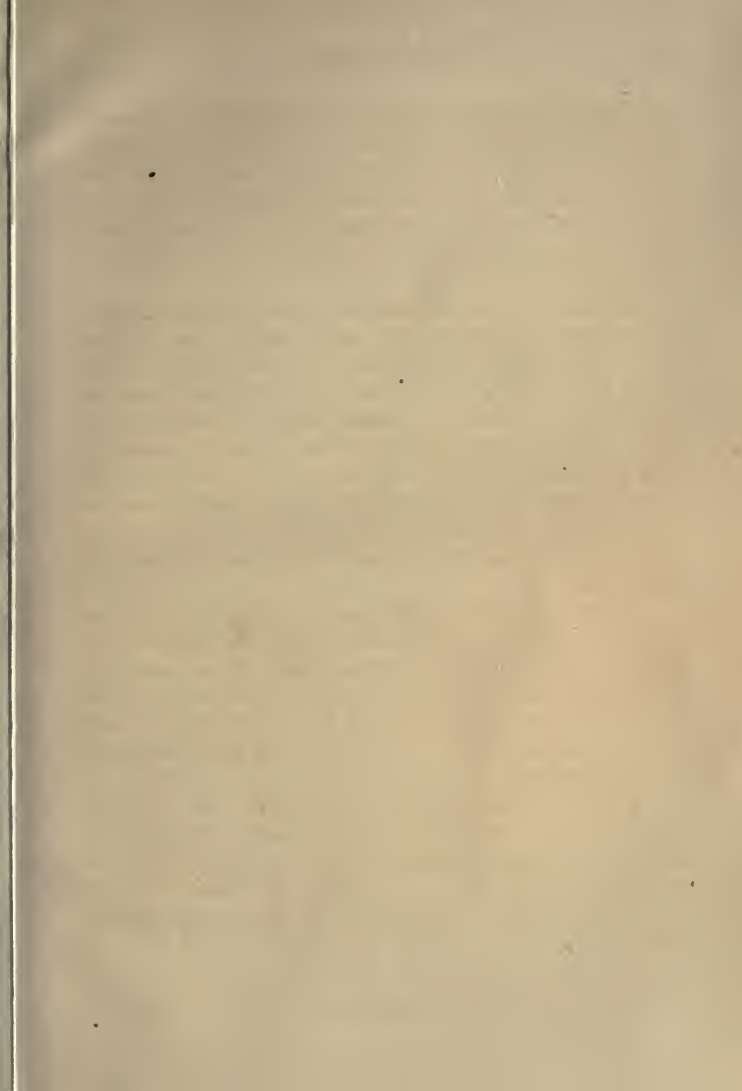
It was five years after that night in Eaton Square when George Bertram again asked her — her who had once been Caroline Waddington — to be his wife. But, sweet ladies, sweetest, fairest maidens, there were no soft, honey words of love then spoken; no happy, eager vows, which a novelist may repeat, hoping to move the soft sympathy of your bosoms. It was a cold, sad, dreary matter that offer of his; her melancholy, silent acquiescence, and that marriage in Hadley church, at which none were present but Adela and Arthur, and Miss Baker.

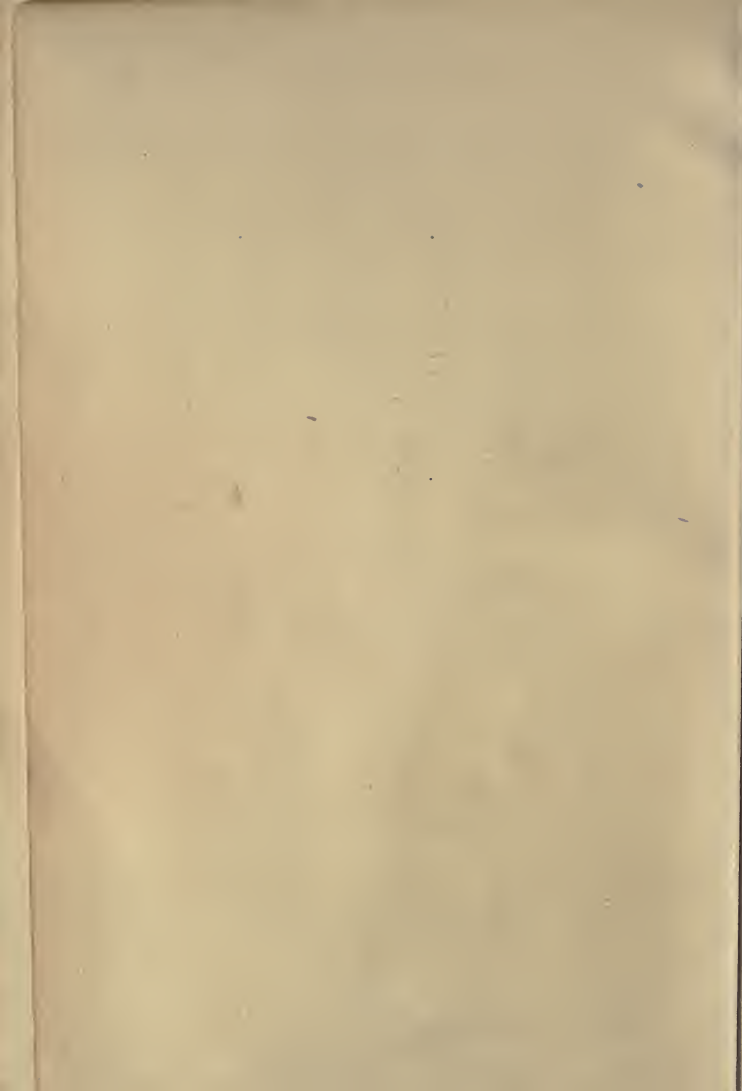
It was Adela who arranged it, and the result has shown that she was right. They now live together very quietly, very soberly, but yet happily. They have not Adela's blessings. No baby lies in Caroline's arms, no noisy boy climbs on the arm of George Bertram's chair, Their house is childless, and very, very quiet, but they are not unhappy.

Reader, can you call to mind what was the plan of life which Caroline Waddington had formed in the boldness of her young heart? Can you remember the aspirations of George Bertram, as he sat upon the Mount of Olives, watching the stones of the temple over against him?

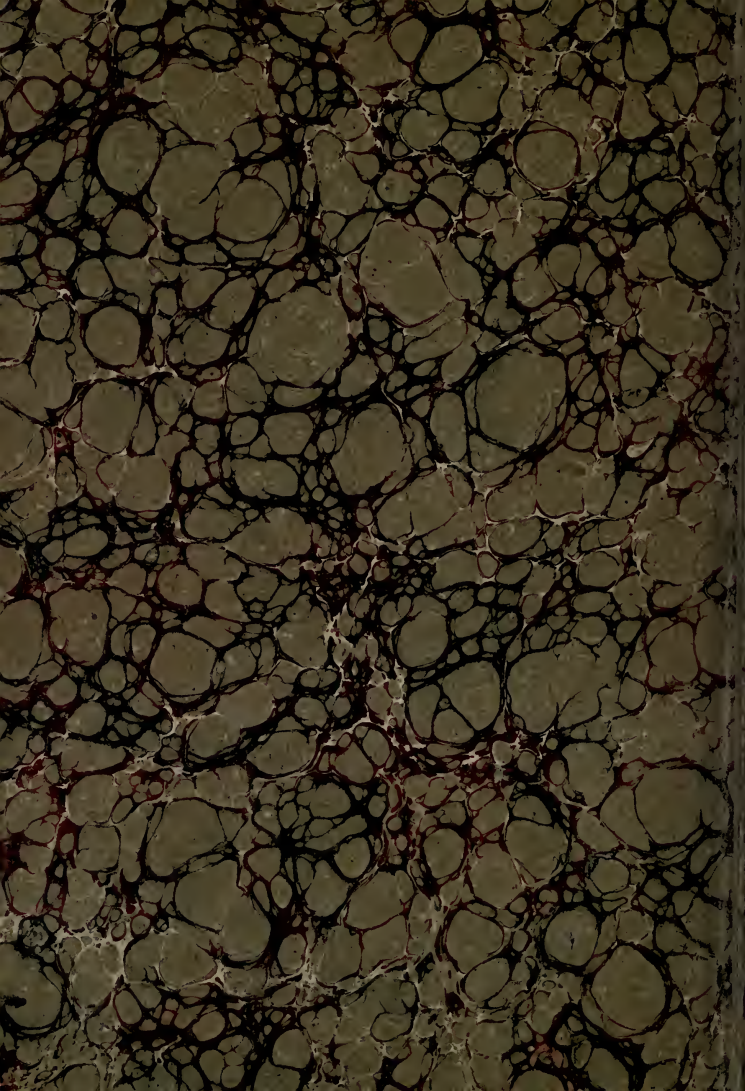
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