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BLACK BUTTERFLIES

BERTHE ST. LUZ



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FROM

Mrs. Theodore E. Nordbeak

BLACK BUTTERFLIES



“Happening to pause, her eyes light upon his portrait.”

—Page 20.—*Frontispiece.*

Black Butterflies

A *Nobel*

By BERTHE ST. LUZ

“He told a tale as wild as sad ;
And they who listened deemed it mad—
Mad as the delirious dream
Of one who, on an Indian stream
Floating in a Morphean bark,
Feeds on the charmed lotus-leaf—
While under the palms, in visions brief,
Through shadows of sunset, golden-dark,
The graceful leopard and leopardess stand,
With plumed tribes on the yellow sand,
To gaze with steadfast, wondering eyes
Where the feeding dreamer floating lies.”



“Wake ! For the Sun, who scatter'd into Flight
The Stars before him from the Field of Night,
Drives Night along with them from Heav'n, and strikes
The Sultan's Turret with a Shaft of Light.”

R. F. FENNO & COMPANY
9 and 11 East Sixteenth Street, New York

1905

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Mr. H. D. ...

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By R. F. FENNO & COMPANY

Black Butterflies

*To the Noble Order of Mystic Shriners
This book is respectfully dedicated.*

Black Butterflies

Black Butterflies

I

“Too much of Duty, and too little Love.”

He pays me in the coin he owes me not.

A long, broad column of crimson and golden sunlight stretches far across the polished, rug-strewn floor, flecking with radiant dots the blood-red roses drooping dejectedly from their thorny stems, crushed tightly within the wide mouth of a huge brass jar; glinting boldly about the pictured face upon the wall, dappling the dusty, gilt-lettered volumes arranged so methodically along the shelves, taking unwonted liberties with the nude charms of a marble, vine-wreathed Bacchante, anon dipping roguishly into Daphne's daintily-carved bosom in a vain endeavor to further explore her hidden loveliness; dancing prankishly, with audacious disregard for either reverence or dignity, about a hideous, bronze, snub-nosed, scowling image of Buddha flanked by a pair of squat, sardonic-looking idols, then prowling, searches the dim space and purpling shadows to reach, touch Lalage's head, entangling itself within the mazy, loose abundance of hair, tip-

ping each wayward tress into an irradiant blaze of glory, as she stands aghast at the silent atmosphere of gloom. For after the recent stealthy tread and low, muffled voices of the mourners—the place seems unearthly quiet, solemn, empty.

Idly twisting the heavy ring—almost barbaric in size—about her finger, she pauses, hesitating in the centre of the room, her duty ended.

What a dull, gray word is Duty. Upon what a cheerless, unpleasant path it leads us; how it blisters the feet of any conscience-stricken creature until weary and heart-sad we mortals, fainting and discouraged, pause upon the narrow, rugged road. Along each side, within easy reach, grow clusters of fragrant, luxuriant flowers, their sweet, sleepy perfume stealing, deadening our moral senses as they droop, entangled, imprisoned amongst their own foliage and splendor.

Beyond, to our left, stretch cool, green fields, shaded thickly by tall, graceful trees, heavily laden, bending downward, overburdened by their luscious fruits, pleasant to the eye, sweet to the taste. A few steps will take us hence. Every light and shadow which creeps, plays across the blooming fields, wantonly tempts, woos us hither. Yet 'tis written we must remain in this rough, barren path. Yea! Whilst the hot, dry wind blows out of the south, scorching our aching brow and trembling limbs. We must refrain from plucking one single bud of pleas-

ure, nor dare to lift from the ground the discarded produce which the overfreighted boughs, unable longer to support their weight, have dropped.

Nay, we must be duly thankful for the few stray petals and leaves which have, perchance, blown hither, falling in the dusty road for our bleeding feet to press.

Exhausted, in dumb protest against Fate, we lag, hesitate, muttering defiantly, rebel, and sink, fainting with misery, until Conscience—the unseen cord by which we are led—is suddenly jerked, pulling us, dragging us to our feet again, and Duty stands out clearly against the sky of worldly circumstances in direct contradiction to ease or pleasure, its grim, unsmiling face turned ever forward, and with threatening, uplifted finger beckons us onward.

The murmur of a near-by stream ripples soothingly on our weary ears; mingled with a lark's fresh, joyous notes encourages, sustains us. Feebly, but determinedly, we stagger to our feet again, buoyant with the hope that some day we may gather great armfuls of those blooming roses growing so invitingly, dangerously near; some day hence we may hope to pluck and feast upon that cool, ripe, golden fruit for our reward, but at present we must be content to trudge, stumbling, on—on.

Lalage still twists the ring about her finger. It has been a hard task-master—a veritable Shylock—this massive piece of gold, ever exacting its due to

the least iota, and now that release has come, and marital obligations forever over, she dimly begins to realize the enormity of her martyrdom during the past seven years.

Since the bond which bade her wear this badge of wifehood is broken, why retain longer a constant reminding source of past horrors? So in accordance, straightway suiting the action of thought, slipping the ring from its place, she, with a swift, fierce movement and wide sweep of arm, flings it far across the sward, its rapid transit beneath the hot noon sun forming a brazen crescent studded with a thousand scintillating stars, ere descending amid the rhododendrons growing dense in great white clusters near the edge of the lawn.

Absently smiling bitterly meanwhile, she rubs the disfiguring indentment which the circlet has caused, but that, alas! is trivial to the ugly imprint seared so deeply on her soul which neither time nor any charm can ever completely eradicate.

By degrees this queer, apathetic feeling of unreality vanishes, and the extreme novelty of the situation is decidedly pleasing. There is a sense of dreamy repose and rest—such rest as she has never known before, whilst her altered position is as yet incomprehensible; merely a faint, blissful, shadowy consciousness of some great, unforeseen happiness. This sweet lassitude about her is an exemption from suffering and bondage.

Is there not invariably something mysteriously holy in the first faint light of early dawn which heralds the coming day, always so gratefully welcome, more especially when one has journeyed through many hours of darkness; and we reverently greet its advent with an exhilarating impulse to accomplish some deed more worthy than hitherto attempted or achieved. And when later, in the east, the sun slowly bursting forth from his purple fetters, sheds warm, bright rays, falling like balm upon our weary souls, is it not a covenant, universally proclaiming the dear Creator has us ever in His memory?

Childishly, Lalage smooths the soft, clinging folds of the mourning gown which for the first time she is wearing. This black garb, the mirror opposite whispers, is essentially becoming. She notes complacently how its sombre hue enhances the creamy whiteness of neck, cheek and brow above which the rough, twisted mass of ruddy hair glows thrice radiantly.

Languidly emerging from the gloomy interior, she leans against the casement, watching the sun glimmering upon the tamarind tree. Her whole being is suffused with a glad sense of gratitude, for to her the world, the sun, the air—which seems filled with music touched by unseen fingers—appear different. And she would fain embrace shrub, leaf and tree, and kiss the slight breeze which so lightly skims her lips.

So intensely has she suffered that the absence of habitual mental pain is a mighty relief—and the knowledge that she is free by heaven's condescension and decree; free forever from degradation. Has it, indeed, come to an end, this thing, this blight which had obscured heaven and earth?

She might—shuddering at the thought—she might have been compelled to live years longer yoked to one who, no matter how private or what secluded spot she sought, had the hated right to enter.

But now, ecstatically, now she can be alone—entirely alone at will, her mind and body free, sacred to herself alone. For *he*—whose presence had filled her cowering soul with repulsion—has no further power over her—none—exultingly—none, none.

From the tamarind tree she watches the sun quivering its heated rays over grass and leaf and hotly athwart the sun-dial around which two immense black butterflies flutter in persistent circles, bumping together, then separating with many dizzy gravitations.

And now her eyes travel far beyond, to the ragged ridge of hills where dimly defined, soft, lacy clouds float in a variegated haze, merging into feathery banks of amethyst whose mysterious deeps are lined, richly shaded with strands of saffron, pale rose and lilac.

To Lalage, that floating mass, partly veiling the solemn sky shimmering above like a cerulean lake,

seems suggestive of nature's poetry fraught with delightful hidden secrets, as in rapt contemplation her eyes follow the vaporish mass slowly drifting toward England. What wisdom of the world does it witness—contain? What wondrous sights behold? Shall she not, perchance, some day share its marvels, its secrets and its sins?

In this romantic vein she peoples her wandering mind with a multitudinous, fantastic population, gay, daring, enchantingly beautiful, who, floating before her gaze, laughingly beckon her presence.

These visions are abruptly interrupted and her attention attracted by various peculiar sounds issuing from the farthest corner of the room, at which she instantly turns, moving mechanically toward a huge cage wherein numerous gorgeously tropical birds, the pride of her heart, are imprisoned.

Murmuring a few words of endearment, she calls each pet by name, recoiling with a stifled exclamation as the beautiful creatures, companions of her many lonely hours and to whom for months past it has been her daily task and pleasure administering to their wants, which attentions, hitherto so eagerly accepted, now seem to her magnified senses to assume a different aspect, and, unresponsive to the caressing tones of her voice, regard her with disapproval and cold, reproachful eyes; and suddenly seem, as if by magic, bereft of their erstwhile brilliant plumage, which to her distorted imagination appears dull,

lusterless, the gay, pretty feathers draggled, broken, from their restless movements in ceaseless futile efforts to escape.

And now, as for the first time she interprets the wistful longing in those eyes, Lalage's heart smites her for her selfish cruelty, and in feverish haste, seizing the structure heedless of the affrighted inmates, who, uttering shrill cries of terror, flutter, dash their breasts wildly against the iron bars, she drags it toward the window. It requires no small effort to perform this feat, for the cage is an immense contrivance, heavy, cumbersome. She succeeds at last, however, and breathlessly, with swift, trembling fingers, proceeds to throw wide open the door.

An unlooked-for occurrence which the startled captives are, for the nonce, slow to understand the meaning of, and hop listlessly about, seemingly either through stupidity or fear loath to avail themselves of the coveted opportunity in sight, until finally one, a magnificent paroquet, after eyeing the aperture askance and dimly comprehending that at last escape is possible, vigorously shakes his ruffled plumage, and, haughtily erecting his scarlet crest, he, more venturesome than the rest, closely accompanied by a gaudy parrot, daringly decides to lead the way to liberty.

These two, upon reaching threshold and sill, burst into harsh, discordant screams of astonished delight, and now, followed simultaneously by their rakish

fellows, are soon disporting themselves, triumphantly spreading their cramped wings in freedom's realm; and turn, wheel, dip, forming bright blotches of color against the azure sky, until, gaining their bearings, they soon disappear, excepting the parouquet, who, through some whim, still lingers, saucily flashing his gay pinions and sailing undecidedly about.

Who knows! Possibly a wee touch of sentimental regret touches his tiny heart at forsaking her whose especial favorite he was. Thrice he circles the sundial in playful pursuit of the butterflies, then gracefully alights upon a topmost leaf of the tamarind tree, which bends swaying with his weight. For one brief moment he perches there, industriously plumbing himself, then wends his way straight to the trees of the dense, dark jungle from whence he came, lying away off toward Simla in the distance, she watching his flight with sad, dark, dreamy eyes.

“Free, free, free!”

Soft—slowly she repeats the word, first with awe incredulously, then exultingly, her heart stirring meanwhile in a queer tumult of mad, fearful joy, as shadowy visions of youthful imaginations, filled with hitherto unknown sentiments, delightfully vague, blissful anticipations of what is left; possibilities, longings, unintelligible yearnings, feminine expectations looked at years ago through girlish, rose-colored spectacles ere her fate had doomed those

pretty fancies to be knocked over like nine-pins, now alluringly obtrude themselves before her mental gaze and dazzle with their immense splendor her whose worldly experience has been limited to the narrow environments of mere domestic life.

During those seven years of loveless wifhood, Lalage required no staid duenna; her feet had no inclination to stray from virtue's territory. Honor was her sentinel, and those sweet, tender fancies, half-uttered wishes, were in truth repugnant to the inner sanctuary of her being. True, she desired love. This desire, however, was not actuated by so base a motive as passion. In short, she merely dared indulge in day-dreams, a trifle wild, maybe, but certainly nothing more serious than those which the chastest spirits may entertain.

Wifhood is world-manufactured, but love is entirely nature's offspring, consequently more absolute in its influence which controls the universe and wondrous realm of romance. And surely one may crave its possession without censure: Love worthy of existence, must be unsullied; 'tis a crime to defile it. The divine flower of womanhood cannot bloom without love. A sickly bud may appear, to speedily languish when swept by the chilling breath of uncongeniality, and perish in a vain endeavor to peep over the high matrimonial wall behind which it pines.

The fibres of Lalage's heart are not yet attuned

to the theme of love. When love touches them they will burst forth in a furious melody.

Quietly, with every turn and movement suggesting the lithe, supple grace of a young leopardess, back and forth she sweeps aimlessly. Lalage has a tremendous stride owing to her athletic build and remarkable length of limb. Beautiful, too—fearfully beautiful in her rounded symmetry of shape. Tall, straight as a sycamore combined with the rare stately pliancy of the palm. And those long, measured, masculine steps become her royalty.

The room, a spacious apartment with delicately-tinted walls and long, wide windows screened closely with green Persians to exclude the glare, save one from whence a rainbowed flood of light falls, affords her ample space in which to move.

A delicious coolness prevails, characteristic of the Indian bungalow whose outside walls, thickly surrounded, are protected by trees which temper the sun rays beating monotonously upon their close-tufted heads.

Lalage is permitted no immediate repose—her present perturbed state countervails that. As her mind saunters whithersoever it lists, the predominating thought is her freedom, as with hands clasped loosely in a manlike attitude behind, a gay tune breathing from her smiling lips, she, in blissful contemplation of the future, moves hither and thither, crossing and recrossing the strip of brilliant sunlight.

One could imagine this woman, despite the nun-like raiment, with her dauntless bearing and splendid physique, despite sundry incipient whimsical traits in the lovely face wherein there is a baffling something, changeable as a cloudy sky, unerringly indicating frailness of character—yet despite all this, one could easily imagine her a Joan of Arc, an Amazon leader with brass shield and helmet resting on her unruly brows, inspired, commanding, amid martial music and the sullen boom and roar of war, urging, encouraging mighty hordes to victory or challenging a foe to mortal combat.

Yes, one could imagine all this and more, as she turns about, her excited mind lightly treading the intractable mazes of wandering fancies, until, happening to pause, her eyes alight upon his portrait, and with a nervous start she draws away and all pleasurable illusions take to their heels. For he, as if divining her recent thoughts, deeply affronted glares down with a mixture of anger and mocking derision, as if sternly forbidding anything beautiful to come, she, meanwhile, steadily returning the glance with mocking defiance.

A full minute remains she thus, then suddenly a violent tremor assails her, a sob bursts convulsively from her distorted lips, and now, strange to say, after all those dazzling day-dreams, exciting glamor of thoughts, comes the reaction, and caprice, or call it what you will, the utter inconsistency of woman's

nature illustrates itself, for, a swift whirlwind of keenest grief assailing her, she sinks to the floor in an abandonment of uncontrollable despair. And lo! I blush, for my warrior queen is attacked by a very unromantic spell of feminine hysteria.

Remorse sweeps her soul, and spectrelike her conscience arises, upbraiding her with her past sins and ingratitude toward him. Remembrance of his few petty kindnesses are exaggerated into chivalric deeds, his numerous faults, harsh actions condoned, obliterated completely from her memory, and in contrast her own casual shortcomings—at most nothing more serious than mere fits of girlish temper, trifles light as air, really—are conned over, enlarged upon, till they in comparison assume such magnitude as to appal, overwhelm her with her transgressions.

Weepingly she recollects his every kindly act, and ah, with what retrospective pain comes the vivid remembrance of a jeweled bracelet with which he sought to surprise her, and after clasping it on her arm bent and kissed the warm, white flesh, and how coldly she repulsed him. And then again, once when lying ill, how softly he had entered the darkened chamber, how deftly, with almost womanish-like tenderness, smoothed her hot, tumbled pillows whilst she ungratefully shrank from his attempted caress.

Yes, yes! In dismay she sees it plainly now. Oh, that generous love! How cruelly had she repudiated, wantonly tossed it aside as so much dross. And

then, too, his age, which she had hitherto considered so extreme, seemed lessened, for surely sixty and twenty-four is not such a vast disparity, after all.

A great loneliness and timidity seizes her, to be sole guardian of her own individuality. Truly the responsibilities of life are alarming. Never, in the whole twenty-four years of her existence has she felt so utterly alone and in need of her natural protector, her counsellor. But ah! That brave spirit has passed away forever, that loyal heart, so true, so kind, is cold in death, and she sobs despairingly.

Oh, to atone to that noble soul! If those past seven years could be mercifully recalled—blotted from her memory, or, better still, lived over again—how differently she would act, what a fond, loving wife, how patient, obedient, true, she would be! Oh, for the power to summon him back from that eternal shore, if only for one brief moment, to assure him of her everlasting fidelity. Beseech his forgiveness upon bended knees for past errors against him whom she now lavishly endows with gifts, nobleness of character, qualities he never possessed nor could lay the remotest claim to. For a more vile, graceless old individual never breathed to whom she now mentally erects a pedestal whereon he is speedily enthroned and before whose dear image—which she now regards with the reverential awe and admiration of a neophyte for some godlike hero—she weepingly prostrates herself, figuratively rending her gar-

ments, hem to hem, heaping the dust of censure upon her repentant head and drinking to its bitterest depths the black-bitter waters of affliction.

This incident is merely typical of the world's ways. While living we are sinners. Presto! The instant death claims us we are straightway transformed by our erstwhile traducers, strangely enough, into saints.

So, her misery complete, the wretched woman moans groveling in prayers of expiation, unconscious of the afternoon shadows which, sinking, merge into the darker shades of evening until they meet, greet the setting sun ere its crimson disk sways languidly behind the tamarind tree leaving a fiery trail in its path whose red glory is chased, scattered by a swarm of golden stars, which, trooping forth, wink, peering down, radiantly smiling or sullenly malignant.

Hush! The slender moonbeams are creeping timidly in, accompanied by a soft, moist night-wind commingled with the sweet, heavy odor of rhododendrons. The beams, in a silvery radiance, hover over all, caressing the empty cage, and kiss, linger lovingly over the forlorn figure of the woman lying face downward, prone upon the floor.

II.

“Then, Ho! Let us tread a measure,
With the world in its swift, mad spin;
With the free, wild sons of Pleasure—
Drink deep to the goddess Sin.”

Clear, high, firmly-balanced, confidently-sustained, the exquisite bird-notes soar upward, easily maintaining their sweetness and purity to the end, then, slowly descending, fall, cease, followed by silence—wonderful, hushed; a silence conveying sincerest appreciation that awed tribute inspired, erected upon the sacred pyre of homage and burnt at Genius' shrine. This breathless space remains unbroken till a single hand-clap from the farthest end of the room, which is quickly caught up and echoed by one hundred others, rudely stirs the lull. A great roar of applause, fresh, hearty, wholly unconstrained, ensues; demonstratively proclaiming universal approval.

In Alexandria the opera season is long since over—this is merely a straggling band, who, by some freakish chance, have drifted hither; and the auditors, for something better to do, attended, prepared for the worst, and lo! are agreeably astonished upon finding this unheralded vagabond troupe of Italians

as full of good singers as an honest English pudding is of plums. True art reigns here tonight; accept the fact, and, as proof, imagine if you can a Rigoletto without the customary tinsel, sans cap, sans bells, daring to sing this rôle clad in a dress suit of rusty black, yet saved from the ludicrous by the magic grace of his voice alone.

The white-robed prima donna, a lovely, girlish Gilda, partly hidden by the heavy fumes of tobacco smoke curling upward, floating funnel-shaped along the ceiling, bows, graciously acknowledging the generous plaudits, and smilingly consents to repeat her "Caro Nome."

The young Englishman—he who has led the applause—beckons to an Arabian flower girl, and tossing her a coin, selects several magnificent crimson roses, then signals a passing waiter; but pauses, hesitates, suddenly remembering Paolo's rueful assertion regarding the fact that this sweet-voiced girl is the wife of the orchestra leader who had soundly cuffed Joseph Matheas—the jeweler's—ears for presuming to send his wife a trinket that same morning.

"Truly," muses the young fellow, in vivid recollection of the threatening manner in which the leader recently wielded his baton, "truly a fair warning to trespassers." He smiles sadly. No fear of him, Erlynde, arousing any man's jealousy; nevertheless he alters his intention, an intention prompted by Verdi's music which invariably sets his blood flam-

ing. The glorious rendering of "Caro Nome" has seriously upset him, evidently, for he vaguely resents the idea of that monkey-faced leader being the lawful possessor of the fair, slim, young songstress whose entrancing voice once more is thrilling:

"Ca-ro no-me che il mio cor Festi pri-mo pal-pitar."

And when Emoclew, as if divining his thoughts, regards him for one moment cynically, he laughs a trifle awkwardly, blushing a little, and sweeps the roses back into the girl's basket, whilst, as the curtain falls, that old, unaccountable sensation of utter loneliness and depression fraught with keen desolation assails him. It is only momentary, however, and soon passes.

The Café des Pharos is crowded. The tables—heavily laden with bottles, glasses of rum, brandy and absinthe forming the most conspicuous beverage—are closely surrounded, despite the oppressive heat which is only occasionally relieved by a sharp, cool whiff of salty air borne through the wide-open windows from off the calm, moonlit bosom of the Mediterranean.

Erlynde lifts the champagne bottle at his elbow, and filling a glass, drains it to the last drop, then tilting his chair far backward, dreamily prepares to enjoy himself by watching the different faces—for the most part a queer lot.

At present Alexandria is almost totally deserted by

her best citizens, who, to avoid the intense heat, have fled. Thus the town now merely contains the scum of nearly all the nations on the globe, every type faithfully represented—unkempt African coast traders, dealers in ivory, gum and india-rubber, natives, soldiers, sailors—a sorry set, a miscellaneous mixture of all sorts under the sun, good, bad, indifferent, the bad largely predominating. In short, none whose faces (barring a few, a very few exceptions dotted here and there, a sparse sprinkling of the finer element) would indicate their characters—could bear close inspection, indeed if any whatever.

There is a confused, mingled blur of many voices—French, Greek, German, Italian—all combined in this vast cosmopolitan crowd over which a jovial spirit of free, good-comradeship and self-abandonment prevails; yet, in justice, by these Alexandria cannot be judged.

Alexandria, founded by that Macedonian, Iskander the Great, is vastly different from the Alexandria of today, who, disdainfully discarding the mouldy garments of her ancient bereavements, has risen, Phœnix-like, from out the dull, gray ashes of antiquity and is now no longer merely the world's museum, but a fearless, proud young contemporary to those by whom she has been hitherto entirely forgotten; or, if perchance indefinitely recalled as a passé memory, she now bursts forth from her chrysalis state; vigorous, charmingly radiant, thor-

oughly up to date, whilst the various nations stand stupidly agape, till swiftly aware of her wondrous, desirable beauty, throw languishing glances toward the East, and now, like gay young gallants, spruce themselves, anxiously vying with each other, fiercely contending to lay siege to the citadel of her heart, all eager to place the nuptial ring upon her finger and lead her to the hymeneal altar of subjection.

But she, Egypt in experience, having the advantage over unsophisticated maidenhood, lends an indifferent ear to the clamoring of her amorous wooers and remains steadfastly faithful to her dead, wedded memories, awaiting calmly the opportune time to bestow her affections and wealth upon a judiciously-selected spouse—Egypt, rich in product and industries, can now aspire to a wonderful future since European education is slowly refining, elevating the hitherto lax, dulled morals and sensibilities of its people whom generations have conspired to crush—almost extinguish—save one small spark, a frail, invisible line at last commencing to be instinctively felt, drawing them higher, nearer to morality.

In the steady march of Time, Egypt has sped far ahead, rapidly outstripping its olden self of whose soulless memories of a great, dead Past it is now wholly independent. True, there will always remain a weird, strong fascination about this ancient land connected with unfathomed antiquities and old, mysterious religions, puzzling, delightful, where the

shades of Antony and Cleopatra hover and the ashes of the sleeping Pharaohs lie, and the Pyramids and Sphinx keeping everlasting watch have seemingly transmitted their patience to the Egyptians, placid predestinators who meekly fold their hands and bow their heads at Fate's threatenings. These wretched victims of Destiny and Despotism now neither resent nor welcome foreign supremacy, for since the rule of the Pharaohs the Egyptians have been mere slaves in their own land, uncomplainingly bearing the oppressive domination of successive despotic Persians, Greeks, Arabs, Tartars, Turks and others. But the weary era of tyrannical oppression is past and the Egyptians are dimly realizing that the heavy chains of bondage have fallen forever from their limbs and their chequered history of weary misery is now well-nigh over. As yet, the Fellaheen feel it a decided novelty to be at last permitted to lift their heads amongst their fellow-mortals, for happily now they are under a just, wise, considerate rule, not of a ruthless conqueror, but a kind and thoughtful power which is earnestly striving for the best interest of that country. Foremost of the Powers in control is Great Britain, whose Consul-General is second in control to the Khedive, His Highness Abbas Hilmay Pasha, and, in the natural course of events, whilst their chief opponents, France and Turkey, like famished wolves will roar, showing their fangs in useless, impotent, jealous fury when cheated of

their expected prey, the valiant sons of Christianity will plant a firm heel in Egyptian soil, and their united flag—united in the sacred cause of Humanity—will float majestically above the ancient land of the Ptolemys, casting its cooling shadow far, far athwart, fertilizing the wide Lybian desert—then will one of the greatest problems of the world be solved and the Sphinx's mission accomplished; for that which it has been watching, waiting through countless centuries will come to pass, the despised Christian will wield the sceptre of the Pharaohs and sit enthroned upon the seats of the Faithful, and the prophecy of Philo, St. Clement and Origen, wise philosophers, stanch, worthy champions of Christianity, aided by divine wisdom, be fulfilled, and the fanatical followers of the Prophet and Koran will finally bend their knee to the Christian creed.

Erlynde glances furtively toward Emoclew, who, with his untasted glass of sherbet before him, his cigarette unlit, has not moved a muscle, save that brief smile, since their entrance. Erlynde, aware by intuition that his friend is in a misanthropic mood—for which silence he is happily and duly grateful, as Emoclew usually combines the wit and pathos of Dickens with Thackeray's dry, crisp cynicism, and as the latter seems at present to have the ascendancy—Erlynde knows from past experience silence while in that humor is far preferable to speech; so, happily

humming "Caro Nome," he contentedly resumes his observations.

Close to his right is a handsome, black-browed woman, clad in a startling red and yellow gown, her hands and arms weighted heavily with massive golden ornaments, a round blotch of rouge upon either dark cheek. She is conversing in a low tone confidentially, with a burly Portuguese sailor, hoops of gold thrust through his ears. They are both sipping absinthe and seemingly becoming more affectionate each moment.

A short distance farther two swarthy Spaniards are drinking quantities of the good red wine of their country. Near them is seated Nathan Isaacs, proprietor of the Café des Pharos, a suave, pompous Jew, entertaining and entertained by a coterie of Hebrew brethren, his keen eyes alert, sharp to note and rebuke the slightest misdemeanor or inattention on the part of the attendants.

Across at another table is a quiet group of English tourists. At this same table leans a man of robust, strenuous build, asleep, his head propped on a firm, strong, though delicately-shaped hand, and whose neatness of attire stamps him as both a scholar and gentleman. Strange that he should sleep through the din, for the wine and beer imbibed is consequently commencing to have its effect; voices are pitched in a higher key, laughter becomes more loud and frequent, eyes are beginning to flash, cheeks to

red den; they all—at least the majority—appear to be getting tipsy at breakneck speed, and when finally the dingy curtain descends on the last act, the multitude who have valiantly, out of respect and sheer admiration for the singers, striven to remain calm despite the liquor's influence, are now entirely lost to all control. The Spaniards are growing boisterous and occasionally thump the table, to the great danger of the glasses which bob, dance and rattle, causing Nathan Isaacs to wince and cast toward them fearful, reproachful glances.

“Ah, you brute!” shrieks the black-browed woman, as, evidently rendered reckless by the seductive absinthe, she strikes the sailor full in the face with her fan of peacock feathers.

It was a risky thing to do, for the man, with the swift, sullen glow of murder in his bloodshot eyes, swears a coarse oath and roughly catching her frail, jeweled wrist with his huge hand, crushes it cruelly till she pales beneath her paint, and, groaning with agony, is fain to plead for mercy.

Erlynde watches this little incident idly, mingled with a certain contempt. Bah! the fellow is already kissing his companion's ear and bruised arm.

Erlynde moves uneasily, beginning to wonder why his friend, amid so much hubbub, remains indifferently mute. He yawns; now that the opera is over he would gladly go. The smoke is growing

thicker and chokes him, the fetid atmosphere is sickeningly unbearable.

His throat is dry, his tongue parched; he desperately yearns for the luxurious comfort of the dahabeah, with its cosy, richly-upholstered salon, redolent with the odors of Fayoum, and wherein he can, in a mental vision, picture the snowy-covered dining-table and dishes piled high with various assortments of luscious purple and golden fruits peeping from amid their deep green leaves; sweets from Damascus, juicy Nubian dates, invitingly arranged by the deftest of hands. He can see, too,—the moisture clinging thickly, running from its sides—an immense crystal pitcher filled to the brim with delicious, perfumed wine, its wide throat choked by a huge, irradiant pyramid of ice, also the dainty, alluring package of cigarettes composed of Lalakia tobacco which later, on deck, he and Emoclew will smoke, stretched full length upon their tiger skins.

Yet Emoclew, still apparently with no notion nor remotest desire for departure, imperturbable as ever, remains immovable, maintaining his motionless, mummy-like attitude as calmly as the sleeping man opposite, and upon whom his eyes are earnestly riveted.

Several newcomers, sailors, evidently, from off the American man-of-war just in port, now enter, and appropriating a recently-vacated table littered with half-empty coffee-cups, one of their number—a

fine straight-limbed young fellow, a handsome specimen of the American type, with his strong, clear-cut features, finely-curved neck and throat, splendid herculean shoulders and the free, rolling steps of the mariner—orders beer for the crowd.

Perhaps by accident, or in honor of the Americans, the musicians strike up the inspiring strains of "The Star Spangled Banner," at which the loyal tars, to a man, reverently remove their caps.

The two Spaniards, between winks and nods, exchange knowing glances; then a hiss, short and shrill, mingles with the music, at which sound the tall young fellow rears his head, glancing indignantly about for the offender.

"In these days," says one of the English tourists, his voice plainly audible through the brief hush which sometimes falls upon an assemblage, "yes, in these days it seems that a republican government is utterly impossible. What is to become of the world if anarchism is allowed to go unchecked?"

"A republic, or any other form of government, is impossible," answers another. "It seems we are utterly helpless. How can it be suppressed? Anarchism breeds apace like vermin engendered by filth and indolence. It is the baleful result of an ignorant mind diseased by fanatical brooding over fancied injury till it becomes enthused with its own petty, imaginary wrongs and can safely be traced, laid directly at the door of sundry unprincipled poli-

ticians who, to gain their own selfish, ambitious desires, mislead, inspire the slothful masses and their tools' weak intellect to frenzy."

"I advocate the Chinese method; they, heathen though they be, can give us some excellent pointers on how to deal with such cases," interposes another. "I agree with the Celestials, who wisely maintain that a diseased mind, both in man and beast, should be exterminated. We shoot a mad dog; why not, then, destroy—though not by such violent means—a mad man who is a vast deal more dangerous. We have drugs for such purposes which will relieve them painlessly and mercifully. There is more room under than above ground for such unfortunates, whose existence is only a curse and who hang like a mill-stone about the taxpayer's neck."

"You would have to analyze pretty close to discover some of those unfortunates," dryly, "since more than two-thirds of the world is a trifle daft on some subject or another. You'd require a microscopic sieve to separate the healthy from the unhealthy whose craftiness and skill to conceal their pet weakness would dwarf to insignificance the traditional slyness of the fox. No, no, my friend, you can't dissipate nor eradicate the evil by that system of —" The music deadens the speaker's further words.

The flower girl hovers about the American sailors, coquettishly offering them her wares and accept-

ing their jolly badinage good-naturedly. One chucks her under the dimpled chin; another pats her sloping shoulder, whilst another—a gay old sea-dog who, judging by his furrowed brow and grizzled locks, probably has a flock of grandchildren at home—audaciously lifts the hem of her tattered petticoat to peep admiringly at her small, bare feet and trim brown ankles. But they buy her flowers—aye, to the last blossom—heaping them in a towering mass upon the reeking table, while she, the vender, with a flash of black eyes and glint of white teeth, despite their urgent cajolery to remain, ungratefully departs.

The gay old tar—now the girl, their gold clutched tightly in her hand, has vanished—a rosebud pinned jauntily to the lapel of his jacket, is ogling a Titian-haired woman who adroitly encourages his amorous glances by languidly drooping her white eyelids to raise them coyly, ever and anon, with an artless flash, to meet his own. She is beautiful, too, with a certain coarse beauty which she fully understands the value of, and well she knows when Jack's on shore how freely his money flies.

“There is a terrible abyss under that nation's feet,” once more the Englishman's voice is heard. “I can imagine no deed more foul, black nor cruel than the recent cowardly assassination of President McKinley, and if—”

Again the music interrupts; but the young Amer-

ican, catching the last words, leaps to his feet, and, with an expression of amazed horror upon his youthful face, strides toward the speaker.

“I beg your pardon, but will you kindly repeat those last words, if you please, sir?” he says. “I’m sure I’ve misunderstood you.”

Before replying the gentleman addressed regards him an instant in puzzled wonder. “We were discussing the death of President McKinley—”

“Death of President McKinley!—” The young man reels, lifting his hand with a bewildered, boyish gesture to his forehead.

“Ah! Now I understand,” says the other, with a comprehensive glance of sympathy. “You have just anchored. The news here is already one week old. Yes, the assassin’s bullet has, I am sorry to say, robbed the world of her greatest modern statesman; a second Napoleon, yet with cleaner, purer morals. America loved and was exceedingly proud of her late ruler, with just cause, too. I can’t find words suitable to properly express my admiration and esteem for William McKinley—God bless him!”

The sailor, in mute gratitude, clasps and wrings the speaker’s hand. Great tears have filled his dauntless eyes, rolling unchecked down the bronzed cheeks. Let them fall, dear lad, they are a credit and honor to your true young manhood!

Hail to you, William McKinley! The laurel wreath upon your martyred brow shall never

wither; 'twill be kept fresh and green by a stricken nation's tears, whilst memory's harp, whose strings are so firmly strung within the casement of our hearts, the fond breath of recollection will ever softly touch and its chords instantly respond, accompanied by sublime music, an everlasting melody, sweeter by far than any ever written, which will remain forever, going down with us in reverence and beauty, filling our souls with divine fragrance and sunshine's warmth, sustaining us by your faith and wisdom, leading us in loving, gentlest care through the many labyrinths and treacherous pitfalls of Life, safely to that dread, unknown shore which touches the chill, dark waters of Eternity.

The young sailor, after joining his companions, whispers a few words, at which they instantly arise in a body; and, as they with sorrow-bowed heads file toward the door, once more, clear, distinct, that snake-like hiss rings out. With lightning rapidity the old tar wheels in time to detect the culprit, and no nimble young midddy climbed a mast nor skipped across a wave-washed deck with greater alacrity than does this weather-beaten old chap, as, after taking the habitual fore and aft hitch to his belt, he lurches forward, landing his knotty fist square upon the nearest Spaniard's mouth, felling him like an ox.

"Take that, yer hissing sarpent!" he growls.
"Lay thar, and be damned to yer!"

This all happens so quietly and instantaneously it passes almost unnoticed. For perhaps the small space of a minute the red-haired girl, her blandishments gone for naught, is filled with chagrin and is plainly vexed to see her prey escape, who, in a jiffy, has now rejoined his comrades; but quickly recovering, philosophically turns her attention to other, though less desirable game.

It is now growing extremely late. The Café des Pharos is gradually thinning, the crowd dispersing slowly, reluctantly. A waiter touches the sleeping man's shoulder, who is, since the Englishmen have departed, the sole occupant of the table. The fellow, as he meets with no response, naturally concluding the man is drunk, shakes him vigorously.

"Fool!" says Emoclew, lifting his forefinger and speaking for the first time, "Fool! can you not see? The man is dead. Yes," calmly, as several, echoing his last word, recoil, "yes," pulling out his watch, "dead exactly four hours, forty minutes and sixteen seconds. That clock," glancing at the huge time-piece above the entrance to the buffet, "is eight minutes slow. This gentleman," coolly, "died in his sleep at the time I mentioned, exactly."

"Jove!" laughs Erlynde, "and so you've been sitting here all the evening admiring a corpse?"

"Yes," slowly drinking his sherbet, "yes, and—envying him."

"Come, man," Erlynde pulls Emoclew's loose

sleeve, " come, man, for God's sake let us get out of here! "

As they emerge, the refreshing night-wind greets their smoke-filled nostrils, and of which they gratefully inhale long, deep draughts. From the minaret of a mosque in the neighborhood the muezzin's voice musically chants the call to prayer. They move slowly over the stone causeway of the quay, which is almost totally deserted save for a few shadowy, blue-clad Arabs, those vagabond loungers who love the freedom of the air and are lured hither by the extreme beauty of the night. The majesty of silence, a hushed, solemn radiance, lingers caressingly over everything, which nothing mars except an occasional gruff voice, a woman's shrill laughter or the twang of a guitar in the far distance. The star-flecked waters move sullenly; past the breakwaters tiny shafts of silvery foam tipped with gold curl, spread and flash upon the rollers. Mechanically the two men seat themselves upon the parapet whilst the briny air sweeps their feverish cheeks.

Rocking at anchor are several ships and vessels, amongst them the Khedival mail-boat and stately American man-of-war. Its masts and spars sharply silhouetted against the background of clear, moonlit sky, the black-lined P. & O. looms plainly. A couple of Cook & Sons' barges tug vainly at their moorings, and a few other vessels from whose masts the

red flag stamped with a white star and crescent floats lazily.

In silence they arise, turning from the peaceful grandeur, and bend their steps toward the Place Mahomet Ali. Emoclew, still in that perverse, taciturn mood, has seemingly no immediate intention of boarding the dahabeah, which Erlynde mentally lays to "downright cussedness." They pause beneath the dark shadow of the huge Khedive statue to light their cigarettes. And now, with swift force the thought suddenly strikes Erlynde: By what mysterious, occult powers did Emoclew so positively affirm his knowledge, and, more wonderful still, how could he possibly gauge the precise time—to the second—as he averred, that the man in the café expired? And yet another strange coincidence: not one person present thought to inquire. Emoclew, he knew, had lived so close to nature, and, the inherent purity of his soul adhering to his early training, with later knowledge imbibed, he had thus acquired a supernatural gift, and the mysterious laws of Nature were, to a certain extent, under his control.

Emoclew, thoughtfully puffing the smoke from his lips, is placidly gazing skyward. Erlynde clears his throat preparatory to asking the question, essays to speak; but for some peculiar reason his tongue falters and lays powerless across his teeth. He starts violently. Emoclew is speaking.

“ Ah! my friend, there are secrets beyond the invisible which that dead man in his sleep has fathomed. He has dared lift the curtain which separates the known from the unknown; his indomitable will has gained the mastery. In defiance he has read the letters which form the forbidden word. At the same time; that secret has conquered him. Yes,” discarding his half-smoked cigarette—“ yes, how often are restless souls set free—no, not all; some human bodies don’t possess a soul—untrammelled by the cumbersome body, which, when quiescent, fly, veer about in queer places not meet for us to go. Thus are we oftentimes, by some mystic ruse, cleverly and cunningly arranged,—which correctly accords for the nonce with our dreams—peremptorily ordered back; or, if it so happens that we have already slipped through that magic space beyond recall, and successfully solved Life’s tantalizing problem (a task given to us from earliest childhood to unravel, which generally keeps us busy our allotted span) then, presto! we suddenly succumb to some accommodating ailment—heart failure commonly answers the needed purpose—for, believe me, the only key to that unknown riddle is death. And yet,” musingly, “ the perplexing enigma must be simplicity itself; as simple, for instance,” waving his slender hand desertward, “ as some of those mammoth constructions of rock and stone yonder.”

“ Heine, the German poet, declared every age a

sphinx which immediately sank into earth the moment its riddle was solved," answers Erlynde, "and I'm inclined to his belief, since before the days of Abraham those great, ugly masses of rock have been standing useless, whilst sages, wiseacres, Egyptologists, pondered, argued, toiled, unceasingly racked their poor brains for ages to discover the reason, method and contrivance the Ancients employed in moving those colossal stones hither. What was their object? It is a pity the Rosetta stone discovered by M. Boussard in 1799 does not mention, nor any of the speaking stones divulge the secret; neither will the mighty Pharaohs awaken from their marble sleep to proclaim it."

"Bah! The puzzling secret lies in a nutshell," quoths Emoclew, "and is, forsooth! merely the lost art of stone manufacture, which secret of their endurance has unfortunately perished with the Ancients, to be accidentally discovered, as all such secrets are, since scientific researches inform us that everything new under the sun is only a repetition of what has gone before, perchance tomorrow or centuries hereafter."

"Bosh!" scoffs Erlynde. "Science will explode the fallacy and impracticability of that absurd fancy. Why, man, it can't hold water; it is full of the holes of improbability. Your idea, though decidedly original, I confess, is a trifle too farfetched to be plausible. The immense excavations plainly show from

whence those gigantic rocks were hewn; which proves beyond all doubt the supernatural, inexplicable achievements of those people. Your advanced doctrine—pardon me, dear chap—is utterly, wholly illogical.”

“On the contrary,” with provoking coolness, “it is altogether logical. Science and reason teach, point unerringly, conclusively to that fact, preposterous as it may at first seem. If you remember, I did not include all the works; I said *some*. The majority, I readily admit, were beyond question carved from the solid whole. There are, however, several exceptions which I firmly believe, maintain, were never brought hence, at least not in bulk, but by bucketfuls, and fashioned where they stand; composed chiefly of the sand of the desert (sand assuredly is the main ingredient) and were then, whilst in a yielding, plastic state, as a sculptor moulds his clay, shaped to their present form which the unobstructed, scorching wind and torrid sun through countless ages have conspired to harden, preserve. Briefly, it is nothing more nor less than manufactured granite which the Egyptians understood the secret of. Though this secret was not confined to them alone; the Pompeiians, if history can be accredited, evidently shared it. Does not history record the astounding fact concerning a solid block of granite, unearthed in Pompeii, within which, when split open, was discovered embedded a

living toad? Please explain that phenomenon by any other theory than that which I offer—if you can.”

“A fake yarn,” promptly; “the mere fact of the toad being alive stamps it on its face as untrue.”

“Oh, you skeptic! Aren’t you aware that toads are universally conceded to lay dormant for ages?”

“Well, granted that your theory is correct, incredulous as it seems, why then were those works not all manufactured by the same easy process instead of wasting time by such stupendous labor?” queries Erlynde, doubtfully.

“Ah! That’s the secret proper. Those sly old Ancients most certainly had a reason—a deep one—which was not merely to blazon their handicraft or perplex their successors through everlasting time. No; There was an object—one only. Who knows? Perhaps the bodies of the manufactured sphinx serve a mighty purpose. Where,” in answer to Erlynde’s look of inquiry, “where have the riches of Egypt vanished? It is true that when the invading Emperor Augustus cruelly seized Antony and Cleopatra’s wretched children to drag in triumph at his chariot wheels through the hooting streets of Rome, he also despoiled, carted off from Alexandria an immense amount of movable treasure; precious metals, priceless works of art, rare ornaments of all sorts, including the double crown of Egypt. Yet that is naught in comparison to what remained. Where is

the ore from the mines—gold, copper, turquoise? Where are the vast treasures which Solomon brought hither from India? Where, through what mysterious channels, has the almost fabulous wealth of Egypt, once the world's magnificent center, vanished? Where?" with a careless laugh and shoulder shrug. "Ah, the Egyptians were clever strategists. That chiseled sphinx is a blind to hoodwink, direct suspicion from the main cause. Methinks, reposing safe, snug within the spacious bowels of that selfsame sphinx untold riches, precious gems are stored, destined, at all hazards, for their beloved gods."

"Zounds!" ejaculated Erlynde. "Once set that notion afloat, and the country will swarm with hordes equipped with pick-axes and dynamite."

"No danger," dryly, "superstition stalks as rampant today as in olden times, and as frequently runs amuck with reason. Show me the knave who would, despite his direst needs or wishes, dare defile those grim, defiant works. Not one. Those crafty, sly old Ancients understood human nature thoroughly, and from their graves defy, baffle us, since superstition rules the world. No, those hideous carved monstrosities will guard their charge, faithfully in the future as in the past. Man's hand is not destined to destroy them. Their vigil is relentless as Fate."

III

Leon.

You, my lords,
Look on her, mark her well; be but about to say,
She is a goodly lady, and the justice of your hearts will hereto
add,
'Tis pity she's not honest, honorable.

—*Winter's Tale.*

“ Art! Ha, ha! So you call him an artist who paints his cupids with the limbs of a ballet dancer, his goddesses with the coarse features and buxom forms of dairy maids? ”

“ I admit his models are not always judiciously selected; yet even you, Bevin, can't deny for originality, strength and daring, the true genius of his recent Phryne.”

“ Bosh! my dear Val. A beastly caricature; instead of the sensual, voluptuous grace with which these mythical subjects should be treated, he resorts to vulgarity and—”

“ You draw too fine a line. By all accounts Jove was a gay old dog, and if you haven't quite forgotten your early mythological studies, our ancient gods and goddesses *were* a trifle vulgar, and horribly immoral, to boot.”

“ We can excuse immorality; vulgarity, never.”

“Hang it! You are slightly illogical. Aren't they identical?”

“No,” shortly. “No; widely different. Immorality, when clothed by refinement, can be amusing, which is, you must allow, a virtue; whilst nothing could avail by attempting to hide the latter's naked ugliness. For instance, when Mrs. Jenkins, the blacksmith's wife, bolts with Simkins the butcher, her horrified patrician sisters cover their blushing faces, crying, “Shame!” But when the Duchess of Snobington elopes with the Duke of Riffraff—which happens very seldom—my lady is a clever strategist and generally contrives to clutch her coronet with one hand and clasp her lover with t'other, and if either must be renounced it will invariably be the latter. Yet, if so she chooses to hook it, we consider it *chic*, and vow it serves her brute of a husband right, (whose only fault, poor devil, was in refusing to pay his wife's gambling debts) and, condoning her Grace's little eccentricities, utterly condemn the other woman who cheerfully gives up all, everything, for the man she loves; which is not much, certainly, considering the fact that her burly spouse repeatedly beat her black and blue besides starving her five days out of the seven. For truth and honesty, give me the bourgeoisie.”

“You have a deucedly queer way of twisting things around to suit your own fancy and away from Dacre's picture. Sinclair tells me he is at work

upon something else, and that Mrs. Demaris is the model—Jove! as I live, there she is now, or I'm a Dutchman!"

"Who?"

"The Demaris."

"Eh? Where?" *eagerly*.

"In the third carriage, with Trixie Fairfax."

Mrs. Fairfax, exquisitely attired in the most modish of gowns, sweeping past behind a splendid pair of bays, smiles, bowing graciously upon the two young men who return the salute nonchalantly; but her companion, reclining indolently against the cushions, scarcely designs to bend her queenly head.

"So!" drawing a long breath, "that's the Demaris? She's a stunner beyond dispute; truly a worthy model for Venus or Helen and all the other enchantresses thrown in. But there's a queer look about her—something bizarre, though decidedly bewitching. God! what hair; what eyes! I confess she dazzles my sight like the hot rays of the sun."

"She is all glow and glitter," answers Valentine Hume, touching a match to a cigarette. "Of all the women I have ever met in any land, Lalage Demaris is, by far, the fairest."

"The Fairfax, also, looks blooming."

"As a weed, beside the other. Bah! How I abominate that woman!" She is a fair type of your Lady Snobington."

“Teddy Stryker told me Trixie’s husband died almost a pauper.”

“Which is true, but Trixie, faithful to her catlike nature, has always landed on her feet. Her half-brother, a queer, studious sort of chap, horribly deformed, fell heir to an immense estate, and, instead of enjoying himself at home as any sensible human creature should, wanders off to study a lot of rubbishing hieroglyphics and papyri of Egypt, leaving Trixie and Dacre in full possession. I met him in Palestine, accompanied by a freakish-looking individual who claimed to be a Brahmin. They seemed quite chummy, and both spoke of coming to England.”

“Speaking of Trixie,” drawls Bevin, “for bare-faced effrontery she takes the palm. ’Pon my word, it was the rummiest sight I ever witnessed when she publicly cut Mrs. Trent at a big fancy ball in Simla two years ago.”

Hume laughs incredulously.

“An actual fact, by Jove! And everyone present who wasn’t an utter idiot knew the Fairfax was Captain Trent’s *chere amie* at the time, and that her bills were paid by him. Droll, eh?”

“Well, you know, everything is proper when under the rose,” philosophically; “the only sin is in being caught.”

“True, though I always admired Dora Trent immensely, and the snub angered me.”

“Mrs. Trent is certainly a charming woman, and aside from Love’s follies is, I’m sure, a noble, generous character.”

“You are correct. There is many a harlot a virgin at heart; many a virgin a harlot.”

“Right. But do you remember the old maxim regarding virtue and its reward?”

“A false motto. Look at Trixie Fairfax, for instance. She has sailed closer—twenty times closer—to the wind than any woman of my acquaintance, and always went scot-free; though that little affair with Dexter of the Guards came dangerously near pulling her from off her matrimonial pedestal.”

“Poor old matrimony! Like money, what a vast multitude of sins it hides; and, like debt, easily assumed, yet the very devil at extraction—” the existence of some certain unpleasant Jews swiftly paramount—“I remember the occurrence; it raised the deuce of a rumpus at the time. Old Hoggy Fairfax threatened her with divorce, and she luckily owes her escape to his sudden illness and subsequent death. That Dexter business frightened her into remaining loverless ever since.”

“Loverless! Pooh! Rumor whispers she has at last consoled herself with Dick Trevor—don’t know him, eh? Well, you’ll meet him at Castlewalls; of course you’re going down?”

“Yes; wouldn’t miss the chance of knocking over a few pheasants for the world. And you?”

“My uncle’s confounded illness left me no alternative but to refuse.” Bevin shakes his head gloomily. “Just my usual luck.”

“I hear Dacre has got a first rate party together, including Miss Padleford, Kath Brabazon—who is no end of fun—and that delightfully vagabondish Nettleton, who is such a cool hand at cutting the cards, and can rattle the dice with the best of them.”

“And, of course,” a trifle spitefully, to relieve his injured feelings—“and, of course, the lovely Demaris; but Vivian declares she is decidedly *epuis* with Dacre.”

“Never say die!” This little dart, tipped with jealousy’s venom, has as much effect on Val as water upon the proverbial duck’s back. He is young, and to him everything in life appears *couleur de rose*. “Never say die,” laughs he mockingly; “without your charming self to contend against, to the dickens with Dacre. I’ll have a fair field and no favor.”

And he certainly does look handsome—dangerously so—standing tall, straight, displaying his excellent military training in every curve and muscle. Bevin, slight, dark, insignificant, is at a decided disadvantage beside him—so young, strong and bold; assailed by no dread nor fear of any rival.

A carriage suddenly stops, while the sole occupant, a slender, stately lady, heavily veiled, utters an exclamation—“At last!”

The two young men start, then bow courteously, almost reverently, before her, a striking difference in this greeting to the cool indifference which they bestowed upon Mrs. Fairfax a few minutes previous.

“At last!” She stretches out her slim hand and lays it cordially in Val’s palm, whose strong, brown fingers close warmly about it. “Oh, you dear old boy, how glad I am to see you!”

“Rosamond”—there is something singularly soft and tender in his manner—“Rosamond—you! The only woman in the world I most wished to see.”

“Thank you, dear.” The voice is cooing, sweet and low; then, changing to a brisk peremptory note of command, “Jump in; I’m going to take you both home to drink a cup of tea with me.” Which mandate Val Hume accepts with alacrity, but Bevin lamely demurs.

“Thanks, awfully, Mrs. Arbuthnot, but I really can’t, you know. I would, with pleasure, but—”

“He’s afraid he’ll be *de trop*,” laughs Val.

“Nonsense,” answers the sweet voice. “Come,” coaxingly. “Yes, yes, I know you dread the ordeal of sipping sloppy tea and nibbling sponge cake like a poor little mouse; but I have some choice old Burgundy which I keep for special occasions.”

“That settles it,” answers Bevin, jumping into the brougham, the door of which the footman still holds invitingly open. And the high-mettled horses soon whirl carriage and occupants out of sight.

IV

“Had Cæsar known but Cleopatra’s kiss,
Rome had been free, the world had not been his.”

“Fie, sir! A woman’s ear is a waste-paper basket into which men cast their worthless scraps of thought.”

The flower-laden table is a bewildering mass of beauty, exotic fruits and blossoms. Great, wide-throated crystal jars, choked with immense sprays of stephanotis, heliotrope and honeysuckle fling athwart their combined fragrance, heavily oppressive, slightly nauseating. Overhead the candelabra, shaded by gaily-colored globes, swing, brilliantly ablaze, throwing a freakish glow across the diners, queerly detracting from and distorting the charms of some, anon, slyly stealing through the shades and shadows to bestow a false glitter upon those less favored; for the nonce kindly transforming Priscilla Stryker’s long nose into a saucy retroussé and mercifully obliterating the cruel letters branded upon sweet Rosamond Arbuthnot’s white forehead.

Erlynde’s cellars boast the purest stock in the county, and the ancient Port and famous old Bordeaux being both excellent and plentiful, the latter

virtue causes the guests to talk animatedly on every available subject—politics, science, religion—waxing witty, eloquent, foolish, just as the mood or wine affects them. For instance, Roger Barnaby, the erstwhile coldly conservative financier, is verging on tears, and in maudlin tones (interrupted by numerous sobs and hiccoughs) vainly strives to recite a lackadaisical poem—of his own composition—to Mistress Joan Nettleton, who listens pensively. Joan's desperate; her purse is almost flattened through a sure tip from the scoundrel, Jim Parks, who basely persuaded her into putting down twenty monkeys to one on John Gilpin. While Barnaby grunts and stutters she is secretly weighing the chance and advisability of borrowing a hundred or so from him.

Owen Chatwin, the timid young doctor, is discoursing in a pompous, learned manner of matters pertaining to the Transvaal war. Teddy Stryker, a much hen-pecked spouse, is making open, desperate love, directly under his wife's sharp nose, to pretty Peggie Padelford whose slim, ringed fingers he holds tightly jailed, which hand being the right, forsooth, she is compelled to use her fork with the left. At the lower end of the table Valentine Hume is flirting outrageously with saucy Kath Brabazon, upon whose bare, white arm, regardless of her mock protests, he has, unobserved, pressed a dozen hot kisses.

Trixie Fairfax, listening to the story Trevor relates, is laughing boisterously—the newest, naughtiest story which he has just brought over from Paris. Trixie's small, piquant face is flushed from brow to chin, even spreading with a roseate hue to her dimpled shoulders, from which her extremely décolleté gown has a fond tendency of slipping, but which long practice has taught the knack to catch and adjust with a marvelous, dexterous twist in the nick of time. As the story progresses, however, so absorbed is she as to have entirely forgotten the customary hitch. As a result, ere Trevor's yarn is finished, Trixie's gown has slid almost beyond decorum's line.

Altogether it is a most delightful dinner, bordering close upon the Bohemian, whilst the massive sideboard, heaped with glasses and bottles—empty, of course—lends quite a Bacchanalian aspect to the scene. The conversation becomes a muttering jumble, until suddenly, above the din, a high, clear voice cuts the air.

“Fie, sir! A woman's ear is a waste-paper basket into which men cast their worthless scraps of thought.”

Mrs. Lighton-Stryker, sitting directly opposite, ceases to eat, and stares with elevated brows at the speaker; then turning to Vivian Hyde remarks, “A libel against your sex, dear boy. I wonder where she got that speech”—spitefully—“it can't be her

own; of that I'm certain. She has evidently heard it before, or else stolen it out of some trashy novel—don't you think?"

The interrogated one, whose mouth at this moment happens to be filled to its utmost capacity with *pâtés à la crème*—of which dainty he is inordinately fond—grunts, without vouchsafing any answer.

Mrs. Lighton-Stryker, being somewhat literarily inclined, and credited with the authorship of divers works, either as yet unfinished, unpublished, or—unaccepted—it matters little—therefore naturally resents any original remark, more especially when made by one of her own sex—it savors too strongly of poaching on her manor, to whose exclusive preserves she claims full right and title. Or, possibly, the allusion to waste-paper baskets is a sore topic, as it is to numerous others whose literary effusions frequently find a final resting place therein.

"Now, that's positively cruel," drawls a well-modulated voice in injured tones. "You willfully misconstrue an honest compliment into shallow flattery. A waste-paper basket—*mon Dieu!* I call that downright shabby." With quick, happy intonation, "say, rather, a dearly-cherished casket into which we carefully, reverently, place our most rare and precious jewels; or, more truthfully speaking, a sacred edifice, to assail whose white citadels of purity by an untruth, or contaminate with words so vile and base as flattery, would be sacrilegious, and the knave

guilty of such a crime should be instantly annihilated."

"Ho, Julian," cries Kath Brabazon, selecting and snapping from its stem a half-blown Duchess rose from among those which are thickly banked upon the table, and with swift, unerring aim pelting him in the mouth with it. "Ho, Julian, thou false philosopher, prepare for death, then; thy end is near."

He catches the flower, holds it to his heart for a moment, then flattens it with a kiss. An instant later it lies a bruised, broken thing beneath his careless heel, while he resumes argument with his companion, a beautiful creature, with great, dark, starry, Eastern eyes; whose small, queenly head is proudly poised upon a slim, fair throat, whilst under the smooth, white, satiny skin the rich blood forever plays and quivers.

"A charming simile, for which your former sins are freely pardoned." She lifts the brimming wine-glass in her strong, firm hand, clinking it lightly against his own whose audacious glances cause the swift, hot color to drench brow and throat. She laughs in slight confusion; and when Lalage laughs or smiles she discloses two rows of pearls which would surely put to shame and mockery the snowy pebbles which strew and dot the Lido's white shore. "We mortals," she continues, "delight in throwing the dust of delusion into one another's faces."

"You are satirical"—Dacre is slightly piqued. "Sarcasm and wit are men's weapons."

"Let woman be content with flattery," cries Kath Brabazon, mockingly.

"And beauty," answers Dacre.

"Do you consider her pretty?" queries Mrs. Lighton-Stryker, again appealing to the consumer of cream patties.

"Eh—er—yes, extremely beautiful." Having finished the patties he is now busily engaged with a great bunch of purple hot-house grapes.

"Nonsense, Vivian! How can you possibly admire such a massive creature?"—the lady being very diminutively proportioned herself, sneers at her more fortunate sisters. "For my part I prefer Trixie Fairfax. Mrs. Demaris is so—so—ponderous."

"All a matter of taste," quoth he, valiantly attacking an immense pear. "Mrs. Demaris is clever, too, there's no denying; but then"—conciliatory—"the society of a clever woman is like a dental operation, painful, but beneficial." Mrs. Stryker winces; Vivian is evidently not endowed with diplomacy—"yet nature has been very generous to Mrs. Demaris, I'll allow."

"Too extremely generous," sneers she. "I see no beauty in so much flesh and bone."

"A rag and a bone and a hank of hair," hums

Vivian, cutting the ripe, golden rind in an unbroken ringlet from the mellow pear.

“That’s it”—quickly—“her hair; it is such a virtueless shade of red, I wonder if”—

But now the hostess gives the signal, and with preparatory moving, creaking of chairs, the ladies arise to leave the gentlemen to their wine and walnuts.

Lalage Demaris, standing at her full, magnificent height, dwarfs all the other women present. She is last in line to the drawing-room, and as she drags and trails her immense length of orange-hued draperies thither, she is followed by eleven pairs of eyes; ten are filled with genuine admiration, but lurking in the baleful depths of the eleventh is a sullen glare of deadliest hatred; and this last pair are not—human; they are the eyes of Erlynde’s dog Nero.

After closing the door upon the ladies, Dacre resumes his seat, and selecting a choice Havana, sits staring vacantly before him, his left hand fidgiting with a mass of loose rose petals which have fallen from their stems to lie scattered upon the table cover.

“Splendid-looking woman, isn’t she?” exclaims Patrick Invorarity, whose brain is slightly befuddled. “I’ll wager she has a history, too; those out of the ordinary looking people nearly always do.”

“No need to inquire to whom you refer.” Val-

entire Hume lights a Turkish cigarette, watching the smoke sail in tiny, curled rings to the ceiling, casts a side glance toward the slender, athletic young giant whose more than handsome face is overcast for the nonce as his fingers still crumple and crush the rose leaves. "If so, Dacre should be the man to enlighten you, considering the fact that he has out-distanced us all with the lovely widow."

"A widow? Imagine my ecstasy!"

"An Irishman loves a widow."

"Pooh!" interposes Trevor. "Artful dodgers, widows; don't suit me—always steer clear of them. Look what Dickens says."

"I notice you always manage to give them a wide berth," jeers Grosvenor, maliciously, remembering his late devotion to Mrs. Fairfax during dinner."

"Yes, by Jove!" answers Hume, flipping the ash from his cigarette. "Yes, here he is on the eve of marriage and live happy ever afterwards, as the story books say, and still carrying on a most desperate flirtation with Mrs. Demaris."

Dacre winces; he knows he is being roasted. With one sweep of his hand he brushes the rose leaves in a scattered shower from the table, then impatiently pushes the short, crisp hair from off his forehead.

"And she certainly seems to receive it well enough."

"That's a fact," laughs another."

"The Saints forgive me, then!" snuffles Invorar-

ity, in mock grief, taking a long pull at the seltzer. "The saints forgive me, I'm going straight to my room to commit suicide. Please"—tearfully—"please write on my headstone, 'Here lies a victim of unrequited passion.'"

"Do nothing rash; wait till morning. Time—" consolingly—"is the most skillful physician. He heals all ills, no matter how serious," says Barnaby.

"Let him go," cries Valentine Hume, grandiloquently. "Passion is the steed of the universe; Ambition, the spur; Life, the rider; Death, the goal. Let him go. Farewell, Invorarity, your request shall be sacredly attended to—I have spoken."

"I warned Dacre how it would be, but he was obdurate," groans Barnaby.

"Yes," muses Vivian, absently toying with an iced mango. "I foresee his ruination."

"He will get his *cong e*," replies Chatwin, sotto voce.

"And serve him right, too, if he wants to make an ass of himself," jeers Trevor.

"What are you fellows driving at?" laughs Dacre, good naturedly, lifting a glass of brandy to his lips and draining it neatly at one gulp. But still the jolly badinage goes on.

"I wonder how his affianced would like it if she should hear of this sort of thing," sighs Desmond.

"It is clearly some one's duty to warn her," chimes Teddy Stryker. "Still, it would be such a

shame to interrupt anything so placid and tranquil.”

“Yes, that’s the deuce of it,” says Hume, “one hasn’t the heart to interfere with an affair so pure and pastoral, don’t you know.”

“Perhaps he believes in that beautiful old motto, ‘The world well lost for love,’” echoes Chatwin.

“Possibly,” interjects Invararity, piously, “and we must strive to reform men’s hearts before attempting to reform their actions.”

Thus they joke and scoff till Maggs, the butler, in stentorian tones announces coffee in the drawing-room, and who, after the men file out (some decidedly unsteady in their gait) with many grunts, protests and aspersions, summons his corps of assistants, and out of the present chaos order is soon restored. Not so, however, the butler’s temper, as, still complaining, he joins his colleagues below.

“Scandalous—scandalous!” he sputters. “It is just twenty years, come this Michaelmas, since I first stepped foot in Castlewalls, and—” pausing to partake generously of the spicy ragout which Mrs. Burton, the plump housekeeper, has for several seconds been pushing toward him, “twenty years, and never before have my eyes witnessed such outlandish, outrageous, disgraceful—”

“Disgraceful?”

“You will please not interrupt me, Ma’am”—the housekeeper’s eyes drop demurely at the reproof—“However, I repeat, disgraceful—yes, *disgraceful*

actions of the whole tribe; especially that red-headed foreign woman, who seems to have set all the men folk stark staring mad with her infernal, barbaric clothes and heathenish gewgaws—”

“Ha, ha!” A suppressed titter from a couple of be-capped, be-ribboned maids, which luckily goes unheard.

“I have had to take out the seventy-fifth bottle of Moselle this week, and here it is only Monday. Ah,” sorrowfully, “if old Sir Vincent could only see that precious stuff, which he prized and treasured as the apple of his eye, a-running wastefully down their greedy gullets, he would send them to the right-about with a flea in their ear, in double-quick time. Every blessed bottle of that precious stuff, as I brush the cobwebs from, brings the tears to my eyes, and —” the girls giggle more audibly, “Oh, yes, you jades may laugh, but the sooner young master returns, the better; I’m sick and tired of such tomfoolery.”

“Law, Mr. Maggs,” chirrups one of the maids, pertly, “you are sweet on Mrs. Demaris’ red hair, yourself; you know you are.”

A shout of laughter follows this sally, whilst Maggs sits in speechless rage.

“Lawks, what a rum idea!” simpers the jealous housekeeper.

“Yes,” continues the girl, dipping him a saucy

courtesy, "I caught you only this morning a-casting sheep's eyes up at her window."

"You are an ill-bred hussy!" shouts the guilty butler.

Amidst the general consternation which follows, fortunately a bell rings, and the maid darts quickly in answer. The housekeeper pushes another tempting dish solicitously forward, which the butler eyes pensively.

"Taste it," coaxingly. "Just a morsel. Mr. Maggs—do!"

Mr. Maggs deliberates, regarding it askance for an instant, then with a little more persuasion recklessly plunges his spoon into the savory mess before him.

Above, the merry guests still hold free, wild revelry, which penetrates every nook and corner of Castlewalls, and floating through the wide-open windows, passes far out, commingles with the distant darkness.

And thus they break his bread and drink his wine, with never a thought nor care for him who gives with lavish hand, save possibly one fleeting moment, when snugly ensconced beneath his roof, amidst silken covers and downy pillows, they are for one brief instant—by the wind or rain dashing against the casement—perchance awakened, to lazily wonder why the sole possessor of such wealth and luxurious splendor values it so lightly that he unwittingly

tingly wanders self-exiled, leaving all in control of those whose hands plunder him ruthlessly—and with far less scrupulosity than the paid hirelings—then yawn, turn, and stretching their warm, white limbs, slumber and dream again.

V

“Rome—Rome imperial, bows her to the storm,
In the same dust and blackness, and we pass
The skeleton of her Titanic form.”

“There is truth in all philosophy.”

“And yet,” bitterly, “where is the philosophism that can prevent us from becoming broken on the wheel of the world before the noon of life is passed—sometimes, alas, long before 'tis reached? You say, my friend, that there is truth in all philosophy, but from a logical standpoint I maintain that all truth is not any one of them.”

Emoclew, standing motionless, an arrow-straight and shrouded figure, with arms folded in their habitual manner closely upon his breast, shrugs his shoulders slightly without replying. He might be mistaken for an image of stone. Remarkably tall, majestic, against the space of the setting sun his profile plainly outlined, cameo-like, distinct, as if carved in marble, a sensitive, womanish profile, with thin, quivering nostrils, firm-pointed chin twisting somewhat upward, a small head, entirely hidden within a heavy white cowl, his manner and appearance a combination of servility and hauteur.

“When the sons of freedom braving,
Rome's imperial standards flew,”

mutters Erlynde, leaning idly against the crumbling wall. "One hour have we lingered here; one hour have I listened to the beat and crash of war. See, Emoclew! Hither comes, like a radiant god, the mighty, well-loved Coilglch, imperiously rolling his dazzling car, rushing defiantly through the immense, deep ranks of the Romans. But ah—(shaking himself as if awakening from sleep) they vanish, and this tottering wall is the end. Behold! Their once mighty ramparts now serve no greater need than to breed and shelter these frivolous weeds"—reaching forth and dragging from their roots a cluster of deep, dark purple blossoms which cling to the wall, swaying, tossing with every breeze—"See the frail, pretty things! only fit to adorn some fair, shallow woman's hair or breast. Thus doth all man's great works and actions fail, ending in naught. A fig for philosophy and knowledge, the pursuit of which merely wears holes in our intellect."

"Yet, oh, Emoclew! what a glorious thing Life's morning is for a fine, straight fellow"—catching his breath, he waves his long arms with a self-deprecatory gesture—"ah, a fine, straight fellow, strong of limb, brave of heart, to whom the world is a vast arena, when, in the insolence of youth and strength he steps forth, stripped like a gladiator! How proudly our—his—eyes indifferently rove around the immense amphitheatre—fierce, eager, confident of victory.

“Until perchance amongst the crowded gallery, we—he—espies one who causes his heart and pulse to throb and beat more rapidly; whilst she, reclining amidst silks and laces, blushing returns our ardent gaze with a coy, sweet smile of encouragement from behind her jeweled fan; or, as a gage, flings us a flower or glove yet warm from her soft white hand, causing us to suddenly realize how wondrous a blessing is life’s strength and love. Filled with exhilarating madness we rush furiously forth; parry, struggle. Ho! our opponent is down, our foot upon his breast! How long and fierce the plaudits ring! Inspired by such a storm of approval we rush frantically forth to meet another victim. Once more victorious! Again and again we win, until, in turn, our bruised, bleeding lips are forced to press and kiss the reeking dust. Our adversary’s heel crushes our shoulder as he glances triumphantly upward for the signal. Which shall it be? It comes—thumbs up—we are spared—we live!

“A trifle disheartened, amid jeers and yells of derision, we sullenly renew the combat; fight desperately; struggle. Again slip, stumble, fall, until finally—” lifting the hat reverently from off his broad, square forehead,—“until finally, the Great Judge seated aloft in the blue dome overhead, mercifully points, ‘Thumbs down!’

“And thus, Emoclew, it is over. What signifies or matters that our battle was nobly, fairly fought?

In the end, alas, we lose—we lose! Another is brought hither to fill our place; another meets those smiling eyes, and is greeted—poor fool!—by that crumpled glove or flower, and listens to the laughs and cheers from the fickle galleries—”

A slight shiver passes over and interrupts the enthused young speaker. The sun sinks lazily, turning the spires and steeples of Rome to amethyst, pale rose and saffron. The misty vapors arise. The cool tramontana has suddenly ceased blowing, to be instantly succeeded by the close, clammy, penetrating, treacherous sirocco. This sultry breeze catches and twists Emoclew's loose gown tightly about him; the other shudders more violently, drawing the heavy coat collar closely about his ears; the stifling oppressiveness of the atmosphere increases.

“ Here! ” cries Emoclew, swift to note the second shiver which shakes Erlynde's frail frame, his slim fingers rapidly uncorking an oddly-carved silver flask. “ Here, you must swallow some of this! A little more—quick—down with it! That's right. Paolo told me this morning that the city is threatened with an epidemic of perniciosa. Come, ” authoritatively, “ come! ”

As the two men turn to depart, the full splendor of the setting sun's rays—gold and bronze—rest strong upon them, adding to the tall, spare figure of Emoclew an extra dignity, as he walks with long, measured strides, painfully gauged now, however,

to keep pace with the uneven gait of the other, whose dwarfish, misshapen form, grotesquely hideous, is in direct contradiction to his own. Slowly they proceed, Erlynde pausing occasionally to drop a coin into the outstretched hand of some whining beggar, to be rewarded by a "*Grazia, signor,*" or an indifferent "*La Madonna vi benedicia.*"

At a short distance Paolo waits with the restive horses tugging fretfully at their reins, tied to a branch of an olive tree; while Paolo, as usual, is amusing himself by flirting with a pretty little Neapolitan girl, whose brown hands he holds in both his own and gazes into her eyes with all the eloquence he is so easily master of.

"Humph!" mutters Emoclew. "The rascal! Last night it was the English maid at the Hotel del Europe, and now this little simpleton."

"Yes," answers Erlynde, "Paolo uses no discrimination; he can't resist sipping the honey from every flower he passes."

"Bah! He is a gourmand. Women and wine in moderation; too much of either is nauseating."

Paolo has just pressed a kiss upon the girl's full, red lips, when, happening to glance over his shoulder, and catching sight of the two men, she utters a shrill scream, and, jerking her fingers from his grasp, flees like a deer; whilst Paolo, turning with a careless laugh and utmost sang-froid, unties

the horses which they hurriedly mount and set off at a sharp gallop.

The atmosphere is filled with a quivering, dangerous moisture which thickly envelops in a vaporish mist the olive groves and vineyards. From the Campagna they turn speedily transverse, past the towering, monumental tomb of Cecilia Metella. This noble structure, erected in loving memory of the many virtues of an idolized wife by a heart-broken husband, has withstood the storms of nineteen centuries, though profaned; for now the unsightly, incongruous battlements unmistakably show the cruel scars of war upon its dauntless front; from its base now emerges a little, ragged goatherd, digging his sharp, white teeth into a thick slice of black bread.

On they dash, through this vast, desolate region, past the remains of the once magnificent circus of Romulus and Dominie Quo Vadis. On—on—past countless buried, long-forgotten Romans, within whose crumbling tombs, sublime even in decay, many a roving vagabond scamp finds temporary shelter, and perchance smashes up a mummy to boil his soup.

Across the ruinous waste, mingled with the wind from the cold current of the Tiber, sweeps the soothing, droning sounds of a zampogna, played, no doubt, by some strolling fellow who has possibly begged a lift upon one of the many wine-laden carts.

Erlynde and Emoclew slacken their reins to gaze on the mighty grandeur about them, which nothing disturbs save an occasional belated horseman, who, clad in picturesque costume and armed with coiled ropes, dashes past at breakneck speed.

“Soft o'er the fountain, ling'ring falls the southern moon;
Far o'er the mountain breaks the day—”

Erlynde reels, clutching the pommel of his saddle, for Paolo, jogging on behind, lazily flecking with his whip the tops of the white flowers from off their stems growing commingled with the green grass, gleaming like tiny, ghostly stars, has suddenly burst into melody, and in a voice so high, pure, sweet, trills the words of this beautiful old Italian song.

“For God's sake, brace up, old chap!” Emoclew, fearful of the deadly perniciousa, clutches his friend's arm in a vise-like grip, and again produces the silver flask. “Take a long pull, Guy,” anxiously.

“It is nothing,” answers the other, shaking his head. “It is nothing, Emoclew; but that voice startled me for an instant. I could have sworn it was my brother Dacre's; and, strange coincidence, too, that is his favorite song.”

“Is that all?” heaving a sigh of relief. “Thank heaven it was nothing worse! I was afraid that villainous fever had you. Paolo,” sneeringly, “is a buffooning idiot, singing and chattering almost everything in every language under the sun, yet,

like a parrot, never knows the meaning of what he says or mimics." And simultaneously both put spurs to their horses' flanks, and are soon speeding toward Roma Vecchi.

Around the trunk and limbs of Guy Erlynde's family tree, the rank, thick vines and blossoms of corruption grew apace, destroying, killing in quick succession, until, curiously enough, of that once mighty race, the sole relic of their sin and vice is this stunted, misshapen thing.

Erlynde's painfully sensitive nature repels him from mingling with the world. Loving beauty with an abnormal passion akin to worship, his own appearance was to him an everlasting horror and shame—striving to win forgetfulness, of which he sought consolation by burying himself deep in Horace and Virgil; content, in his wanderings through the East, to dream away his life; idly living over again the delightful Græco-Roman period. He attempted—nay, wrote—some fairly good classic verse, delicate, firm and fine in outline. He was, in truth, a thorough classicist.

One morning the Mollah—a green-turbaned Turk, claiming direct descension from Mohammed, in charge of the Kahriye Mosque, one of the most ancient temples in Constantinople, whose paintings and mosaics Erlynde delighted to examine and study—was absent, and his place temporarily filled by another, between whom and the Englishman a pleasant

acquaintance began which speedily developed into sincere friendship.

When Erlynde left Constantinople, he wandered aimless, purposeless, until by chance, several months later in Bengal, happening to attend a ceremony in a Hindoo temple, they met again. The temple was to be dedicated to the Goddess Doorga—Emoclew's special deity. The Englishman, contrary to custom and as a mark of honor, was permitted during the rites to cast a flower into the basin of water, which fortunately floated to the right—a good and excellent omen—which cemented the friendship of these two still more strongly.

Emoclew, a strange mixture of Oriental fanaticism and modern common sense, though a Brahmin, was far advanced of his fellows. In some instances his nature was simple as a child's; in others he was strangely unfathomable.

A strong fascination, blended with awe—not fear—drew Guy Erlynde in friendship, day by day, nearer and closer, in an unbreakable bond to the Hindoo.

This queer mortal, despite his scoffing and mockery at the many absurdities, erratical customs of his race, devotedly, from the first to the ninth lunar day, observed the worship of Doorga, clearly illustrating the fact that the ridiculous superstitions of his creed were not banished; merely, owing to his broad-European learning and extensive travels, lying dor-

mant, only awaiting that single spark to his fatal, heretic nature, to burst into swift, uncontrollable flame.

Of this taint in his friend's otherwise loyal and noble character, Erlynde was fully conscious, and loved him none the less; and admired him immensely, possibly more on account of his mysterious, bizarre theories, ideas; and, being the weaker of the two both mentally and physically, was it strange that he should lean upon this brilliant Brahmin, relying wholly on his dictations, and gladly rendering him a certain amount of homage? Nothing could surpass, nay, equal, the loyalty and truth existing between these two men, so widely different; dissimilar in form, temper, nature and nationality; whom Fate seemed ever to delight in casting unexpectedly together. They had parted in Constantinople to meet in Egypt; again in St. Petersburg, and, through the mysterious channels which Destiny sometimes leads us, had met once more in Rome.

VI

“The visions that oft to worldly eyes,
The glitter of mines unfold.”

“Will you come with us?” cries Trixie Fairfax, approaching, followed by several of her guests. “Will you come with us? We are going to have a gypsy tea over yonder,” nodding toward the lindens, “where there is shade and a breeze.”

“Yeth, do,” lisps Bobs, Trixie’s wee daughter, as, hugging a huge doll, the counterpart of herself, she toddles up to Dacre, who, with Invorarity, is lying stretched at full length beneath the branches of a copper beech. “Yeth, do, you lazy, big mans.”

Dacre, a prime favorite of hers, jumps to his feet, and regardless of the doll, which slips to the ground, catches the little thing, who shouts with delight, and tosses her high above his head, whilst Trixie’s little spaniel whirls and scampers with curved body madly around him.

Invorarity, pretending to weep copiously, picks up the discarded doll.

“Is she dead?” gasps Bobs.

“No, not quite,” mournfully; “her ankle is sprained, her nose is smashed, and a few ribs broken, but she *may* live, if——”

“ Give her to me,” screams Bobs.

“ See, Bobs,” tantalizingly swinging the doll to and fro by a flaxen curl, “ see, what a miserable wreck. I very much fear she is really no more use; but, if you will come and kiss me, you shall have her.”

“ I won’t!” yells Bobs.

“ Now there’ll be an awful row,” laughs Trixie, as Bobs, endeavoring to regain her own, lets forth a volley of naughty little petulant oaths which she has learned, goodness knows where; then bursting into passionate tears, flies at Invararity like a small Fury, and after gaining possession of the doll, gathers it into a maternal embrace.

“ Come,” says Dacre, who has constructed an impromptu couch of dry leaves and moss for the invalid doll. “ Come, let us move her a little and make her more comfortable.”

“ No, no,” beseechingly, “ you will hurt the poor dear. Look! She has got a fever.”

“ I wonder if she wants some water?” inquires Miss Brabazon, kindly.

“ Will you drink, my dear?” sighs Bobs, dolefully. “ There, there,” wetting her tiny lace handkerchief, and laying it tenderly across the tip of the injured doll’s nose, in the faint, fond hope that this simple remedy will prove beneficial. As the child flutters, hovering tearfully above the waxen toy, the guests

are convulsed with silent mirth, with the exception of Invararity, who exclaims wrathfully :

“ Deuce take it ! I can’t stand this sort of thing any longer, you know. It always maddens me to see a female child hugging to her innocent breast a beastly doll. Pitch the cursed thing away ! Put a top, a ball, kite, marbles in her hands instead. Let her enjoy her brief youth. Maternity, with all its bitter cares, responsibilities and sorrows, comes, God knows, only too soon.”

“ Amen ! ” laughs Trevor, brushing several yellow beech leaves from his shoulder. “ Amen ! Invararity, what you say is indisputable ; nevertheless we mortals are a constant contradiction ; no sooner are we able to lisp or toddle than we imitate the staid mannerisms of Age. Presto ! No sooner do we attain that period than we ape the follies of Youth.”

“ That is because we delight in contrasts,” interposes Dacre. “ Pray explain why the coy, sweet maiden of sixteen chooses as her *beau ideal* the man of fifty, whilst the matron of forty dotes on the boy of twenty. Human nature ; nothing else.”

“ Humph,” snaps Mrs. Lighton-Stryker, leaning closely against Vivian Hyde’s shoulder (who is contentedly munching tarts and biscuit by the score). This remark seems to convey more of personal significance even than that regarding waste-paper baskets. “ Humph, how very absurd ! ”

“ Heigh-ho ! ” sighs Mr. Dacre, stretching himself

upon the ground, and comfortably propping his head against his sister's knee. "Heigh-ho! we earthlings run around in a perpetual circle——"

"Hark!" enjoins Kath, solemnly. "Listen! Julian is surely going mad."

"Yes," acquiesces Patrick Invorarity, "the sun is a trifle hot for weak brains."

"Nay, my lady love," answers Dacre. "I'm only mad on one subject."

"And that is?" queries Kath.

"Yourself"—promptly. "But what was I saying, Miss, when you so rudely interrupted me?"

"I think," hazards Peggie, "it was something about perpetual motion, or——"

"Ah! Now I remember, I was remarking, we earthlings run around in a perpetual circle. Take, for instance, the unsophisticated youth who, immediately upon reaching, struts along Life's highway, to instantly succumb, recklessly cast all at the feet of the first blasé enchantress whom he meets, and, flattered, arrogant, proud of her favor, her open preference for him above all his older rivals, swaggeringly assumes a boastful air, and, forswearing fealty to poor, fond little Phyllis, who, foolish soul! amongst the buttercups, daisies and green meadows patiently awaits his return, and, alas! on whom he now seldom bestows a thought save an occasional brief, disparaging remembrance and blush for his silly, hobbledohoy sweethearting days—whilst he

compares his first love's simple pink and white prettiness to his present enslaver's manufactured charms——"

"Oh, I say," interpolates Mr. Invorarity, "he ought to be stopped!"

"Yes," chimes Miss Brabazon, "if he keeps this up much longer we'll have to resort to drastic measures."

"But," continues Mr. Dacre, quietly ignoring these interruptions, "in after years the foibles and frailties of this experienced coquette fail to please, amuse; consequently her blandishments pall on him, and becoming weary, satiated with hollow, worldly vanities, he eventually—when age casts its first frosty shadows before, and a whiff of its icy breath touches his cheek—then, then he arrives at the same point from where he started in youth, to carefully select as a mainstay in his declining years, bread and butter prettiness, congratulating himself, meanwhile, on so wise and judicious a choice with one in whose hands his honor (of which he suddenly becomes extremely solicitous) will be safe, and his line worthily propagated."

"You are talking a lot of rubbish, I think, dear," laughs Mrs. Fairfax, at the conclusion of this speech, running her fingers through her brother's curly hair.

"Nay," smiles Lalage, "not rubbish at all. I," with a tranquil glance toward Dacre, "thoroughly enjoyed it."

“Do you speak from experience, Mr. Dacre?” asks Mrs. Lighton-Stryker, with an insinuating glance toward Lalage, whose meaning conveys volumes.

“No,” answers Julian, “not personal experience; my ideas are formed from general observation.”

“Ah, indeed!” smiles she at this rebuff. “Then you evidently carry a mirror with you.”

“And yet,” continues Dacre, ignoring Mrs. Stryker’s words, stirring his tea thoughtfully, “and yet the only prop and consolation of our declining years is the remembrance of those selfsame ‘youthful follies.’”

“Thou aged and feeble sage!” scoffs Miss Brabazon, casting a mischievous glance from beneath her curling lashes at the speaker, and whose impish, dark beauty is thrice enhanced by the startling red gown she wears. “Thou aged and feeble sage!” mockingly, “you probably speak from experience; if so, *your* declining years should happily be filled—crowded—with many such reminiscences. Now, don’t be cross; I mean innocent little reminiscences, of course. Please throw me a tart. Thanks,” sweetly, as the tart spitefully alights in her lap, jam side down.

“Poor fellow,” sighs Peggie Padelford, plaintively. “Somehow he has missed the sweets of life; consequently it has embittered his disposition.”

“Sour grapes is his complaint,” answers Invarar-

ity, moving toward Mrs. Demaris, who is looking entrancingly beautiful this warm afternoon; the sun, sifting through the lindens, turning her uncommon shade of hair alternately into different hues—red, gold and bronze. Her gown, too, of some queer, soft, diaphanous material, is essentially becoming, being scarcely whiter than her perfect face and faultless neck and arms.

“Sour grapes,” repeats the Irishman.

“Oh, go to blazes!” Dacre turns irritably; a branch overhead has apparently interfered with his attention and—temper.

“The fickle God of Love has flown past,” sighs Joan Nettleton, “and evidently shown him a clean pair of heels.”

“Love, forsooth!” glancing furtively toward Lauge. “Love is nothing but a tangled mass of false illusions. I don’t believe in such trumpery stuff—at least, not woman’s love; it is all deceit and—er—that sort of thing. I want none of it.”

“That shot’s intended for her. See! her cheeks are turning positively scarlet,” whispers Mrs. Lighton-Stryker to her bosom friend, Mrs. Carew, who replies,

“Yes, Dacre’s jealous as a Turk.”

“And no wonder,” accedes Priscilla Stryker. “The way she carried on with Invorarity last night was positively shocking.”

“Ho, Dacre!” cries Miss Brabazon, “What a

nasty speech. How you must hate us. Oh, cruel one!" in mock tones of grief, "are we to infer that you contemplate celibacy?"

"Infer whatever you please," laconically.

"He's trying to draw her out." Mrs. Lighton-Stryker leans toward Mrs. Carew's ear. "Now we'll have some fun."

But if Lalage has heard Dacre's remarks, she appears totally unconscious; her face is as imperturbable as usual as she calmly murmurs in answer to Trixie's inquiry regarding refreshments:

"Yes, another cup, please; not any sugar, thank you. No, nor cream, either. I'm like the Russians—or—which is it?"—with that soft little laugh of hers—"the Chinese, who drink their tea straight?"

She gathers a handful of crumbs and casts them to the gorgeous peacock, who, followed by his humble brown mate, has ventured nearer and nearer, and now boldly pecks at the shimmery folds of her white gown. Dacre feels the meanness of his words, and yet, another side glance at her lovely, serene face is enough to enforce its continuance. She does not show the least inclination to join in the general conversation, nor exhibit a particle of interest.

"I'm sure she's in love with him, for all her seeming indifference," snickers Mrs. Stryker.

"Hush!" answers Mrs. Carew, warningly. "Hush, he's going to say something,"—and he does.

"Some fools make goddesses of women; some,

idols; some, servants or slaves; and some, what they really are—toys. All women are insatiable, delusive coquettes of the first water.”

“What a fib!” flares Kath Brabazon, angrily, making a tempestuous motion toward him with her fist. “How dare you say such horrid things? On the contrary, man is the most insatiable creature in existence.”

“That’s right; give it to him, dear,” lazily draws Peggie Padleford, who is lying, stretched Cleopatra-like, upon a grassy knoll. “Defend us at all hazards.”

“I’m loyal to the fair sex, and agree with Miss Brabazon. Woman is man’s superior, by far,” says Invorarity, who is comfortably wedged in between Lalage and a tree-trunk. “Faith! look at the number of heroines the world can proudly boast of.”

“Heroines! Ha, ha! Never were any; never will be any,” retorts Dacre.

“History can’t lie,” answers Mrs. Lighton-Stryker, tartly. “Look at Jeanne d’Arc.”

“H’m, history,” tantalizingly, “history doesn’t lie; it simply prevaricates—which is worse—to eulogize and screen the frailties of your absurd sex.”

“Oh, treason!” cries Miss Brabazon, wrathfully. “Dacre, you *are* a brute.”

“I’ll wager,” continues Dacre, undaunted, “I’ll wager when Joan of Arc was in the thickest of the fight, busily raising the siege of Paris, she was

trembling in her boots for fear her back hair would tumble down."

"She had no cause for fear," says Mrs. Lighton-Stryker. "*She* was not like the majority of modern women nowadays. I'm certain her hair"—with a spiteful glance directly toward Lalage's glorious, abundant tresses—"I'm certain *her* hair wasn't false nor—dyed."

"Dacre's brutal—simply brutal," says Invorarity. "Eh, Mrs. Demaris?"

"Such a silly subject," she frowns slightly. "For goodness' sake change it."

"And she pretended not to listen," whispers Mrs. Stryker.

"You can rest assured she heard every word," answers Jane Carew. "Believe me, there is more in this than we are aware of."

"Not the least doubt of it, my dear," acquiesces the other. "He positively *glared* at her."

"I say! This is beastly slow," yawns Vivian, who has just finished the last biscuit and emptied his seventh cup of tea.

"So glad to hear your voice again," carols some one.

"Yes," cries another, "though I have heard it is considered wisest to let sleeping dogs lie."

To this witticism Vivian Hyde grunts, without deigning any answer.

"Hello!" From the distance approach Hume,

Teddy Stryker and Chatwin, equipped with shooting jackets, guns and bulging game bags slung across their shoulders. "Hello! May we have some tea?" shout they.

"Oh, for mercy's sake!" screams Trixie Fairfax, gathering her dainty skirts about her. "For mercy's sake, call your nasty dogs away! The horrid things are jumping over everything. Oh!" turning despairingly toward Trevor, "Oh, do try to chase them off. Ugh! The wretches are actually licking my hands."

"An' you love me, Mrs. Fairfax," says Teddy Stryker, "a cup of tea."

"You don't deserve any, you cruel monster," cries pretty Peggie Padleford, indignantly. "Out all day destroying, killing these poor little innocent birdies." Reaching into Teddy's game bag and drawing forth a pheasant, she holds the wee, limp body in her slim, white hands, tenderly stroking the silvery-gray feathers which are thickly bespattered with blood. "For shame, Teddy! Trixie, don't give him any tea."

"What a Bacchanalian scene." Hume, looking very handsome in his hunting toggery, casts an admiring glance toward Lalage, who smiles most graciously in return. "Any tea left?"

"I'm afraid not," answers Trixie, peering anxiously into the teapot. "Scold Vivian; he's the culprit. I've just drained the last drop for him."

He has devoured the tea, bread, cake, tarts, biscuit—everything.”

“Not so much as a crumb left to swear by,” says Teddy Stryker, gloomily.

“By Jove, Hyde,” says Hume, reproachfully, “you *are* a thundering glutton.”

“I can’t eat any more,” sighs Bobs, reluctantly casting aside a morsel of sponge cake, which the three young men, amidst shouts of laughter, wildly scramble for, like famished wolves or starving, shipwrecked sailors. “I can’t eat any more,” repeats Bobs, stretching her dimpled arms toward Dacre. “Come, please carry me home, you dreat, big mans.”

“Darling,” he whispers, as he passes behind Lalage to reach the tired baby, “darling, darling, forgive me!”

VII

"He comes at last in sudden loneliness
And whence they know not, why they need not guess."

"Who the deuce is she?" mutters Erlynde. A magnetic influence seems to possess, overpower him. He moves uneasily, and again lifts his eyes, which follow a slender ray of light, straight through the tiny space of the floral barrier in front of him, to meet a pair of wondrous, peculiar eyes opposite, which steadily return his gaze for perhaps the space of a second. "Who the deuce is she?" Then turning to his neighbor, "Will you favor me with the *carte du pays*, Miss Brabazon? I have been introduced all around, I think, yet have become somewhat mixed amongst so many strange faces. Fortunately, I'm familiar with most of the male portion, so you may skip them."

"With pleasure," Miss Brabazon laughs good-naturedly and accordingly dashes into details with her usual happy aplomb. "The girl seated next to Teddy Stryker is Peggie Padleford; the dearest, sweetest——"

"Yes, yes," laughs Guy. "My dear Kath, I remember Peggie now, very well. Pray spare me your rhapsodies—move on. Who is next?"

“Hump! That’s Mrs. Lighton-Stryker.” Miss Brabazon’s red lips curl scornfully. “She pretends to be a writer, lecturer, or something equally unpleasant. The category of the gifts she lays claim to is unlimited. One thing, I vow, she does possess, and that’s a tongue.”

Erlynde laughs outright, which causes the lady under discussion to stare at them for a moment through her gold *pince-nez*.

“Look at her,” crossly mutters Miss Brabazon, “she has no more need of those eye-glasses than I have. She merely wears them to look distinguished or clever—disagreeable old creature!”

“It is evident you don’t love Mrs. Stryker.”

“Not I,” shortly. “I despise her. She is mean and spiteful and always saying *things*.” Kath has evidently not escaped that lady’s tart tongue. “Why,” in a burst of candor, “she wasn’t in the house ten minutes when I overheard her call me ‘a horrid young woman.’ The wretch! Just because I allowed Valentine Hume to tie my sandal.”

“*Honi soit qui mal y pense*,” quotes Erlynde.

“Yes,” agrees Miss Brabazon, “and the bare-faced manner in which she carries on with that greedy Vivian Hyde is too absurd. She married Teddy under the impression that he had a pile of money;”—with a malicious little snicker—“she was woefully mistaken, though.”

“Why did he marry her? I remember Peg and

Teddy loved each other from the time they wore pinafores and made mud pies."

"Goodness knows," shrugging her shapely shoulders. "Teddy always was easy-going, and she coerced or bullied him into it, no doubt. The gossips have already predicted that Peggie and Teddy would run off together some day; and considering everything," says this very unconventional young woman, "I wouldn't blame them if they did. Look at her, now, whispering to Vivian. I'm positive she's talking about me. 'Pon my soul!" wrathfully, "I feel like flinging a knife at her head."

Again Erlynde laughs, and is once more favored with an icy stare through the offensive glasses.

"The one in black velvet, who has just taken a sip out of Barnaby's glass," continues his cicerone, "is Joan Nettleton, a former schoolmate of Trixie's. Despite her apparent demureness, they say she associates with a rowdy set in London. She's an inveterate gambler, too. Julian declares she plunges frightfully and wins or loses a fortune in an hour without turning a hair. Common rumor has it she dropped a pot on John Gilpin, Thor Jethro's horse, less than a fortnight ago. Her maid told mine that she has a beastly temper and swears like a trooper and——"

"Her husband?"

"I believe report has him in China, or Jericho, I've really forgotten which; but for all it concerns

her, I'm sure he might just as well be in the moon. She is going up to London in the morning; Mr. Barnaby will be disconsolate. I know she borrowed some money from him," nonchalantly, "I heard her ask him for it."

"The other one, with her hair cropped short like a boy's, is Jane Carew, a crony of Priscilla Stryker's and built precisely on the same plan, so it will be useless to bother with her," contemptuously, "she isn't worth it."

"That lady in the amethyst-colored gown, talking to Valentine Hume, is Rosamond Arbuthnot. Yes," in answer to his horrified look, blended with incredulous amazement, the quick tears rushing to and threatening to overflow Kath Brabazon's bright eyes, "yes, isn't it cruelly dreadful?" with a nervous little jerk, catching a fold of her trembling lip between her small, sharp teeth.

"I will make the story terse as possible. It appears," valiantly striving to stifle the sob which, suddenly arising, swells her full, round throat, showing that this jolly, rollicking girl carries a woman's tender, loving heart in that fair, soft bosom of hers—"It appears," sinking her erstwhile gay voice to a whisper, "before she married there was some one awfully in love with her—a cousin, I think—who, when she married Mr. Arbuthnot—an astronomer, a queer, studious kind of fellow—swore to be revenged, and worked, Iago-like, on the husband's

jealous nature, until, by degrees, he finally persuaded the man (who was really partly demented from overstudy) to believe his wife faithless; the result of which, one night while Rosamond slept, her husband, with the fearful cunning of insanity, before heating to a white heat, bent, twisted some narrow astronomical wires, constructing them into those letters forming that false, shameful word which he cruelly branded upon his sleeping wife's forehead; after which deed the wretch went raving mad—so I've heard—and blew out his brains that same night.

“To my certain knowledge, there is not another woman of my acquaintance so truly pure as Rosamond Arbuthnot, who is loved by every one. She is goodness and virtue personified. If ever there was a saint on earth, it is she. Her influence is so soothing, so heavenly.”

“I can easily believe that; there is an expression in her eyes more akin to heaven than earth.”

“Yes, the men are altogether different when Rosamond is present. Their frivolous manners change instantly to the utmost deference. I've even noticed they shake hands differently, more courteously, with her than any other woman. They would no more presume to squeeze *her* hand than fly.”

“And now,” entreats Erlynde, in an undertone, “pray tell me, who is my vis-a-vis?”

“Oh,” craning her neck around the mass of blossoms, “this load of flowers has almost caused me to

slight the most important one of them all. That's Mrs. Demaris; so adorable. Trixie and she are warm friends. They met out in India. Is she not beautiful?" enthusiastically. "And has *such* a romantic history, too. She was married to a very old man, an Anglo-Indian, tremendously rich. He was killed by somebody," vaguely, "or something—at any rate, he is dead, and left a will with a clause—a nasty little clause, which no one but a jealous, viperish old fossil would do—stating that should his young widow remarry, she must forfeit everything. Rather shabby, I take it—don't you?"

"Rather a dog in the manger affair, I should imagine," answers Erlynde.

"Yes, wasn't it?" agrees Kath. "Dacre, your half-brother," lowering her voice confidentially, "is quite mad about her. It is the talk of the county. She is the original of his last painting—some queer Roman subject, where a woman is to be smothered to death by falling rose leaves. Hume says it will make his fortune. But if Miss Yarrow, his affianced, happens to get wind of his devotion to Mrs. Demaris, it will be all up with him in that quarter."

"And she—Mrs. Demaris——" with a sudden hitherto unknown sharp pain piercing his heart—"Does she seem to reciprocate this devotion?"

"It is hard to know," meditatively shaking her curly head. "There is something so unapproachable about Mrs. Demaris. Much as I admire and

like her, I have never become really very friendly; she has such a stately air and manner, it appalls me." And from this their conversation drifts into other channels.

"Why does the idiot stare so?" Lalage leans further back in her chair, for through the floral screen those eyes are once more seeking her own.

Trixie Fairfax, oblivious to everything save Trevor, with whom she is flirting abominably, seems to have entirely forgotten to give the required signal.

"Botheration!" fretfully grumbles Mrs. Lighton-Stryker, who has sat with her gloves buttoned for the last ten minutes, "Botheration! Why does she keep us sitting here like a lot of geese, and—You clumsy mortal!" as an attendant, stooping over to refill Vivian's glass, accidentally brushes her powdered shoulder—"I protest. Trixie is getting worse and more remiss every meal."

The room being warm and close, Mrs. Stryker is longing for a stroll in the shrubbery with Vivian, who is contentedly dallying with a crimson water ice by her side.

Joan Nettleton is likewise impatient; having obtained the desired loan, she is uneasy. There are one hundred things to attend to and superintend as she leaves at daybreak, and—that imbecile of a new maid never can be taught to fold a skirt properly. Joan is seized with the gamester's fever, impatient to take another tilt, but not a shade of that im-

patience is visible on her serene, Clytie-like brow; her well-bred languor is the reverse of haste; by no action does she betray her annoyance save once her white teeth click so hard and savagely against the wine glass as to almost break it.

"Are you really asleep, Mrs. Demaris? I have spoken to you twice, but you seemed deaf, dumb and blind."

"Pardon," she smiles, "you must think me very rude."

"I was merely remarking," answers Invorarity, "that if looks count for anything—and I think they do—you have made another conquest."

"Your meaning?" asks she, in her pretty, curious way.

"Impossible that you haven't noticed Erlynde's ardent glances all during dinner?"

"Erlynde's glances?" Lalage suddenly sits upright, her face a trifle flushed, as she apprehensively scans the different guests.

"What?" in astonishment. "Didn't you know our host had returned—arrived quite unexpectedly an hour or so before dinner?"

"But," argues she, in painful embarrassment, "I thought—er—understood that he was——"

"Deformed, eh?"

She nods acquiescence.

"Well, so he is, and beastly conscious of it, too, poor chap! but when seated it is scarcely noticeable.

In short, Mrs. Demaris, Guy Erlynde is your vis-a-vis."

Lalage's eyes are calm, but filled with natural surprise as she again meets those clear, brown orbs opposite. The first time she missed the fact that there was nothing but admiration in his gaze.

"You see," continues Invorarity, "I've known him for years; we were great chums at school and college. He was a forlorn little fellow—that is what first attracted me, I being a wild, harum-scarum lad—yet he would eye me with such an unconscious, urgent appeal for companionship and sympathy it instantly touched the cockles of my heart.

"He is wonderfully clever, too, in a bookish way, being a poet, and an astronomer, also, of no mean note; they say a formidable rival of M. Flammarion. He cares nothing—or seemingly cares nothing—for the modern world. Women, in particular, were always his especial *bête noir*. I'm quite sure," glancing toward her with a sly twinkle in his merry, Irish eyes, "he has never cared to look twice at the face of any woman since his mother died, till tonight. In short, he is a dreamer, living solely upon the poetry of Nature, quite oblivious, forgetful of the commonplace prose."

"But," quoth she, "the poetry is merely the froth of life; prose is surely more stable."

"The froth," answers Invorarity, "never gorges

us, while the prose is liable to give us indigestion; it is a trifle solid, you know."

"Ah, true," Lalage laughs, and with a quick, childish gesture, altogether charming, with both hands pushes the wiry red hair from off her forehead. "Ah, true. And I'm certain more than half the crimes committed on this planet are caused and could be traced directly to that fatal malady, indigestion. It will make a fiend of any mortal; I had an attack, once, and know the bitter sorrow of it."

"Indeed, you?" incredulously. "I can scarcely believe that."

"Truth, I assure you. The laws of nature are stronger than the laws of man. I have always maintained that if we give proper care to our digestive organs—that is, attend strictly to the inner man—the outer man will take care of himself."

"Wrong there," dryly. "I differ with you; look at Vivian. The amount that fellow eats would fill a regiment of soldiers, and——"

An audible "Thank heaven!" from Mrs. Lighton-Stryker interrupts Invorarity's further speech, as the hostess, suddenly becoming aware of the surrounding situation, and encountering several pairs of reproachful eyes, hurriedly gives the requisite and longed-for signal to arise.

VIII

"Take, take them back, the gift and vow,
All sullied, lost and hateful now!"

Dacre yawns for the hundredth time, walking with long, impatient strides about the room, and for the hundredth time glances toward the small ormolu clock. He is commencing to feel in a decidedly injured mood. Yet, despite his annoyance, he is fain to acknowledge she is justified in her tardiness; also, in ordering him hither by the terse, peremptory, lilac-scented note which he holds crumpled in his hand. And the fact that he knows himself blamable vexes him. No man, however dishonorable, cares to appear, to know himself a cad—in a woman's opinion; especially that woman to whom he has plighted his troth.

He glances about the room, which in the past had been so familiar, and which now assumes a most unreal aspect. The placid air of true refinement clings to every article, dainty and neat; no vulgar gewgaws, nothing but sweet, womanly trifles. Here is her work basket—her tiny gold thimble. He remembers what a beautiful, slender hand she has, and then he mentally compares this sitting-room

with one other strewn with silken cushions, low divans, oriental hangings, rugs, skins of every imaginable animal, and presided over by a glorious creature of barbaric splendor, who moves with the lithe, sinuous grace of an untamed, jungle-bred young tigress, and who arouses his passions and blood to fever heat, causing him to forget all bonds and ties in her voluptuous presence. Whilst here, this abode is a haven of bliss, soothing, restful—and then a mighty flood of remorse assails him. Alas! the inconstancy of man! Only one hour previous he hailed the advent of his freedom with rapture; now it seems he would give the world to reclaim this woman, whom, through his willful folly, he has forever lost. And as craven Adam of old blamed Eve, so does Dacre now blame and curse his temptress.

He is convinced, now, that Margaret it is, whom he has always loved, and the thought that this happiness is surely slipping from his grasp almost maddens him. He knows the truth, now, when it is too late—at least he thinks he does. Fool! He forgets we mortals are all virtuous and will remain so only till temptation again crosses our path.

Dacre seems to have shut his eyes to all consequences, and abandoned himself entirely to his passion. Day by day passed, and he could not shake off those delightful fetters; yet fully conscious that he was acting in most despicable treason toward this

girl, the recollection of whose serene, deep gray eyes seemed ever mutely to reproach him. And the battle still raged between his honor and his passion.

“Bah!” I’m a dull, weak fool,” he would groan, “but when Margaret and I are once married I’ll get over this, and then we’ll hit it off all right.” And yet with Margaret it would be a terrible existence—one continual regret. She made no appeal to his sensual nature. In her presence his pulse beat not one whit the faster—and then the door is suddenly opened and Miss Yarrow enters, with smiling lips and gracious, out-stretched hand, no sign of jealousy nor anger traceable upon her cool, pale countenance as she sweeps toward him.

He had never considered Margaret pretty till this minute, and now it swiftly dawns upon him that she is essentially beautiful, with an ethereal, girlish beauty wholly delicious.

Without a word he presses her cool, slim fingers reverently to his lips, and then she sinks languidly into the nearest rocker, silently motioning him into the opposite chair. There is a spray of purple lilac tucked within the belt of her simple white gown. She toys with it for a moment, hesitatingly, causing a thousand tiny, detached petals to fall upon her knees.

What does she know? How much or how little has that ever troublesome busybody Rumor told her? He knows that Margaret is too intensely

proud and honorable to give ear to, or heed, mere idle gossip; so he sits awkwardly on the anxious-seat, awaiting with the same hopeless dread tugging dully at his quickly-beating heart, as the wretched, sordid criminal captured with guilty evidence upon him sullenly awaits the sentence condemning him to punishment or doom—so he awaits her mandate and her pleasure. He dare not plead for pardon—her wealth and his poverty forbid that. If their positions were reversed it might be possible. Yet, as she remains silent, an icy atmosphere of hauteur surrounding her, a more conceited, suspicious or practiced eye than his would instantly discern that this proud, cold girl is laboring, striving desperately under a heavy mental strain for self-composure. But to him it passes unnoticed.

Dacre's artistic nature ever uppermost, even now, at this critical moment intrudes itself, and he absently ponders what a worthy model for Lucrece she would make; and in a vision sees her seated spinning, surrounded by her maidens, ere the vile Sextus Tarquinius had polluted her chastity.

Then, as he yearningly regards her pretty hands, trifling with the lilac blossoms, her downbent young head crowned with masses of soft, feathery dark hair growing so wondrously thick above the low, broad forehead and about the delicate, blue-veined temples; the sweet, disdainful mouth; the pretty, high-bred little nose whose thin nostrils quiver like

those of a wild steed of the pampas; the beautifully moulded arms; her waist so slim, so dainty; her firm, round, virgin breasts, swelling, falling somewhat irregular beneath the thin white gown, the sight of which spurs him to fury at the swift realization of his loss, and he is seized with a sudden, wild, mad, reckless desire for her possession. To grasp, claim her at all hazards, to hold her, struggling, begging for mercy, in his arms, to cover her with hot, fierce kisses—to crush her soft, supple body closer—closer, till she should submit to his brutal force.

A desire wholly unworthy Dacre's otherwise chivalrous nature, impelled doubtless by her calm, winsome purity—that purity which tempted Tarquin to despoil Collatinus' wife of that virtue which was dearer by far to her than life—and which almost invariably tempts man's selfish bestial, lower self to tarnish, contaminate that which is spotless.

Dacre, like many another mortal, values as naught that which he claims or owns, yet, that object once lost, it is unreplaceable—its value increases a thousandfold.

“You sent for me, Margaret?”

“Yes,” she laughs lightly and her hand leaves the lilac blossoms to slip from the third finger of her left hand a sparkling, diamond circlet, the one solitary ornament save the lilac which she wears. “Yes, Julian, I wished to return you this.”

Although he came fully prepared for this answer, his heart sinks with an odd, chilly sensation of deep, unutterable loss; for while he has never, until this moment, experienced any feeling stronger than mere friendly regard for his affianced, there has hovered about him since his betrothment a calm, delightful, soothing influence of utter confidence in Margaret, who was as a cooling oasis in the torrid desert of his turbulent existence; and he stammers stupidly,

“But, Margaret—why?—I——”

For one fleeting second her firm lips tilt with a shade of bitter scorn at his apparent cowardice. She leans forward, holding the ring toward him.

“Take it, dear, and please forget, as I wish to forget, that I was ever such a simpleton as to wear it.”

The words carry a taunt—a well-merited rebuke.

“You want to cast me off,” rising to his feet. “Margaret,” fiercely, “you are a vile coquette!”

“Now pray don’t put it that way, nor call ugly names which you know are not true, nor nice. I,” coolly, “simply request, nay, demand my freedom from a very silly, irksome alliance which we—I, at least—sincerely deplore ever existed.”

The words sound coldly cutting, unnecessarily cruel, perhaps, to one who knows not the speaker, whose tortured heart is strained well-nigh to bursting.

“Oh, very well, then,” Dacre goes white as the hue of death with surprise, unutterable pain and anger. He can scarcely credit Margaret with their utterance. “Oh, very well, then.” Taking the ring he grinds it savagely beneath his heel. “Your wish is gratified, Margaret, you are free—be satisfied.”

“Thank you,” smiles she, “but is it not a pity to spoil so pretty a thing?”

And so they part, he to curse himself for a dolt—a blind idiot, who carelessly mistook dross for gold—she, to fall amidst groans and tears of anguish prone upon the spot where he left her, childishly kissing, pressing to her aching heart that bent, broken bauble which he in his misery had so ruthlessly destroyed.

One single word from either now would be joyfully accepted; but that word is never uttered, for the demon Pride holds them both firmly in leash, and Pride, alas, is a foe which it takes only the bravest to conquer.

IX

“Not in those climes where I have late been straying
Though Beauty long hath there been matchless deem'd;
Not in those visions to the heart displaying
Forms which it sighs but to have only dream'd.”

“You are a bold-faced jig——”

“Ha, ha!” from a score of voices.

“Yes,” thunders Maggs. “yes, I repeat, bold-faced jig!”

“La!” retorts the subject of the butler's wrath, that same saucy maid who had rumbled his bombastic plumage upon a former occasion—“La, Mr. Maggs, and you're a blooming old tyrant!”

“A shameless minx, you, to be skylarking and philandering about from morning till night with that Italian whipper-snapper, and——”

“And I'll let you know, sir,” flippantly, “I'll talk to whoever I choose.”

“Of one thing I'm convinced—he's some villainous pirate or brigand,” says Maggs, “and it's my firm belief and duty to warn you, every one, we'll wake up some fine morning with our throats cut from ear——”

“Oh, Mr. Maggs, dear, don't!” screams the housekeeper, clutching her fat neck between both

plump hands. "Though I do agree with you, he's a queer-looking individual."

"Well, I have merely expressed *my* opinion," says Maggs.

"Pshaw," laughs the girl, gaily spinning around like a teetotum on the high heel of her smart little slipper. "Pshaw, Mr. Maggs! your opinion ain't worth a ha'penny. Paolo is the handsomest amongst you," dexterously flinging out her arm during the giddy whirl with a deprecatory gesture toward the group of tall young footmen assembled about Maggs, and whose injured looks and lowering brows clearly denote the fact that they are his warm supporters flocking gallantly to his standard. "Paolo is the handsomest amongst you, and the nicest, and sings like an angel, too."

"A fallen angel, I doubt," interposes Mrs. Burton, also loyal to Maggs, "and a black one at that—black as Satan."

"Black?" stopping short so suddenly as to set awry the trifle composed of lace and ribbons called by courtesy a cap, perched jauntily upon her smooth, pretty head. "Black!" indignantly—"you must be color-blind. Why, ma'am, his skin's fairer than your own, and his eyes," with another roguish glance at the footman, "Oh!" clasping her hands tragically, "his eyes are beautiful—so large, so brown, so——"

"Fiddlesticks!" bellows Maggs.

"Reminds me of a Hafrican 'Ottentot," ventures one of the footmen.

"And me of an hinfernal screech-howl a-tooting," says footman number two. "With that blawsted hinstrument as 'e calls a gutter constantly a-dinging an' a-donging into our blessed hears, I——"

But Paolo's champion, with head erect and arms planted firmly akimbo instantly subdues his further speech by such a scathing look, he is fain to slink meekly behind the others for shelter.

"All's the matter with you," cries she, "you're all jealous because master treats Paolo with more freedom than he does any of you. You want to mix with the quality, yourselves," turning to Maggs.

"Didn't I see you skip like a goat, when Mrs. Demaris dropped her fan the other evening, and bow and scrape like an organ-grinder when handing it back to her? Besides," triumphantly, "Paolo isn't Mr. Erlynde's servant at all—*his* master's an Indian prince," a pardonable exaggeration, perhaps, under such trying circumstances. "Yes," reiterates the maid, "an Indian prince, who has sent Paolo on ahead to see about announcing him and to be sure that everything is in proper order to receive so distinguished a person."

Surprised, dead silence follows. This speech has the desired effect, and now the enemy is routed—vanquished—victory attained, the speaker can't resist—as many another, older, more wise than she

know to their cost—to let the good old plan, “well enough alone,” and as one successful fib generally hatches another, continues:

“I don’t just remember, now,” airily, “but I have heard it said somewhere that Paolo is a relation of the Prince—a distant one, of course—as an incredulous snort warns her it will not be safe to proceed much further, nor impose any longer upon her restive listeners’ credulity. So, having gained that point so dear to a feminine heart—the last word—she gracefully beats a retreat by walking majestically from the room.

The foregoing is only one of the many recent wrangles occurring at Castlewalls since the master’s return; and instead of Maggs’ troubles lessening (as he so proudly boasted) his grievances only increased, for Erlynde seemed contentedly to dream the hours away heedless of any interests, whatever, pertaining to his household matters.

Trixie still held tightly to the reins of government, holding full sway, and Dacre’s word remained supreme.

The objectionable guests continued their nightly orgies, carousals. That priceless wine for which Maggs himself cherished so fond and secret a penchant was, bottle after bottle, fast disappearing, and not a hand put forth to save it.

Then, too, Paolo—when the maid taunted Maggs with jealousy she happily hit the nail squarely on

the head—for Paolo, Erlynde's handsome valet, was a constant source of annoyance—also a very painful thorn in the envious old butler's side.

Paolo, brimming over with bonhomie, wit and repartée, combined with his gay, debonair, graceful manners and dress, had, alas! in the short space of one week caused sad havoc amongst the numerous maids' susceptible hearts, with the result that they were all eagerly clamoring (much to Maggs' and sundry footmen's chagrin) for his smiles, which he distributed freely among them.

Is it strange, then, that many an humble Abigail weeps herself nightly to sleep upon her coarse, tear-wet pillow, for love of a pair of laughing, dark eyes, just as passionately, despairingly as, perchance, her high-bred mistress has likewise mourned, wept for some recreant knight?

Erlynde and Emoclew had parted in Italy, the former turning homeward, Emoclew departing, ostensibly, to attend (before his promised visit to England) a religious ceremony in Jorasanka; and not wishing at such a time or occasion any incumbrance, begged his friend as an especial favor to take Paolo for the nonce off his hands, a request which the Englishman, who had already become somewhat attached to the blithe young fellow with his cheery, buoyant humor and the bright, sunny air of his vine-scented country clinging warm about him, gladly complied with. Such company was truly acceptable

to the lonely owner of Castlewalls, whose former simple habits and mode of life did not change in the least with his accession to immense wealth, and required not, nor necessitated the services of a valet. Thus Paolo's leisure was boundless.

Paolo assumed the change without a murmur, nor thought of protest, for this gay Italian's confidence, love for his quiet, eccentric master and patron was remarkable, surpassing by far any of that frothy affection which he so lavishly protested for all luckless women who so easily attracted his roving heart and fickle fancy. To his beloved master's slightest wish, lightest word he bowed, as solemnly faithful as to an inexorable law.

Erlynde's home-coming and home atmosphere had been a sharp disappointment. He was constantly overwhelmed with an unpleasant, restless feeling of discontent. His home was dissatisfying; something was seriously lacking—what?

He became more and more gloomy; melancholy seized him, and his soul burned with an intense longing, yearning, for the sympathy, comforting, congenial presence of Emoclew whose dry, clever cynicisms he missed, and whose companionship had now become almost indispensable.

He gloomily lived over again the remembrance of Pinkaothek and Gytothek, where, with sculpture and paintings, they had loitered, dawdled at will. Then later, in Verona, where all day long they had wan-

dered, delightfully indolent, from place to place, intoxicated, saturated with its languorous, fairylike beauty, its mysterious, brilliant coloring, and its coy, sweet Winter, merging reluctant into Spring; its lights so soft and tender, its noble, bold, capacious, dignified buildings—those structures whereon whose wondrous frescoes Time had partly effaced, their dim vagueness now more picturesque by far than their once vivid beauty.

Then the churches—those dear old churches—with their painted windows, dark, cool aisles, wax candles and pleasant odor of incense commingled with the outside fragrance of violets, damp moss, and that peculiar reek of yew which heralds the tidings of Spring.

Those old churches, so mystical, dim, subdued, crowded with bygone shadows. The glorious music from the organ floods, overflows everything, blending in mysterious dreams of some unfathomable, holy Presence with outstretched arms hovering over the bowed heads and forms of kneeling worshipers in silent blessing. Ah! dear, dear old churches! How many restful hours had they passed, lingered within their sanctified walls! Erlynde's early narrow religious training had not been weakened by philosophic theorizing.

Then they visited the ancient arena with its grandiose, its massive gray stone walls; the Canossa Palace, with its frescoes carved by Tripolo, its log-

gia and splendid view of the Adige; the steep Justi gardens, with confused masses of luxuriant, spreading rose trees and dark, magnificent cypresses.

And then they turned their steps toward that most desirable sight of all Verona, the tombs of the Scaligers, strongly enclosed in their wonderful chainwork, to linger spellbound in awful contemplation of that weird, mutilated statue of Can Grande and his charger's peculiar trappings.

They had remained ten full days in Florence—Florence, that divine, rightly-named "City of Flowers"—during the early May, living an aimless, idyllic existence, strolling along the Arno from across whose blue waters songs of gondoliers are borne; arising, sallying out at midnight to feast, gloat on the moonlit beauties of the Piazza del Signoria.

The Bacchanalian scenes of Rubens, Titian, with his warm, rich colors, they had admired, studied at the Academy while they had dreamily sauntered about, satisfying their poetic idealisms and erratic philosophism.

The Pitti Palace and Ufizi were also visited. Erlynde reveled in drinking deep draughts of beautiful enthusiasm, and to turn to the sober realism of prosaic life was distasteful. It is true that he felt occasionally terribly homesick; but that feeling was easily discarded amongst such loveliness, grandeur and charm with which he was surrounded. A statue, a picture, a flower or tree, some love song

to the accompaniment of a guitar in the distance, the dreamy clang of bells, the cool, lush breeze from the Arno—all this was enchantment, an enchantment which he longed for again.

Erlynde had been like one of Byron's tireless heroes, wandering incessantly, leisurely floating down the curved, winding length of the Rhine, now skimming free as a bird across the blue depths of the Mediterranean, anon drifting at will, gliding along the smooth, green bosom of the Nile, and ploughing the waves, white-capped waters of two oceans, watching in their flight the sea-gulls poise, wheel, dip and cool their pinions; gazed upon the mighty pyramids of Egypt; studied, viewed Palestine's wondrous land; traveled Jerusalem thoroughly; climbed with difficulty the lofty heights of the towering Himalaya; basked beneath the scorching sun of India; penetrated, wandered through, explored the dangerous, exotic beauty of the thick, almost inaccessible jungles, from whence those mighty trees and shrubbery, the fragrant orchidaceous plants and flowers grew, clinging, swaying from every available branch or bough, permeating the sultry air, overpowering the senses with their unearthly, subtle, drowsy, sweet perfume.

This, then, is the excessive beauty Guy Erlynde has seen, enjoyed; yet naught, none of these scenes or sights could equal, nay, compare with the languorous, enchanting beauty of Italy—Italy with its

dainty, delicate flowers and mellow fruits, its lulling *Ave Maria* at eventide. Sweet, slumberous Italy, the Mecca of bliss! Fool, to have ever left those happy, careless days, joy and sunshine, for this present frivolity, levity surrounding him, which sickens, chafes his soul; from whence he would flee, cast behind, fling to the winds these sham conventionalisms—so false, so glaringly transparent.

Amongst the score of visitors tarrying at Castlewalls, Erlynde discovered not one single kindred spirit. Yet stay! There was one, one whose love, loyal devotion, had oft been proven beyond all doubt or question; remaining firm, stanch through fortune's many weary vicissitudes, alluring smiles. One whose unselfish love had been most severely tested; ever faithful, never lacking, deep and true, more lasting by far than any human—Erlynde's feeble old dog, Nero, who for years, since his master's childhood, bravely, uncomplainingly, shared that master's hardships; content, happy to trot proudly by his side, but who now, alas, owing to advanced age, was compelled to remain passively inactive at home. Good, noble old Nero, who had been the first to recognize, welcome his idolized master's longed-for return, demonstrating his joy with many gleeful capers upon his weak old legs; and now, despite his partial deafness, still pricks up his ears in pleased, willing answer to that well-remembered, dearly-loved voice or whistle, and though scarcely able to

hobble, valiantly strives, manages to totter almost constantly at Erlynde's heels.

As the days slip past, however, and the Hindoo still tardily lingers at Jorasanka, the master of Castlewalls commences to gaze upon the world with a more liberal aspect; judging it from a broader standard, life assumes a more roseate hue, he becomes dimly conscious of a change—a new sensation—which he cannot rightly fathom, interpret. Another feeling, wholly unexplainable, so entirely different as one pole from the other, is slowly, surely usurping its place. Existence now is really becoming quite endurable. Out of the past sombreness issue magic sounds—music like Pan's breath blown against his quivering reeds. Elfin-like notes floating across a silver flute. The faint, sweet echoing strains from an angel's harp or a choir of saintly voices mingled, blending in one delicious harmony in acknowledgment, praise—of what? Something not sightable, answerable.

What is it? Have the mass of thick, gorgeous poppies, growing so rank in the gardens, boldly flaunting, tossing their scarlet heads in wanton response to every amorous breeze that passes, careless of consequence, mischievously shaken, strewn their narcotic seeds upon his unconscious lips? Or, what unknown force propelled, caused this miraculous change, he did not question, solely content to know, realize such a delightful condition, hitherto

so foreign to his erratic nature, now pleasantly controls, pervades, transforms, his whole secret being, flooding his erstwhile empty soul with such a divine ecstasy, which, seemed to him, must exhale in one great, glad shout, proclaiming it and giving to the vast, assembled universe a prayer of thanks.

Whatever were the influences, circumstances contributing to bring this state of affairs about, one thing is certain—all former matters have merged, degenerated into naught. Guy Erlynde's life will never resume nor run again in the old rut. The Fates who have overtaken him will see to that; and for good or evil, will deal, slowly toy, dally indiscriminately with him; not, indeed, as his merits deserve—merely as they see fit, as their wayward fancies suit them.

X

“That dogs bark at me as I halt by them;
Why, I, in this weak, piping time of peace,
Have no delight to pass away the time,
Unless to spy my shadow in the sun
And descant on mine own deformity;”

—*King Richard III.*

“Oh, dear! Will he eat with his fingers, and sit on a cushion on the floor in the middle of the drawing-room, his legs crossed à la Turque beneath him, smoking a hookah—I believe that’s what they call those long pipes—with his arms folded impassively across his chest, and have us all skip, whirl, dance gracefully around him, clad in transparent gossamer skirts, waving gauzy scarfs aloft to slow, dreamy air of some hidden music? That would be too delightful,” quoth Miss Brabazon, busily engaged passing the tiny teacups about to the several loungers assembled upon the cool, green lawn.

“Transparent skirts,” echoed Mrs. Lighton-Stryker, covering her blushing face with both lean hands. “How dreadful! Do you really mean to say, my dear Miss Brabazon,” with that irritating, prudish way of hers, “do you really mean to say that you would participate in an exhibition so—so very indecently vulgar?”

"Yes, of course," with a scornful glance in that lady's direction, "isn't that the way the houris dress?" appealing in mock innocence to Erlynde.

"Don't know, I'm sure," chimes in Invorarity; "I've never seen a houri. Beg pardon—present company excepted, of course. What I mean, you know, is—I've never seen a houri in the transparent state."

"Oh, pray *do* hush!" in shocked tones from Mrs. Stryker.

"You ought to know," ignoring these interruptions, "you've traveled everywhere. Now please tell me," still waiting for Erlynde's answer, "isn't that the way they dress—Lalla Rookh and all those? I'm sure Lalla was a most estimable, virtuous young person, or else Moore told some awful fibs," says Miss Brabazon.

Kath, a slim, dainty, white-robed Hebe, worthy cup-bearer of the gods she appears, this hot afternoon. Trailing her pretty lace-edged skirts hither and thither, unconsciously dragging back and forth in her wake a number of crackling twigs and sweet, dead, dry leaves which the blustering winds of March have torn, swept from their lofty abiding-place, and which the gardener, grown gray and lazy in the service of Castlewalls, taking advantage of the present slack system of affairs now sadly neglects—and now they have become captives, swirling, imprisoned beneath the folds of her long gown.

“My regret is keen,” laughs Guy Erlynde, “but unfortunately, Kath, I have slighted, missed Persia in my rambles, so know scarcely anything pertaining to its houris; therefore cannot, much as I would like to, enlighten you upon the subject. But I assure you,” earnestly, “you’ve got a mistaken idea of Emoclew; he is a thorough European and dresses as such, merely wearing the habiliments of his country when the whim occasionally seizes him. I’ll vouch that you’ll find him a polished, intelligent, cultured gentleman.”

“Thank goodness;” cries Mrs. Lighton-Stryker, heaving a sigh of relief, followed by—

“How provoking!” from Kath Brabazon. “Here is disappointment, with a vengeance; I had pictured him in my mind’s eye so entirely different—quite romantically heathenish, and——”

“We understand,” interposes Dacre who is industriously making a sketch of Mrs. Demaris’ profile, “A Byronic Corsair sort of chap, eh? A stern, dark chief, with a ‘laughing devil in his sneer,’ who would make you toe the mark and bear you, willy-nilly, away at midnight, and hoisting a blood-red flag upon the topmost peak of his ship carry you, an unwilling—or, which would it be?—a willing?—bride, to some lonely cave or far-off pirate’s isle—zounds!”

For now Kath, who has dipped the tips of her slender fingers into the marble basin of the fountain

—musically tossing, spurting its many tiny sprays in a myriad of brilliant colors—angrily dashes them into the speaker's face, instantly checking further speech and sprinkling, blurring the cleverly-drawn outlines of the sketch spread upon his knee.

“There!” laughing ruefully, brushing the drops from his face. “There! all my trouble gone for nothing,” tearing the paper in twain and across.

“Trouble,” yawns Invorarity, rolling about in the grass like a half-grown puppy and now sitting upright to take aim with the end of his cigar at a nearby vine-wreathed, weather-stained statue of Bacchus, “Faith! trouble is simply knots tied in the rope of Life, against which that tiresome, grim, clumsy old woman, Sorrow, forever trips, stubs her ugly toe; but which happy, sly Miss Don't Care so adroitly manages to avoid, skips across with the ease, agility of a professional *première danseuse*.”

“Dear, sensible Miss Don't Care,” answers Mrs. Demaris, with that peculiar, pleasing drawl of hers. “What a delightful version of trouble you give us. Mr. Invorarity. How I should like to learn a few of her wonderful steps!”

Lalage Demaris is a charming symphony in dull gray mull whose soft, clinging folds disclose the noble outlines of her magnificent figure to perfection, and relieved by no other color save a creamy half-blown rose which some freakish impulse has urged her to slip inside the collar of her gown,

where it sways restlessly on its extremely long stem, nestling one moment beside her small curved ear, creeping stealthily, with every alternate breeze, to kiss her throat, bending backward with crazy, acrobatic movement, knocking against her sloping shoulder; upward again, dipping into the deep, cool depths of the bewitching dimples in her cheek, caressing the dainty, curved corners of her mouth, mingling, coquetting with the short tendrils of her wonderful, tawny hair growing so low, luxuriantly upon the beautiful white nape; anon, reaching madly, striving anxious to scan, explore, the divine mysteries of her sweet, warm bosom.

“How handsome Mrs. Demaris is,” says Kath Brabazon, handing Erlynde a cup of tea. “I don’t think I ever saw her look quite so beautiful before.”

“She is glorious,” answers he. And then, as a sudden meteoric spark rudely pierces, illuminating the dense shadows in his brain with a queer, distinct perception, a groan escapes his lips. He sets down the teacup in dismay. This, then, explains fully why his heart was now fast losing its past agitating desolation. Oh, fool! not to have known, realized it sooner. Fool! Thrice—ten thousand times fool—to expect, dare look upon the sun without being dazzled, blinded by its fiery rays!

And then an overwhelming shame for his hateful hideousness overcomes, possesses him. Dumb with misery he gazes, scans the different forms of the

men present; all, every one of them, handsome, strong, straight-limbed fellows, himself the sole wretched exception.

Guy Erlynde had always deplored his deformity, but never, not until this moment, had it overwhelmed him with such helpless, swift, brutal force, when he knows, feels himself the one solitary blot amongst this otherwise perfect scene and surroundings; and the cruel knowledge, horror—of it, confounds him completely. He longs to crawl, creep away—hide—cover himself, his miserable despair, from every human eye—A sudden yearning for his mother—that scarce-remembered mother lost in early childhood—now assails him. He longs to lay his head upon her knee, to cry, sob out the sorrow of his breaking heart in childish tears, for comfort, against her tender breast.

Then a sudden fear that someone—*she*—will discover his secret, frightens him, filling him with a terrible dread—this agonizing secret, which the slightest word, movement, act will surely disclose, must be guarded with his life. He remembers with terror how only one short hour previous he had presented her with that selfsame rose now blowing against her lips; and again, the taunting remembrance of the night before, when, in the conservatory, he had rashly taken her hand, straying amid the dark green leaves of the camellia bush, and carried it to his lips, and an unutterable loathing for

himself consumes, scourges his whole being. The one thing paramount now is flight—instant flight. He starts violently—Kath is speaking again.

“You must buckle on your strongest armor, dear boy, for aside from being so very lovely, Mrs. Demaris is also most fascinating. Val Hume solemnly declares her the most beautiful woman he has ever seen, and he is considered quite a connoisseur on that subject, you know.

“What a very queer idea,” continues Miss Brabazon, musingly, “to tuck that rose where she has. If I should wear a flower sticking, bobbing against my neck in that fashion, I’d appear a regular gawk; but she,” generously, “is always charming, and can easily do and wear things which no one else would think of nor dare to.”

“I—I—” hesitatingly— “think you mentioned something about Julian caring for her.”

“Yes,” Kath nods. “Oh, yes, every one knows that.”

“And—” fearing to utter the question which is burning his lips—“and she? Does Mrs. Demaris seem to reciprocate the attachment?”

“Why not?” carelessly. “Isn’t he an Adonis and a Don Juan combined, rolled into one——”

The words sting him.

“They may marry now. I heard for a certainty that the engagement between him and Miss Yarrow is broken off entirely. Margaret gave him his *congé*

over a week ago. He has behaved satirically nasty ever since," a remembrance of that little speech regarding Corsairs suddenly crossing her mind. "I don't like Dacre in a cynical mood, do you? Cynics are such horrid, disagreeable people."

"Such as Mrs. Lighton-Stryker, for instance," answers Erlynde, striving to appear his natural self. He is in a critical situation—a situation that is making prodigious demands upon his strength, wit and coolness.

"The only obstacle to their marriage," muses Kath, "would be his lack of riches. I told you, don't you remember? that if she marries again, the general opinion is she will lose her wealth."

"That would be a trifling impediment, surely, if they truly love one another."

"Maybe not, but there always remains an 'if.' There can't be much doubt about Dacre's regard for Mrs. Demaris—at least it was too plainly evident a week or so ago and I presume it still exists—but she—there's the rub! I really don't think Lalage Demaris returns those tender feelings quite so deeply. The love is certainly, as I take it, a teeny-weeny bit one-sided."

At this remark, Erlynde's heart gives a convulsive throb against his side, only to sink lower and with greater pain, if that were possible. This deluded heart unwittingly hearkened, under the guise of angelic, melodious voices foolishly listened, to a siren's

song. Now that song has merged into a low, sullen voice of impending danger, distant, rumbling thunder, which has rudely awakened him from slumber—and his delightful, impossible dream—harshly disclosing the coarse realization, this mocking demon in his brain.

He loves her, and his love is utterly hopeless. Alas! If he had been warned in time; not blinded—willfully, persistently blinded—by those cruel Fates, he would have known, understood how to parry, avoid their treacherous attacks; thus saved himself this inevitable wrench, and remained at peace.

“Oh, fool!” he mentally groans, “Why did I forget that I am not like other men? Why was I not content with my studies and books which God in His wisdom has provided for my loneliness and consolation? Nothing else is fitted, permitted me.” And yet right well he knows those same volumes of philosophy will teach him now and forevermore nothing but despair.

Hitherto the peculiar hardship of his lot had, indeed, frequently shamed, annoyed Erlynde; but that annoyance could never equal the wild suffering of today—today, when he is forced, compelled with unspeakable anguish, to crush, uproot that love which has become firmly planted in his heart; and the usual cowardly remedy, flight, which had at first suggested itself, offers him no consolation, merely a weary prospect of unpredestinated, everlasting pain.

Why—why is he so afflicted? So severely punished? A rebellious misery floods his soul, slowly succeeded by fierce, unholy anger which sweeps over him; a blinding, furious rage against the creative power which has, out of sport or mischievousness, fashioned him so grotesquely; followed by wild, bitter, unreasonable hatred toward that mother whose memory he is now tempted to curse for giving his distorted body to the world, and who is responsible, blamable for his existence.

A prowling devil seems to have taken, assumed full possession of his brooding soul, and refuses to be subdued, hidden. The expression on his face shocks Miss Brabazon. It is surely a revelation of something dreadful—some terrible suffering.

“Are you ill, Guy? You do look so strange.”

“No, it is nothing.” Her touch upon his arm awakens him with a sudden shock to the present. He glances around in alarmed apprehension. Has his emotional frenzy been observed, commented on by any other save Kath? No! He heaves a sigh of relief. Mrs. Lighton-Stryker, the lynx-eyed, is carrying on a desultory conversation with her crony, Jane Carew. Vivian Hyde, in close proximity as usual, is placidly, in pleased anticipation, poising his spoon preparatory to swoop, dip into a saucer of luscious crimson strawberries, tipped with their summit of snowy cream.

Dacre has busily resumed his sketch of Mrs. De-

maris, who, thank heaven, is apparently asleep, her head resting against the trunk of a lilac bush. Peggie Padelford and Teddy Stryker are bending over, intently engrossed with some book. Hume and Invorarity are both stretched full length, their hands clasped beneath their heads, blinking skyward. Joan Nettleton (who has returned from her hurried trip to London), seated somewhat apart, is deeply absorbed with a miniature deck of cards, in the game of solitaire.

Trixie has waived the duties of hostess, this afternoon, in favor of Miss Brabazon, who assumes the rôle right royally. Mrs. Fairfax and Rosamond Arbuthnot have remained indoors to write, and Trevor is nowhere visible.

“It is nothing,” laughs he. “I would merely beg you, my dear Kath,” holding his cup toward her, “to please refill this cup with a little more nectar.”

“With pleasure, if——” ruefully—“if Vivian has spared any.”

A soft, riotous little breeze has arisen and is sweeping gaily, rakishly about, taking unwarranted liberties with Mrs. Lighton-Stryker’s flounces, and committing sundry depredations toward others, casting the spray from the fountain in various different directions. A few drops alight, spatter upon Invorarity’s nose, causing him to shift lazily a trifle further away.

Suddenly Lalage, awakened from her nap, springs

light as a whiff of thistledown to her feet, her rapid movement disclosing a glint of dainty gray satin slippers and a suggestion of silken hose of the same identical color. She stands upright for a second, stretching her long arms above her head, then with lithe, easy grace moves away.

Erlynde follows her retreating form hungrily with his eyes. At her approach several stately peacocks, stalking majestically about, take fright and race swiftly across the crisp sward, uttering loud, harsh, discordant cries of alarm. On she goes, past the laurel trees, studded with their bright yellow flowers—not brighter than her shining hair; past a graceful marble Diana she strolls, lingering, turning for one moment under the pink, white and red blossoming oleander trees, to wave an adieu, and then vanishing, like a fire-tipped spiral column of smoke, into the distance.

“Where on earth is she off to now?” snaps the gentle Priscilla, with an extra degree of asperity in her voice, pausing from her talk to note Erlynde’s straying glance, and the cause.

“Don’t know, I’m sure,” replies Invorarity. “Didn’t think to ask her.”

“She has gone to gather violets,” says Kath. “I heard Paolo tell her this morning that there were some extremely large white ones growing behind the hedge of rhododendrons near the coppice.”

“Oh, *indeed!*” retorts Mrs. Lighton-Stryker,

twirling her eye-glasses around by their string between her thumb and forefinger.

This strongly-emphasized exclamation, plainly conveying the hint of a possible rendezvous, is followed by a snickering little "tehee" from Mrs. Carew, which causes Miss Brabazon to turn squarely around and look at the speaker, who really has the grace to droop her pale blue eyes for an instant beneath their short, ashy lashes.

"I think," says Mr. Invorarity, manfully striving to ignite a match (which stubbornly refuses all efforts) by scraping it against the moist base of the fountain, "I think, more likely," casting the useless lucifer away in disgust and substituting another which he lights by striking against Hume's heel, and holding it to the tip of his cigar—"I really think," puffing placidly, "that Mrs. Demaris has gone to chase butterflies, strip them of their gossamer wings. I'm sure," with a sly glance and wink toward Miss Brabazon, "they would make a charming garment, and transparent enough to suit the most fastidious. Don't you think so, Mrs. Stryker?"

"Now, once for all, have done with that gossamer, transparent foolishness," snaps that lady. "I despise and am heartily sick and tired of the subject; it is abhorrent to me."

"Ah, yes, naturally—to *you*," answers Miss Brabazon, with a wicked tilt of her small retroussé nose

and a meaning glance of survey which takes in all Mrs. Stryker's little defects—bony shoulders, scrawny neck and arms, hollow chest. "Yes, I understand your objections, my *dear* Mrs. Stryker," sweetly, "and certainly, under the circumstances, it is not to be wondered at."

To this speech Priscilla Stryker does not reply; her sallow cheeks merely burn with a sullen, dull red glow of passion, whilst she sets her lips, if possible tighter together, mentally vowing vengeance with interest upon the very first available opportunity. She sits in sulky silence which nothing except a sharp, quick rifle report from the direction of the preserves (indicating thereby that Grosvenor, Barnaby, Desmond and several others are still keenly in quest of pheasants) breaks.

"Phew! Now she's in a wax!" chuckles Hume. "Sure as you're born, she's in a beastly wax."

"You know, my Friends, with what a brave Carouse
I made a second marriage in my house;
Divorced old barren Reason from my Bed,
And took the Daughter of the Vine to Spouse."

"Edward!" Mrs. Stryker places the *pince-nez* firmly across her nose, for that meddlesome, frolic-ing zephyr, still hovering slyly about, furtively watching, awaiting a favorable chance to commit other petty peccadillos, has now stolen the present opportune moment to waft these lines, uttered in Teddy's well-known voice, directly to every ear, par-

ticularly those of his wife, who instantly rears her head, sniffing the air like a war horse at the first smell of battle.

“Listen! now she’s going to take her spite out on poor Teddy,” says Kath, sotto voce. “Frumpy old thing! I can’t help feeling savage toward her.”

“I think that allusion to divorce gave her a turn—frightened her a bit, I’ll wager,” answers Invararity. “And serve her jolly well right, too. Hush——”

“Edward!” sharply repeats Edward’s spouse, “What rubbish is that you are reading, I’d like to know?”

“The Rubaiyat,” shortly returns Teddy, who seemingly pays small heed to his wife’s peremptory tones.

“The Ruby—what?” exclaims she.

“It is the verses of Omar Khayyam, a Persian poet,” meekly explains Peggie Padelford, “entitled ‘the Rubaiyat.’”

“Ruby—rot!” snorts Priscilla Stryker. “I’m surprised at you, Edward. Are you lost to all sense of decency?”

At this scathing reprimand Teddy simply shrugs his shoulders good-naturedly.

“Now,” growls Vivian, pausing from his strawberries, “Now, Priscilla, for goodness’ sake don’t get cranky.”

“What a vixen,” whispers Hume. “By Jove! I

don't understand how Teddy keeps his temper; seems to me if I were afflicted with such a shrew I'd be tempted to try the remedy of the ducking-pond or whipping-post."

"Oh, no, no; surely not that?" laughs Miss Brabazon, "though I'll allow she's horrid bad form—with Vivian dangling at her apron strings—and worse still, is never content unless she is hurting some one's (especially a woman's) feelings."

"Yes, I've noticed she's always pleasant and conciliatory to my sex," says Hume, "but hard as nails on her own."

Some mystic influence, magic power, or what you mortals will, now causes, prompts Erlynde and Dacre, who have remained mute, uninterested spectators during the foregoing controversy, to simultaneously lift their eyes, as Lalage is dimly discernible, emerging from the space of shadowy old trees, rocking, swaying, stately as a full-masted ship, slowly moving with imperial grace, near, nearer, until at last she stands like an empress—a wind-kissed, storm-tossed empress, 'tis true—within their midst, her arms and hands filled, overflowing, with waxy white violets which emit a delicate, delicious fragrance.

"Naughty truant!" cries Brabazon, playfully shaking a slender forefinger, "Come, give an account of yourself."

"Pray let this speak for me, dear," replies Mrs.

Demaris, selecting, shaking free from its fellows a single exquisite white blossom, which she lovingly inserts among the girl's glossy jet tresses, then moves languidly toward her former seat.

In passing, the rosebud, unnoticed, falls from her neck, which that selfsame saucy breeze pounces upon, catching, tossing it recklessly about, whirling it finally to Erlynde's side, who watches it as devouringly as a cat would a mouse, covertly intending, unnoticed, to possess it. But alas! that wind, so fickle, immediately snatches, reclaims and flings it unceremoniously upon Dacre's knee, and he, guided, assisted by those uncanny Fates, aimless, indifferent, picks it up, pinning it carelessly against his heart. A depressing omen for Guy Erlynde, surely, who notes it with the chill of death, a pathetic glance, like the dull, sad, glazed gaze of some dying dumb animal in mortal pain.

"Ugh!" fretfully grumbles Mrs. Lighton-Stryker. "Please hand me your salts, Jane. The odious scent of violets always sickens me. Such a common, vulgar, plebeian odor—don't you know?"

"Nice sort of little flower, the violet," interposes Dacre, who has overheard that lady's rude remark. "If it were the lilac, now," with a swift glance of irritation directed to the pretty, unoffending lilac tree, heavily abloom with its dainty plume-like blossoms; and a fleeting retrospection, a haunting memory of a slender, fair, proud young girl, with a bunch of dark

lilacs tucked loosely within her snowy belt, the petals falling thickly in a purple mass, sprinkling her hands and knees, obtrudes itself. "If it were the lilac, now, I'd agree with you. Always did draw the line at a lilac—only flower I really object to; so—so beastly suggestive of—of—deceit."

"Why, Julian!" answers Mrs. Demaris, with uplifted brows, pausing from her task of industriously assorting the violets on her lap. "What a very vacillating person you are. It was only a short time since that you distinctively stated your preference for the lilac above all flowers."

"No," shaking his head decidedly. "You're mistaken, I assure you. My favorite flower is—" looking desperately about and, happily chancing in his quandary to glance over his shoulder his eyes alight upon a cluster of scarlet poppies growing near. "My favorite flower is, and always has been," triumphantly, "the poppy."

"Tut," says Miss Brabazon. "I'll substantiate Mrs. Demaris' assertion. I've heard you positively declare your allegiance to the lilac a score of times and tearfully deplore the fact of its season being so short. Deny it if you dare."

"Wrong," bravely, stubbornly standing by his guns, "my dear Kath, entirely wrong, I assure you. As I've already solemnly sworn, my favorite is the—the—" floundering hopelessly again, and, unfortunately this time, turning, looking over the wrong

shoulder in a different direction to where an immense row of golden sunflowers bend, nodding, courtesying on their long green stalks—"As I said before, and repeatedly maintain, my choice is the sunflower," enthusiastically, "handsomest, truest, most exemplary thing that grows, by Jove!"

"How very æsthetic," jeers Kath, mockingly. "I've half a notion to gather one for you," making a pretended movement toward them, "and compel you to wear it in your buttonhole all during dinner."

"No, no!" At this dire threat Dacre winces; sunflowers, in truth, being his especial abhorrence. "No, no!" imploringly, "not now. See!" a happy thought striking him, "See," tapping the rose upon his coat, I would not be so ungallant as to slight this."

"Bless my stars!" cries Mrs. Lighton-Stryker, on her feet in an instant, as Desmond, Barnaby and Grosvenor appear, and the stable clock, in brazen, clarion tones, rings out the half hour after six. "Bless my stars! whoever thought it was so late!"

"I'll race you both to the entrance," says Invorarity, looking from Miss Brabazon to Peggie Padelford, who are standing near, with arms entwined. "Come, is it a go?"

At the word "race," Joan Nettleton, instantly on the alert, thrusts her cards into some mysterious recess of her gown and comes forward to join the group about the contestants.

"Oh, yes, yes!" cry the two girls, clapping their hands gleefully! "and let Joan be the judge."

"All right," agrees Mrs. Nettleton, briskly entering into the proposition. "I'll enter Dacre and Desmond and make it a three-quarter mile heat." lapsing into the language of the turf. "Three-quarter, mind; not to the entrance, though—that's up hill; too hard running. Better make it from here, around the Diana yonder—nice level ground—and back three times, eh?"

"Good!" cry a chorus of voices. "Splendid idea!"

The excitement immediately becomes contagious; even the staid Priscilla joins in right heartily.

"What are the odds?" asks Chatwin, producing note-book and pencil in a business-like way.

"What'll you offer?" queries Joan, above the confused babble of voices. "Ten to one on Invorarity—ten to one on Invorarity! Four to one on Desmond—two to one on Padelford! Three to one on Brabazon! Five to one on Dacre! Who'll you take? Ten to one on Invorarity—two to one on Padelford—three to one on Brabazon. Or, take the field, take the field—bar none!"

"I'll take the field," promptly interpolates Lalage Demaris.

"And so will I," screams Mrs. Stryker. "But be sure it's bar none."

"Padelford," promptly decided Teddy Stryker,

swiftly, impartially sizing up Peggie's willowy, Atlanta-like form.

"Padelford!" echoes Chatwin.

"Brabazon!" spontaneously cry Erlynde and Hume, the latter a bit dubiously, however, noting Kath's unmistakably heavier weight over her other fair opponent.

"Invorarity," says Vivian Hyde, shortly. "Surest thing in the whole bunch." For Invorarity certainly does display excellent racing qualities.

While this preliminary hubbub goes on, the contestants stand quietly huddled together, Kath and Peggie with uplifted skirts, alert, anxiously awaiting Mrs. Nettleton's signal, which is soon given.

"Here!" authoritatively to Desmond, who is ungallantly edging a trifle in advance of Kath Brabazon. "Stand closer together—so; no fudging, remember. Now—one, two, three—off!"

Away they rush, Invorarity's long legs five lengths in the lead, Kath second, Desmond third, Dacre fourth and poor Peggie trailing far, far in the rear. On they speed—past the statue of Bacchus and the laurel tree. Hurrah! Invorarity has safely reached, rounded, the Diana, Kath closely following. Down the homestretch they fly with the speed of reindeers, Dacre third, Desmond fourth.

"Brabazon! Brabazon!" they yell. "Come on, Brabazon!" as Invorarity and Kath sail by. Off they

go—leaving the cheering mob behind. On dashes Invorarity, Kath steadily at his heels.

Attracted by the uproar, Trixie Fairfax and Rosamond Arbuthnot lean from the drawing-room windows, while the servants, male and female, crowd, flock about the lower portion of the house, shouting, yelling madly, waving aprons, caps, towels—anything within reach. Even tiny Bobs, in her nurse's arms, frantically brandishes a doll.

Another lightning-like turn of the statue, and Brabazon, Invorarity, neck and neck, whirl past the frenzied mob, close pressed by Dacre, Desmond showing unmistakable signs of fatigue. Kath is also slowly losing ground—Dacre passes her. And now a most wonderful, unlooked-for thing occurs—for game little Padleford, who has been almost forgotten, steadily gains — reaches — passes — Brabazon, who is now almost out of the running.

On comes Peggie—almost up to Invorarity—ha! —past him—easily; on—on—skimming down the homestretch light as a lapwing, her skirts held high in both hands, entirely heedless, unconscious of her pretty feet and prettier ankles. “Hurrah!” the spectators are cheering, shouting, yelling, howling, like a small Bedlam let loose.

Lalage waves her handkerchief hysterically, completely forgetting the violets, which lie tumbled, strewn about her feet, like snow-drifts.

“Padelford! Padelford!” screech, howl the mingled voices.

“ Padelford! ” yells Mrs. Lighton-Stryker, lost to all decorum, flinging her glasses and heels high in the air, as Peggie, pale, cool, not a hair turned, darts up to Joan Nettelton a length and a half the winner.

Invorarity, puffing, perspiring—second; Dacre and Desmond third and fourth, while Kath, red as a peony, with hair disheveled, limps crossly in, a sorry fifth.

“ Well done, Peg! ” says Teddy, admiringly, patting the girl’s shoulder. “ You’re a regular thoroughbred, and no mistake.”

“ Yes, ” acquiesces Mrs. Nettleton. “ Finest race I ever witnessed.”

While Miss Padelford stands demurely, receiving her honors modestly, the stable clock once more clangs out the half hour, and there is a general stampede as they all troop off—in pairs, singly, or in groups—to hurriedly dress for dinner.

XI

“Look on its broken arch, its ruin'd wall,
Its chambers desolate, and portals foul:
Yes, this was once Ambition's airy hall,
The dome of Thought, the palace of the Soul.”

“You are a soulless sort of person!”

“And why?” asks Mr. Invorarity, turning to Mrs. Demaris. “Why do you term me soulless?”

“Well,” answers Lalage, haven't you just scoffed at—ridiculed—genius?”

“Ridicule! Scoff! nay, far from it; I merely proclaim genius and talent nothing more nor less than superfluous imagination and energy wasted—and I repeat that statement. What is the use of that peculiar inborn power of mind, those mental gifts called genius—Wait, pray allow me to finish,” as a chorus of indignant voices arise in protest—“tell me, what compensation recompenses Fame for its mockery?”

“Mockery?”

“Aye, mockery! Mockery, to know your fairest, fondest thoughts, which have crept, nestled in your brain and heart, cherished, evasive fancies, dreaming and waking, have vaguely haunted, fretted, tantalizingly eluded you from earliest youth, until—joy!

—finally you by untiring patience at last grasp, capture, for no other purpose, alas! than to have those treasured ideas, sentiments, hitherto so jealously guarded, locked within your being, paraded brazenly, cheapened, wantonly treated.

“The sweetest ballad ever written will soon be caught, worn threadbare, devoured by ghouls. What remuneration—certainly nothing of a lucrative character—can requite that author to listen, hear his loved song (inspired, perhaps, by some pure, sacred, dead memory), squalled, perchance, in the lowest music hall, by some painted, abandoned creature, her vile lips reeking with the foul fumes of grog and tobacco! What reimbursement can a paltry laurel-wreath offer? Will it sustain, deafen the mighty composer’s ears—prevent him hearkening to his sublime music hawked about, groaned out on every street corner to the harsh, discordant notes of a hurdy-gurdy? Or reconcile the artist to behold his masterpiece—over which he has toiled, tormented with hopes and fears, late and early—instantly copied; see it strewn indiscriminately, promiscuously around in cheap prints, to adorn the dingy walls of every alternate inn, rum-shop in the universe, as”—(pointing to the large, unframed picture entitled “Rose-Doomed” resting upon an easel in Dacre’s studio, awaiting shipment to London, and before which all are crowded—held spellbound) “as its fate surely will be?”

The painting—for reason of its wonderful execution, poses and originality, so delightful to look upon—shows the light-subdued interior of an immense banquet hall at the conclusion of a Roman feast, where several unfortunates, by the whim—command—of half-crazed, treacherous Nero, for some trifling, imaginary offense (or, mayhap, no offense whatever), possibly the wretched victims of that whimsical, mirth-loving monarch's grewsome, serious little jokes inspired by the same spirit, doubtless, which prompted him to make a bonfire of Rome (for which innocent diversions he was so famed and so delighted in) are seemingly trapped, condemned, awaiting that frightful death by falling rose leaves.

At the gloomiest, farthest end of the room are huddled a panic-stricken, flower-crowned group of men and women. At a corner of the table—the only portion visible—a solitary reveler, his wreath-twined head thrown backward, reclines, one arm flung carelessly over the side of his couch, a silver goblet with the blood-hued wine spilling from it still clutched in his nerveless hand—blissfully oblivious to his impending fate. Each figure in its varied, dark, sombre coloring is a superb gem, yet all the surpassing beauty, bizarre grandeur of the whole, entire scene of that long-past Neronian era, is concentrated in the central, principal figure, a woman majestically, unearthly beautiful, remarkably tall, symmetrically formed, clad in a loose, long robe of purple from be-

neath whose folds protrudes one slim, arched, sandaled foot. Heavy, barbaric golden bands encircle her slender wrists and glorious, outstretched white arms. A narrow shaft of light, streaming from one of the massive, swaying lamps, strikes the dark depths of her red-bronze hair, turning it to saffron. But the chief charm of the painting is the baffling, indescribable expression of the face which a master-hand has, with miraculous, unerring skill, safely caught, and pinned to the canvas—an expression of amazement, terror, anger blended, whose secret rests, lies in those mysterious eyes, silvery-gray as a sullen winter's sky, or deep, darkly green as the fern-fringed forest pools; anon, sultry-black as Egypt's night—uplifted, now, to the grim, sinister, cruel faces peering in derision from above, their merciless fingers casting handfuls of rose petals, which descend in a scattered, feathery mass, flecking her unbound hair, bare arms and snowy bosom in a variegated shower of crimson, pink, yellow and white, withal so pretty, dainty, frail appearing, destined soon to smother, crush, stamp out her strong, warm, young life.

“Did you ever see anything half so beautiful?” cry Miss Brabazon and Peggie, in ecstasies.

“Yes,” answers Hume, furtively glancing toward the lovely original, who stands mutely contemplating her pictured counterpart. “Yes, far more beautiful.”

“To my mind, it is perfection,” is Trevor’s verdict. “Those eyes—those wonderful eyes!”

“It is unquestionably a really marvelous, clever piece of work,” says Invorarity. “I prophesy that this, your latest, old chap, will be no end of a sensation—a howling success in the world of Art, safe to win the Royal Academic Gold Medal—no fear on that score. Yet, despite its beauty and merit, ‘Rose-Doomed’ can’t escape its unavertible fate.”

“Your words are a horrible warning to Ambition,” answers Dacre. “Still, you are right—right as a trivet—on that point.”

“Pooh! ‘Put money in thy purse,’” quotes Trevor, “and let Fame go hang.”

“Self-conceit dominates the human animal,” laughs Julian Dacre, somewhat ruefully, “and I confess Invorarity has put a pretty strong spoke in my wheel of conceit this morning.”

“Pay no heed to that, dear boy,” says Trixie Fairfax, laying a dimpled hand affectionately upon her brother’s shoulder.

“I freely coincide with Mr. Invorarity,” cries Mrs. Lighton-Stryker, resplendent, gorgeous as a Cape parrot, in a stately crimson gown, a wall-flower fastened artistically amid her ashy locks, “I freely coincide with Mr. Invorarity—Fame isn’t tantamount to the troubles, petty annoyances which invariably follow in its wake.”

“And you, having climbed the dizzy ladder,”

answers Invorarity, with thinly-veiled sarcasm, "therefore are an authority upon the subject, dear Mrs. Stryker."

"Ah," sighing with a doleful head-shake in a lackadaisical, insinuating manner intended to convey the impression that Fame is not all beer and skittles—"Ah! Renown—Celebrity!" painfully affecting grandiloquence—"What is it? Naught but a hollow, empty soap-bubble, enchantingly beautiful, 'tis true, with its sparkling rainbow hues, but alas! containing nothing for the possessor; devoid of happiness, contentment, love, home; nor tender touch of clinging baby fingers."

"Faugh! Much she knows about it," snickers Miss Brabazon, aside, to Guy Erlynde and Valentine Hume—"or 'baby fingers,' either. She positively loathes children. Why, it was only yesterday, she yelled like a Red Indian because poor little Bobs accidentally stepped on her toe, and afterward I distinctly overheard her declaim to Mrs. Carew that she detested 'brats.'"

"Very brilliant, original idea." Mrs. Stryker turns cordially toward Dacre. "I like your picture immensely," but unable to resist her habitual venom, "with the mere exception of the middle figure. Surely," reproachfully, "you could have chosen a more appropriate model?"

"Yourself, for instance," mutters Kath, with a grin.

“It is so—so—er—rather coarse, don’t you know,” continues the lady. “Big women nearly always are,” catching the chance and blessed opportunity of administering punishment to Lalage, toward whom she, for some unknown reason (unless, indeed, it is jealousy of the other’s beauty) is intensely hostile; and, unfortunately happening at this moment to note Vivian’s dull, heavy eyes suddenly aglow, lit with sincere admiration as he glances at Mrs. Demaris’ pictured loveliness, it is a whip to scourge, goad her to madness; her pent-up malice bursting all bounds, betrays itself in uncontrollable, insulting asperity. Accordingly, she furiously attacks the inoffensive picture with bitter, sarcastic badinage, wholly regardless of good breeding and every result. “Heavens! What carrotty hair,” sneers she, “and look—look at her eyes, turned up like a dying duck—great, awkward creature! It will require a lot of rose petals to cover *her*. They ought to throw down a load of cabbage leaves or else she’ll live to die of extreme old age.”

“Has she got through clacking?” Hume turns with a stifled imprecation. “Despicable little cat; how I’d like to wring her neck!”

“You are a frank, if not amiable critic,” smiles Lalage, entirely ignoring Priscilla Stryker’s flagrant insolence—“both frank, just and witty.”

“Yes,” supplements Dacre, an ominous frown gathering upon his usually serene forehead. “Yes,

you are extremely witty, Mrs. Stryker, and being an Englishwoman you should accept that as a rare compliment. The French and Irish," nodding toward Invorarity, "are, in my opinion, the only class who can honestly lay claim to witticism; Germany is hopelessly philosophical, and England is undoubtedly the most prosaic, humdrum nation on the globe."

"I care nothing—not a fig—for wit," snaps Mrs. Stryker, who is certainly in a truly villainous temper. "I admire, desire intellect, and England undeniably takes the lead there."

"Humph!" Miss Brabazon nudges Erlynde. "Look! She has got a wall-flower stuck behind her ear, and goes around impressing upon everybody's mind that it is her favorite flower. Just fancy, such idiotic, impossible taste, and then prate of intellect. I believe she only does it to be considered eccentric. Who *could* admire a wall-flower—bah!—common, stiff, ugly yellow things! I'd as soon choose a potato blossom or buttercup."

"Wall-flowers," answers Guy—"pray do allow the poor woman to cherish them, if she so disposes. Who knows? perhaps a kindred spirit unites them."

"True," laughs the girl. "I never thought of that."

And now Maggs comes to announce in injured tones the long-delayed luncheon, and they all troop off.

"You were beastly, Priscilla," grunts Vivian, pre-

paring to fall upon a plate of sliced, golden pineapple. "Downright beastly to that handsome Mrs. Demaris. 'Pon my word, it wouldn't have surprised me a particle if she'd soundly boxed your ears. You must be a little more circumspect, my dear; it doesn't do to let your tongue run away with your brains."

This is a remarkably long speech for Vivian, perhaps the longest on record, and almost takes Mrs. Stryker's breath away. She can put but one construction upon it, and that is, he is championing that hateful woman's cause. The thought is gall and wormwood. She manages to gasp—

"Hold your tongue!"

Her advice is unnecessary, for Mr. Hyde's whole attention is now completely absorbed with the juicy pineapple; so she turns in a huff to Jane Carew, who says fawningly:

"I was so glad, dear, that you had the courage to take some of the wind out of her sails this morning. She is really quite too insufferable, with her unbearable airs and graces; a few wholesome truths won't hurt her. Why the men rave over her I can't see. She is trying to make a conquest of that wretched Erlynde now, and has already fastened him securely to her chariot wheels. Yes," in answer to the other woman's incredulous, interrogative look, "yes, didn't you notice how very realistically he played Lanciotto to their (her and Dacre's) Francesca and Paolo in the *tableaux vivants* last even-

ing?" The speaker shudders—"I vow, it made my blood run cold to see him scowling and glaring through those curtains—ugh!"

"Whew!" Jane Carew makes a wry face and whistles beneath her breath. Their voices sink below the ceaseless chatter of prevailing small talk around them, as they both sweep a furtive glance toward Lalage, who, charming in a heliotrope-colored gown, looks if possible lovelier than ever, a magnificent *gloire de Dijon* rose nestling amid the mass of radiant hair thickly coiled loose in a rebellious halo about her imperial head bent slightly toward Erlynde as she listens graciously, with smiling lips, to his discourse.

"There's not the slightest doubt," whispers Mrs. Stryker; "I've noticed from the first, Erlynde's quite daft over her. His eyes follow her from pillar to post."

"But—" queries Mrs. Carew, "they say now that Dacre's free—"

"Stuff and nonsense! Should those two marry, they'd be as poor as church mice, and Lalage Demaris doesn't strike me as a woman to endure poverty. Trixie is terribly cut up over the estrangement with Miss Yarrow and her graceless brother, who, I verily believe, is the only thing on earth the vain, shallow little creature cares about."

"She seems to have a sincere regard for Mrs. Demaris," muses Jane Carew. "Would it not, if she

suspected both brothers were smitten, interfere with their friendship?"

"Not one whit, you innocent! for that, forsooth!" sneeringly, "is the very secret of Trixie's friendship. Her aim is simple. She desires, fully expects to make a match between her bosom friend and half-brother, Guy Erlynde."

"Impossible!" in slightly raised, shocked tones. "He is—"

"And," dryly, "the master of Castlewalls."

"Still, wouldn't it be to Trixie's interest for him to remain single?"

"Jane, you are densely stupid! Assuredly it would, but Trix is far-sighted. Erlynde, being enormously rich, despite his deformity may marry. Is it not wisest, then, for his sister to give him a wife of her own choosing? And who, pray, is more suited to the purpose than this woman, inordinately lazy, who'll gladly allow Mrs. Trixie to retain her present proud position?"

"No sane person could imagine a marriage between those two. It should be forbidden by law as sacrilegious."

"Yet," smiles Mrs. Lighton-Stryker, with an indifferent shoulder shrug, "mark my words—such a marriage will occur, or I'm no prophet."

Will it? The Fates who sit crouched, winking knowingly behind each individual chair, forever dexterously twisting, turning, tirelessly plying their

shuttles of many threads by which they toss, jerk,
lead us helpless, blindly about at their mercy, will,
pleasure—alone can answer.

XII

“The power of Thought—the magic of the Mind!
Link'd with success, assumed and kept with skill,
That moulds another's weakness to its will.”

When Guy Erlynde first entered into possession of Castlewalls, this princely estate, he scarcely realized or duly appreciated the fact. Old Sir Vincent's death, though long expected, nevertheless came as a surprise, a sudden clap of thunder out of a calm, blue sky, which rudely disturbed, robbed him for the nonce of his hitherto undisputed, dearly-loved quietude, which, strange to say, he resented.

For awhile his senses were dulled, his whole being benumbed by the swift unreality of things, and the idea of assuming position, responsibilities altogether at variance with his timid nature, vexed, appalled him. Thus, without a thought or single word of protest, he passively allowed his half-brother and half-sister to attain full control of everything, content to bury himself and burrow mole-like in his beloved, musty old books.

Previous to this epoch, however, Erlynde's half-sister, Beatrice, had married Colonel Fairfax, who, visiting England on a three-months' furlough, straightway fell an easy victim to Trixie's artless,

infantile, pink-and-white prettiness—as army officers at any extremely susceptible age after their chilly blood, from a constant diet of fiery curry (for which they seem to acquire a passionate taste), becomes highly inflammable—are often wont to do; and was consequently rapidly beguiled, whirled ere he had a fair chance of escape, headlong into the seething tide of matrimony. And Trixie, a dainty, lovely bride, one week later accompanied her portly husband out to India. When old Hoggy Fairfax—as he was secretly dubbed by the subordinates universally for reason of his detestable characteristics, manners, resemblance to the porker tribe—after six years of stormy wedded life—the Fates lightly shook the overweighted bough of Hoggy's existence, and he very thoughtfully, conveniently, died (the only thoughtful or convenient act ever known to his credit) leaving his widow with a two-year-old proof and pledge of conjugal bliss—Roberta—so christened in courtesy to gallant Lord Roberts, then in India before he took a hand in the foolish, hurly-burly struggle in South Africa—the one man living whom Hoggy held in any kind of esteem. And from thence little Roberta's stately name soon degenerated into the more appropriate and loving sobriquet of her prototype, “Bobs,” and she ruled with despotic sway, domineered imperiously over the soldiers of her father's garrison and was by them idolized, willingly obeyed.

At Hoggy's death his relict (who, by the way, looked astonishingly well in crepe and bombazine) embarked with little Bobs on a P. and O. bound for England, where, after establishing herself in as comfortable, pretentious quarters as her meagre income would permit, and being a woman of extremely frivolous nature to whom admiration was as breath to her nostrils, upon finding the irksome ties of matrimony broken, luckily severed by death instead of divorce, which undoubtedly (if current gossip can be credited) would have happened after that too apparent esclandre with gay Paul Dexter—the remembrance of which even now fills Trixie's soul with trepidation—prepared forthwith to enjoy her freedom to the utmost, for Gower street, albeit in an unfashionable neighborhood, nevertheless afforded various advantages over, and was certainly preferable to, the humdrum, sleepy little Hill Station in India where latterly Colonel Fairfax's regiment had been stationed, and where Mrs. Fairfax, at the few social functions, disported her charms and held right of way.

True, in her London establishment it was frequently nip and tuck to make both ends meet, but fortunately Trixie was diplomatic; if her altered social position disturbed her equanimity, the evidence was not discernible. During her late vicissitudes she had acquired, mastered, a vast amount of self-reliance and happily became an adept at that most use-

ful, desirable art, tact, which freely enabled her to meet, successfully avert, many unpleasant obstacles which might unexpectedly arise. For instance, upon overhearing one of her bosom friends, after partakingly lavishly of her hospitality, sneeringly call her "that Fairfax woman," she smiled sweetly, not a muscle quivered—at least not outwardly—and at the very first opportunity kissed her ungrateful traducer upon both cheeks, and adroitly turned the tables later by simply lying patiently in wait for that treacherous friend's husband to innocently impart a trifling confidence and—proofs, so cleverly and naively that the natural result was victory, whilst she, Trixie, the informer, was the very last to be suspected. So much wiser and infinitely more lady-like, complacently mused she, than to fly into a foolish, useless, vulgar passion, which invariably mars, accomplishes nothing.

But now, after several months of fairly smooth sailing in those rock-strewn waters, there commenced to flit damaging little rumors regarding certain transactions in the Gower street residence; whispers which speedily grew in volume to open speech; dark, ugly reports, hints pertaining to marked cards, loaded dice and sundry other nefarious deeds, coupled with a nasty yarn of how and why Phil Edgerton happened to recklessly scatter his brains over Trixie's dainty carpet, and fresco her delicately-tinted walls so lavishly with crimson life-

gore, which was truly very inconsiderate of him, indeed, and which, despite the many plausible reasons vouchsafed, none, nothing could appease the wrath of Edgerton's grief-stricken young widow, who cut up rough, raised a thundering rumpus—as wives occasionally will—and boldly said some certain things of Mrs. Fairfax which caused some of that lady's friends to look askance at the modest abode on Gower street.

Thus Trixie had lived, existed mainly by her wits, for nearly one year, when, alas! the dread, sulien clouds of adversity, so long warded off, had descended low, storm-laden, charged heavily with unpaid bills, so hovering thus in dangerous proximity, threatened to burst tempestuously forth about Trixie's pretty ears and fluffy golden head.

Mrs. Fairfax's ingenuity was therefore taxed to the utmost limit. It was utterly useless, absurd, appealing to Julian Dacre, her brother, who never had a shilling in his pocket. She was in a critical quandary, and in sheer desperation was tempted to accept the offer of an admirer's doubtful protection, kick over the traces entirely, cut it all by a bolt for the Continent, and leave the obnoxious tradesmen to dun and whistle for their money till they were black in the face.

When lo! Providence intervened; for her half-brother, Guy Erlynde, whom she had ever held in abhorrence and ridicule, suddenly fell heir to his

uncle's fortune, and—joy! Trixie was herself again.

Installed as mistress of Castlewalls was a long leap for the hostess of the obscure little den in Gower street, and Trixie preened herself anew, altering her tactics in accordance with the prevailing order of affairs; no metamorphosis could wholly change her inborn instincts, however, inherited from a vain, frail actress-mother and reprobate father, both long since dead—Trixie's affections were mainly as shallow as her brain. Virtue rested on a par with her maternal sense—an element absolutely lacking in Mrs. Fairfax's composition. Her child maintained but a slight hold upon the mother's devotion, who delighted to surround herself with life, beauty and pleasure. Being essentially feline, she basked in warmth, light, luxury; selfishness was her predominating possession.

Trixie, being wise in her generation, immediately concluded it was imperative that she should neatly patch the many rents, smoothly darn the tattered edges of her torn reputation, by first systematically raking, weeding her hitherto neglected garden of Friendship, which in the past few months flourished so rank, gaining a tremendous headway, thriving apace with lightning rapidity, fed on questionable methods, lax morals; and so she blithely spaded, assorted, cast aside the majority as worthless, thistles, nettles, which are at some future day liable to prick,

sting, or become otherwise troublesome; and to guard against such disaster, Trixie selected a fresh field, surveyed her land carefully, set out a number of different plants and cuttings, mingled with a few—a very few—transplanted from the old soil. These she industriously cultivated with rare success, which when abloom showed a radical change for the better—not up to the required standard, possibly,—that stupid, strict line which censures certain desirable, pleasant little deviations which are as spice sprinkled amid the erstwhile tasteless pudding of existence. Of course a moderate amount of discretion is something we are in downright need of. Propriety for a surety deserves, invariably maintains, the right of precedence; society necessitates a restraining arm around its stately pillars; but then—what would you? Stiff old fogies and staid matrons are so tiresome! We must not be too decorous in choosing our friends, else they might eventually pry, pick flaws in our own characters—a glass house theory—if there are any faults to find, we should be the ones to discover it in them, not they in us—oh, dear, no!

So, Trixie, an illustration of the above fact—all knowledge of crinating dice and suspicious cards blotted entirely from her memory—queened it to her heart's content at Castlewalls, and could now conscientiously pass her erstwhile risky associates, whom she wholly repudiated, with a cool stare of

non-recognizance, and Mrs. Grundy cried "Pec-cavi!"

Three successive times the white and crimson roses clambering thickly over the massive gray stone walls, proudly budded, blossomed, then drooping dejectedly, cast their fragrant petals athwart the smooth greensward below, ere slowly turning to dust for the winds to play with. Three times the pheasants nested, brooded—thrice had the red deer herded in the shady, wellnigh impenetrable forest, brought forth their young; and then the master returned.

Foremost amongst the guests at Castlewalls was Lalage Demaris, whom Mrs. Fairfax had met on the homeward-bound steamer (and who, likewise, by a queer coincidence, had also left a spouse slumbering forever calmly beneath the swaying branches of the white tamarisks) between whom and herself there sprang up, still existed a congenial friendship; and when the keen-witted Mrs. Lighton-Stryker surmised Trixie's latent intent, to wit: the probability of a marriage between Guy Erlynde and her friend, she hit the nail of Beatrice Fairfax's maneuver squarely on the head; for this is precisely that lady's desire, and to that end she has marshaled, steered her splendid troupe of well-drilled energies.

Truly, it is a stupendous undertaking, and clearly can only be surmounted by judicious, orderly procedure; no flaunting of flags nor blatant bivouac song must betray her. Luckily Mrs. Fairfax is a cautious

general who reserves her ammunition and relies mainly on events, opportunities. For a time Dacre was a serious stumbling-block to her machinations, but happily, an important inkling, accidentally gained, spurred her onward with renewed vigor, until now, nothing daunted, she determinedly marches forth, aided, abetted by the erratic Fates who play readily into her hands, rendering her faithful service, gaining fresh force with every turn or movement to certain victory.

Occasionally the tired, overworked wheels of this mighty universe clog, causing a halt, a brief stoppage of Destiny's machinery, resulting in a leaden sameness. All is stationary; naught seems to budge, change. We, impatient passengers on Life's huge vehicle, drum our fingers upon its windows, yawn grumbling protest against the odious tedium which ensues, questioning will this gloomy lull never end? To which anything, even calamity, is preferable—almost welcome—to the deadly, prevailing lassitude. Thus we fret and fume whilst the Fates rest, indifferently rocking like snowy sea-gulls on the smooth, dull gray bosom of Ennui's placid ocean, idly watching, awaiting that magic signal we so eagerly crave and which will start those massive wheels once more revolving—whither?—which, for well or ill, we gladly hail. We foolish mortals delight in variety, excitement.

Pretentious qualifications (the ruling essence of

existence) is the chief cause; loathing ourselves, consequently we seek, require some other influence—good or evil, it matters nil—to lift us out of our own immediate being and tiresome environments of such ugly, uninteresting colors. Thoroughly aware of our wretched frailties, we are surely pardonable for screening them so jealously, and that, my masters, is the true and only secret of deceit. Standing upon the shifting sands of Life, we are pleased to play at cross purposes, fondly imagining we can successfully blind our skeptic neighbors to our demerits, or strive to gain their approval with feigned abilities, so bland is our acting we sometimes unwittingly deceive ourselves; for the stars above are scarcely higher than our Youth's deceitful visions soar.

Heigh-ho! When will we learn to hang our hat and coat on our own little peg, tuck ourselves cosily away into the humble little corner directly at our elbow invariably awaiting our occupancy—that wee niche whose space is hollowed, fashioned especially to fit, shelter us, and affording ample room if we will only fling off, discard forever, that cumbersome, disfiguring cloak of Hypocrisy, whose heavy weight fatigues our aching body and limbs? Pray be wise in time! Remember, we cannot cry "Avaunt!" nor hoodwink those Argus-eyed Fates—snap our fingers defiantly at false illusions. Enter, abide within this peaceful cell of Contentment which far surpasses, transcends all visionary prospects, and where, never

fear, if there is genuine merit in your aspirations, rest assured they will not long remain dormant, hidden.

But please bear in mind, contemplation of expected pleasure is generally pleasanter than the full realization of the same. Don't storm, bewail laggard events. The looms of the Creator's factory work slow—but perfect. Don't take trouble too seriously. Life is a comedy or tragedy, just as we, ourselves, make it. Don't be over-eager for other people's opinions; we will find fools in plenty who, for their own aggrandizement or interest, are always ready, anxious to thrust their worthless advice upon us, oftentimes to our sorrow. Let us rely mainly upon our instinctive ideas and hereditary principles. Don't desire, covet gifts reserved, destined for some more fortunate, worthier individual. And lastly, don't unceasingly pursue the brilliant, evanescent rainbow, rimmed in the distance, which seductively beckons, luring us on, on to madness, shame, death.

Take, for instance, as a safeguard, Mrs. Fairfax, who never rebelled against tardy circumstances, and who merely adjusted her thinking-cap more firmly upon her brows, and composedly waited the coming incidents, that as yet unknown instrument, which will consummate the final act.

Whilst the will-power of the Fates establishes an invincible, magnetic line which flies through limitless space, penetrates all obstacles, till it reaches Jora-

sanko and communes with its object, a tall young Brahmin, who has come hither to attend the Pooyak ceremonies and offer homage to Doorga, his tutelary deity, and who, at the conclusion of the rites, loath to leave, still lingers near the goddess' shrine; but now, at that mystic command, abruptly announces his intention to depart for England on the morrow.

And thus things obligingly shape themselves in Mrs. Fairfax's favor, fit into her plans, arrangements, as snug and neatly as the painted blocks which compose a child's toy house.

XIII

“God’s images, forsooth.—such as he
Whom India serves, the monkey deity;
Ye creatures of a breath, proud things of clay,
To whom if Lucifer, as grandams say,
Refused, though at the forfeit of Heaven’s light,
To bend in worship, Lucifer was right!”

“Are you in trouble?”

The music borne upon the moist evening air from the brilliantly-ablaze drawing-room, floats toward them; through the low, wide windows the forms of dancers are plainly portrayed, the vari-hued gowns of the ladies forming a marked and pleasing contrast to the men’s sombre dress.

Mrs. Lighton-Stryker, apparently in high feather, conspicuously arrayed in a bewildering mass of greenery, is coquetting with an immense fan of the same outrageous hue. Kath Brabazon—a pretty, witching Kath—clad in simple, creamy mull, her hand clasped in Mr. Hume’s, would stir the heart and pulse of an anchorite. A spray of scarlet geranium, whose glowing petals scarce equal the cheeks and laughing lips of the most madly alluring mouth imaginable curving upward to meet and greet the wee, deep dimples above, is twined amid her glossy

hair, another cluster of the same tucked within her bodice.

It is an entrancing scene. Dainty Peggie Padelford, enveloped in some foamy, pink creation, moves demurely about, albeit smiling roguishly up into Teddy Stryker's eyes. As the dancers pass, repass, a tall couple—by far the tallest in the room—move hither. Lalage, by some caprice, is robed in a queer gown of some oriental fabric and has never appeared so enchantingly lovely as in this bizarre costume which a more timid woman or one less assured of her charms would hesitate long before wearing, and which clings as closely to her lithesome form as the scales to a snake. And as she glides, twisting her supple body, its rays catch, reflect, scintillatingly respond to every spark of light—she looks not unlike a huge serpent.

Mrs. Fairfax, seated at the piano with Trevor attentively turning the leaves, is playing, and the sweet, rippling notes of the gavotte fall distinctly on their ears as the merry guests within bow, move slowly, passing with up-clasped hands, through the graceful figures of the stately minuet, with the exception of Mrs. Lighton-Stryker, who seems unable to grasp the conception of the same and is executing a wild sort of war dance.

“Are you in trouble?”

She had noticed his general air of deep dejection,

and some tender, womanly instinct urged, nay, forced her to follow and approach him.

“ You *are* in trouble; can I help you? ”

“ No, no! ” yet there is a gesture of mute despair in the involuntary uplifting of his shoulders. “ No, ” shrinking further into shadow. Then, half apologetically as if to atone for his abruptness, “ The matter is really not worth a thought. ” He lifts his large, sad eyes—Erlynde has beautiful eyes, but the unmistakable anguish in their dark depths belie his words as does the harsh, short laugh which accompanies them. “ ’Pon my word! ” he exhorts, “ it is awfully good—er—kind of you to bother about me. ”

She lays her hand softly upon his shoulders. Perhaps the music affects him, or possibly the half-caressing touch of that gentle, sympathetic hand overwhelms his taut-strung nerves, for he suddenly breaks into an uncontrollable burst of boyish grief. The hoarse sobs choke and shake his frame as does the tempest toss and bend the mighty pine upon the hillside.

She quietly sinks upon the rustic bench beside him, and lifting both hands draws his head down, down until it rests upon her breast.

“ There, my dear, ” soothingly, stroking his brow and cheek, and then, as tenderly as a mother might, presses her cool, sweet lips to his throbbing temples. With a groan his arm convulsively encircles her waist; yet nothing in this novel situation affronts,

nor prudish restraints assail her sensibilities; that from which a less pure-minded woman would shrink aghast appears but right and natural to Rosamond Arbuthnot whose nature, soaring far, far upward toward the misty heights, yet ever deigns to glance beneath at the struggling, stumbling ones in the gullies and valleys below, to whom her hands are ever outstretched in loving sympathy and whose thoughts are now solely occupied appeasing his distress. And no sanctified saint should be held in greater reverence and esteem than she, who offers the rest, consolation of her bosom as freely to this sorrow-stricken man as to a forlorn child.

“There, dear boy,” she whispers. “There, my poor, poor dear!”

Above them a restless bird scrambles, twitters amid the branches of the spreading elder-tree, causing an occasional showery mass of creamy blossoms of aromatic fragrance to fall. The full moon shines gloriously, shimmering the lawn and park with an elfin, silvery radiance against which the avenue of pine trees loom massive, sullen, and bathing the ghostly statue of Diana—around which a tropical vine laden with its immense, gorgeous, red blossoms, tightly twines—in a flood of light. The atmosphere is redolent with subtle, sweet perfume of flowers—carnations, heliotrope, lilac, lavender, commingled in the tender night, offering up their incense to the stars as prodigious as that which Nero consumed at

the funeral of Poppæa, which filled the Romans with amazement.

Rosamond partly suspects Guy's secret, therefore her sympathy is intensified, though on that subject her lips are mute. And now his arms gradually relax their fierce pressure; his sobs lessen, the wild paroxysm subsides—passes. Yet they remain motionless, his head resting upon her shoulder. The music within ceases; Trixie arises, the dancers pause, mingle.

Lalage and Emoclew turn and lean over the casement of a near-by window, glancing out into the night stillness which is broken only by the waters of the fountain falling into its marble basin, or the soft rustle of leaf and bough from the dense thicket of myrtle, stately palms and lofty Lebanon cedars, filling the air with numerous stealthy whispers, fraught with weird, dark secrets of the East, interrupted ever and anon by a nightingale from some hidden glade suddenly bursting into a delicious melody, passionate, vibrating.

There is a new expression on Lalage's face tonight—an expression of pleasure and delight. The habitual shade of ennui seems to have entirely vanished as she smiles brightly into her companion's face. Some one else has now taken Trixie's place at the piano, and once more the music sweeps out. This time it is a lively, rollicking mazurka, in which the two standing apart at the window do not join.

In close proximity a laugh rings out; evidently some of the guests, attracted by the magic beauty of the moonlit night have deserted the drawing-room and are approaching.

“Hey! Spoons!” ejaculates Mrs. Lighton-Stryker, who has, with Mr. Hyde in tow, made a bee line for this identical spot and now stops short in some consternation, beneath the elder-tree. Is her prophecy, then, to prove false? At the possibility of such, she is naturally aggrieved. “Hey! Pardon! Mrs. Arbuthnot and Mr. Erlynde in hiding,” turning on her heel. “How—er—extremely romantic!”

“Oh, here you are,” cries Miss Brabazon, sauntering up followed by several others. “Let me have your fan a moment, Rosamond; Valentine has mine in his pocket. I’m so broken with weariness since that last dance, I can’t lift a finger—ready to expire! My hair is higgledy-piggledy, I’ve danced the hair-pins all out of my head, and lost the heel off of one of my slippers. I really believe it flew out of the window, and——”

“If it should alight, meteor-like, on your head, Rosamond, I tremble for the consequences,” scoffs Dacre.

“Valentine is searching for it now,” continues Miss Brabazon, totally ignoring the interpolator.

“He’ll be sure to stumble across it—can’t possibly miss it,” bent upon tantalizing her. “Say, Guy, did you happen to hear a dull, heavy thud a few minutes

ago? I'd advise Hume to get a spade; it has evidently sunk several feet into the ground."

"Make room, dear," says Kath to Rosamond; "take pity on me and let me sit between you and Guy, if I'm not *de trop*. My foot's sore; Julian stepped on my toe; he——"

"Your toe?" in feigned incredulity, still persisting in his waggery. "Impossible! I thought it was one of those carved tabourets which Trixie has such a fond penchant for, strewing promiscuously about to catch the unwary. 'Pon my word! I haven't got over the shock yet; knocked me a regular twister and——"

"There!" Dacre's further utterance is cut short by a smart whack of a fan across the mouth, administered by the irate Miss Brabazon. "There, that'll teach you to discriminate between my toe and a horrid old hassock next time you go flopping around like a great, clumsy bear."

"You've loosened two of my front teeth," mournfully.

"Serves you right," says Peggie Padelford, witheringly. "You require discipline sadly. I declare, he is positively growing unendurable and is forever squabbling. He has been rude to me all day and—I shudder to think of it—passed the whole afternoon drawing grinning skulls, cross-bones, coffins, and quite ruined my sketch-book."

"Yes, and he drew two nasty skeletons dancing

on the tablecloth, at luncheon. It turned me quite ill and faint. I couldn't eat a mouthful," retorts Kath.

"Yes," answers Peggie, and oh, did you notice how savagely he stabbed his cutlet and rolled murderous-looking bullets out of bread crumbs? It quite frightened me.

"And he's as cross as a grizzly bear," exclaims Kath, plaintively, "and forever nagging and growling."

"I'm in love," sighs Peggie, suddenly.

"With me?" rapturously cries Dacre.

"Madly, desperately in love!" oblivious of Dacre, as Emoclew, with Lalage's white fingers resting on his arm, her radiant gown glittering in the moonlight, slowly moves across the lawn. "Yes, madly, desperately in love with Guy's friend. He's so handsome, so cultured; his manners are perfect; his face fascinates me; he is young, too, much younger than I imagined him to be."

"Humph!" sneers Mrs. Lighton-Stryker, hovering about within ear-shot. "He's as swarthy as a mulatto."

"He is certainly not a bad-looking fellow. Is he a Theosophist—they nearly always are?" quoth Dacre, moving to Peggie's side. "How would you like to join his harem? I hear he has got a stunning set of beauties of whom he has grown tired, and that his sole purpose in coming to this country is to gather a fresh supply. The others, on his return,

are to be disposed of. I believe drowning is usually the method, being also the most humane death—both painless and easy—in fact, pleasant. However,” cheerfully, “you may experience the pleasure some day. I was told he has an unlimited number of rupees to his credit. If you marry him you’ll be a sort of Begum.”

“I’m in a quandary,” says Miss Padelford, turning toward Guy Erlynde. “Please enlighten me. How shall I address him—as Sahib, or just plain Mister?”

“As ‘Your Excellency!’” cries the indomitable Dacre. “As ‘Your Excellency,’ by all means.”

“Uncle Julie! Uncle Julie! screams little Bobs, fleeing toward Dacre, pursued by her nurse. “Uncle Julie!” claspng both chubby arms about his legs like the tentacles of a small devilfish and valiantly resisting the maid’s frantic efforts to detach them.

“Hello, Bobs! Not in bed yet?” Dacre stoops and lifts her in his arms; “you rummy little beggar, aren’t you afraid of the Bogie Mans?”

“I had a letter from mamma, today,” says Kath Brabazon, addressing Rosamond, who answers,

“Yes, dear—and what was the news?”

“None,” pouts the girl. “None worth speaking of. It was dated from Japan. They are *en route* home.”

“That will please you?”

“No,” crossly. “Before mamma married Mr. Jones she adored Paris, but now she seems to have changed her mind in accordance with his. It appears my stepfather desires to live in England. He is ambitious—wants to go in for politics and all that. For my part I prefer Paris to London—dear delightful Paris! Everyone behaves so much better there,” with a resentful glance toward Julian Dacre, “and are always sending one bonbons, flowers and things.”

“Cruel one!” answers Guy. “You shall have a cart-load of roses in the morning.”

“All right,” coolly, “providing they are my favorite Jacqueminots.”

“I will strip the conservatory for you.”

“Look at Mrs. Lighton-Stryker” grumbles Kath, who is evidently in a cantankerous mood. “Faugh! Just look at her—horrid old frump! Strutting about like a peacock, everlastingly twirling that hideous fan. No wonder she is warm, with her dress buttoned up to her ears.”

“The penalty she must pay for a lean neck,” replies Mr. Erlynde.

“No doubt,” laughs Miss Brabazon, unconsciously caressing her own plump throat.

“You are still at swords’ points with Mrs. Stryker?”

Kath nods affirmatively. “Yes, she reminds me

of a quarrelsome hen, with that disagreeable little cackle of hers.”

Lalage Demaris, always the center of attraction by the divine right of her peerless beauty, is still moving slowly about the lawn with Emoclew by her side. Tonight she is unusually gay and talkative; the joy bells in her heart are set a-ringing as she stops ever and anon to exchange a laughing word with someone. The slight air of restraint and chilly hauteur which has hitherto clung about her has, as if by magic, wholly disappeared, leaving her an ordinary mortal for the nonce at least.

Julian Dacre, seemingly unmindful of Mrs. Demaris' metamorphosis, is ardently devoting his attentions to some slim young person who accepts them in coy complaisance; whilst Mr. Invorarity, full of *bonhomie*, jovial as usual, is flirting lazily with Mrs. Arrowes, a late arrival. Pat Invorarity has a decided penchant for new faces—fair or ugly, it matters not; all invariably pall upon his fickle fancy in an incredibly short time.

“Ahem!” coughs the lynx-eyed Priscilla, her *pince-nez* directed disapprovingly upon Lalage Demaris' graceful form, and casting a swift, furtive glance toward Dacre, evidently desirous of arousing that gentleman's jealousy. “Ahem, Queen Guinevere has at last met her Lancelot. What an outlandish gown she is wearing,” spitefully—“ugh! she reminds me of an anaconda.”

“Would that she were!” ejaculates Miss Barbazon, *sotto voce*, “and that she would swallow you—horns, hoofs and all.”

“Amen!” fervently echoes Dacre.

“Is you a cow?” asks Bobs, anxiously, leaning from Dacre’s shoulder to peer inquisitively into Mrs. Stryker’s face.

“A cow!” shrieks that lady, “Mercy sakes! has the child gone daft?”

“I thought you was a cow,” answers Bobs, “cause Kath just now said you had horns an’ hoofses, but” dubiously, “I can’t see none, though.”

“Oh! Miss Brabazon said that, did she?” with an annihilating glance toward the crimson culprit. “Well,” inelegantly, “what can one expect from a pig but a grunt?”

“Oh, Bobs!” groans Kath, as the nurse straightway whisks the baby from off her lofty perch and bears her nurseryward, “Oh, Bobs; you *have* done it!”

“Aha!” chuckles Mr. Dacre maliciously, “now you’ve put your foot in it!”

A small coterie which includes Emoclew and Lallage now surrounds Rosamond Arbuthnot, who possesses a rare conversational charm which is never stilted, strained by useless affectation nor grandiloquence; no matter how commonplace the topic under discussion may be, she invariably brightens it by the wit and beauty of her original, graceful fancy. She

has, too, an abundance of unparalleled powerful, logical diction which enables her to meet, turn the most ordinary, prosaic subject into bright, clever witticism.

The only child of a savant, Rosamond has, from earliest girlhood, imbibed some of the massive thoughts of Socrates, Plato, Aristotle and others of those wonderful thinkers; her mind is therefore stored with rich and varied ideas. With this advantage, her alert imagination can easily overstep the narrow boundary of prejudice, and by swift, happy intonation gain her listeners' favor (who might differ materially) and finally win them to her own opinions. And so Rosamond Arbuthnot talked easily, naturally, giving free vent to her fancies and showing her consummate knowledge of Life, Men and Literature of many countries, holding her listeners entranced, and even compelling Mrs. Lighton-Stryker, whether she understands or not, to listen.

"Yes," the sweet cadence of her voice is heard in response to some remark of Grosvenor's, "yes, indeed, large sorrows we are braced to meet; sustained, cheered by human sympathy. It is the trifles which we most dread, guard against. These furtive small missiles of sorrow, thrown by the sly, firm, unerring hand of Destiny, which smart, bruise, cripple us, sapping our energy and life; as constant dripping water wears away a rock, so do these petty vexations wear us mortals out, until, like a con-

quered thing, we sink beneath the relentless lash of Fate."

"So, Mrs. Arbuthnot, you are a fatalist—eh?" sarcastically remarks Mrs. Lighton-Stryker.

"Yes," with quiet dignity, "yes, to a certain extent, I am."

"Wouldn't it be delightful," cries Kath, "if we had hammocks swung up here amongst the trees and should sleep outside all night, like a lot of gypsies?"

"What a truly Bacchanate idea," laughs Lalage.

"I can imagine nothing so preposterous," snaps Mrs. Lighton-Stryker.

"Nor I," chimes Invorarity. "We'd all wake up with the earache, rheumatism, lumbago or some other ailment."

"It would be the acme of bliss," says Dacre.

"Bliss—forsooth!" scoffs Peggie. "You'd make the night hideous with your snores; you *do* snore dreadfully. I heard you last night; you went to sleep on the couch in the drawing-room after dinner."

"Oh, spare my blushes," whimpers Dacre. "However, I intend to sleep here in spite of influenza, earwigs, to boot. I swear it by—I've forgotten," appealing to Invorarity; "which of the two did King Lear swear by—that old sot Bacchus, or the pretty boy Apollo? Bah! It doesn't signify. I'd rather swear by Venus and Aphrodite—divine

goddesses of Love, and—er—such—more appropriate to my idea.”

“Oh, yes,” answers Invorarity. “We all know you’d swear by anything that wears petticoats.”

“Did—*do* goddesses wear petticoats?” innocently. “I have my doubts. The only ones I ever saw wore the traditional fig-leaf.”

“Oh!” shrieks Mrs. Lighton-Stryker, “that remark is downright indecent.”

“Yes, it is indeed, ma’am,” sweetly acquiesces Mr. Invorarity. “It surely is. Just glance, for instance, at that shameless Diana yonder. Begorrah! You ought,” turning reproachfully toward Mrs. Fairfax, “you really ought, you know, to tie a shawl, scarf, something, about her; it shocks my sensibilities every time I look in that direction—it does, for a truth!”

“H’m. I consider the fig leaf a very appropriate dress,” interposes Emoclew, evidently possessed with a spirit of cynicism, “and it would be a laudable idea, not to mention comfort, if it were to be adopted universally—especially on a warm night like this.”

“Splendid idea!” cry several voices.

“If we could only find someone brave enough to take the lead,” hazards Kath.

“Will you be that one, Mrs. Demaris?” asks Emoclew.

“I heartily coincide with your suggestion,”

laughs Lalage. "If it rests with me, you'll see us, if the morning is not too cold, all down to breakfast in that attire, providing we find a fig leaf tied to our doorknob."

"With one exception," snorts Mrs. Lighton-Stryker.

"And I warn you beforehand," snickers Trixie, "I want my leaf edged with real Valenciennes lace, and a ruffle or two."

"I'm surprised at you!" Mrs. Lighton-Stryker glares at Trixie—"that you," grimly, "the mother of a family, should so far forget yourself."

"Do you call my one poor little Bobs a family?" good-naturedly laughs Trixie. "And if they are to wear those fig leaves, I'm sure I want one."

"Vanity, thy name is Woman," declaims Invorarity.

"And then I suppose," grumbles Teddy Stryker, "you'll all be clamoring for the smallest—Oh, I beg pardon; I mean, of course, the largest leaf."

"Edward!" shrieks Mrs. Stryker, "Edward Stryker, this is the last straw; such language, and before *your own* wife, too, is not to be tolerated."

"Now I've done it," sighs poor Teddy dismally, aside to Dacre. "Can't square myself in a thousand years."

The conversation now becomes desultory, drifting off into different channels.

"Yes, we spend the few short years of our lives

vainly theorizing," Invararity's voice is heard in argument with Emoclew, "vaguely speculating on the pros and cons of existence. What do we gain?"

"You are evidently a pessimist," answers the Hindoo.

"On the contrary, I'm a stanch optimist, but nevertheless maintain we are all a pack of fools seeking to become conversant with that which is and will continue to be a mystery to the end of time. We study science, religion; rack our wretched brains over useless, contradictory philosophy, so ungraspable it teaches us nothing—nay, leaves us more ignorant than before. Mythology, my friend; all, all mythology, nothing else. In fact, when caught it is but a handful of froth which vanishes, melts within our hold."

"Not always," rejoins Emoclew. "The froth you mention is sometimes like the soft, equally evanescent snowflake. Yet catch, roll it briskly into a hard ball and it becomes compact, solid, hardened; so is it with philosophy. I allude to practical philosophy; no visionary theories——"

"That's it," interjects Dacre, "that's it exactly. The Darwin theory in an egg-shell—isn't that practical enough to suit the most skeptical mind?—and therefore the fig leaf which we have just been discussing was the first step toward civilization; a fact, I assure you. I've given the subject most serious consideration."

“Perhaps you’re right,” smiles Emoclew, “though I don’t much relish the connection.”

“What’s that?” cries Mrs. Lighton-Stryker, bearing down upon them, cocked and primed for battle. “What’s that?”

“Bejabers, Mrs. Stryker, darlint, he’s preaching treason against the human race,” answers Invorarity, tearfully, “and says he believes as that brute Darwin did, that we all sprang from monkeys. Shocking, isn’t it?”

“Yes,” replies Dacre, “I accept the theory, because I faithfully believe in it. All civilization points conclusively to the fact; everything pertaining to the human race asserts it, and if you should ever read Darwin’s “Descent of Man” you could no longer doubt it.”

“I grant it is a galling belief,” joins in Desmond, “but can’t help agreeing with Julian. Myself,” bowing deeply in mock devotion before Mrs. Lighton-Stryker, “I myself secretly loathe the thought as most unworthy when compared, confronted with so much grace and loveliness.”

“I consider Darwin’s theory a beastly insult to the whole human race,” says Mr. Invorarity in secret league against the lady. “It shames, degrades our moral nature, and that *you*,” with a sly dig in Dacre’s ribs, “should champion such a theory—a theory which reduces us to the level of beasts—I can’t for the life of me understand.”

"Darwin compliments us," answers Julian Dacre. "Monkeys are nice, clever, intelligent, witty little animals. Now if he had given us as our progenitors a stupid sheep, pig or donkey, we might have cause to complain and feel justly affronted at the relationship."

"Such idiotic doctrines and sentiments are sickening," says Priscilla Stryker, in her sharp, high staccato. "It only tends to corrupt humanity. Mr. Invorarity's right," dramatically waving her fan in that gentleman's direction, "such ridiculous ideas lower our higher nature and degrade all better, finer sensibilities."

"First-rate little animals, the monkeys. Why are you so hard on them?" sighs Dacre. "Now I've often thought," pensively, "what a jolly little monkey Miss Brabazon would make—I can see her now, in my mind's eye, scampering about and swinging gaily from the branch of a cocoanut tree, head downward, suspended by her charming little——"

"Stop!" commands Kath, in a towering passion. "Stop; I forbid you to finish that—that—shameful sentence."

"What?" chorus the crowd.

"Shameful sentence?" blankly. "How do you know what I was going to say?"

"I can guess."

"No, you can't," indignantly. "I was merely go-

ing to say—toes!” triumphantly. “You *have* got a toe; I know it to my sorrow.”

“O—h!” lamely. “But—but—I consider it an insult to compare us to a lot of apes and horrid, hairy baboons, anyway.”

“Oh, I see,” sneers Julian, “it wounds you in your tenderest point.”

“And what’s that, pray?” snaps Miss Brabazon.

“Your self-conceit.”

“If you’d say our self-esteem,” answers Mrs. Lighton-Stryker, loftily, “you’d come nearer the mark.”

“No,” firmly, shaking his head; “self-conceit. It is nothing but vanity that causes you to so heartlessly repudiate your ancestors. Vanity predominates the human race, else why, in moments of bodily danger, do we mortals lift our hands to shield our faces?”

“Fiddlesticks!” retorts Mrs. Stryker, tartly. “Luckily your blasphemous logic regarding monkeys won’t hold water.”

“Blasphemous logic?” blankly.

“Yes, you are certainly blaspheming against the Creator, aren’t you? whom the scripture assures us fashioned us after His own divine image, and out of your own mouth you stand convicted, for you have—deny it if you dare!—likened the Supreme Being to an orang-outang.”

XIV

“He who holds no laws in awe,
He must perish by the law.”

Emoclew-Houssein Rao, directly descended from that noble Brahmin, Rayee Rao, the hereditary accountant of a Concan village, who, when Saho, the Mahratta Prince, was by Azim (younger son of the dead King Aurengzebe) released from Mongul bondage, his chief supporter, and assisted him in seizing from the Mohammedan Shah the entire countries and wide-spreading territories south of the river Chambal, including Allahabad, Mattra and the holy city of Benares; successfully overthrowing Tara Bye, widow of the great Raya Ram, a remarkably clever, beautiful woman, who, owing to the weak intellect of her son Sevayee, assumed full authority and carried on the war and affairs of state with wondrous wisdom and ability.

Rayee Rao was for these valuable services generously rewarded and honored by Prince Saho with the office of Peishwa (prime Minister) the Prince giving himself up in the meantime entirely to pleasure and amusement. Therefore, as a natural consequence, Rayee Rao became in time the real King of

the vast Mahratta Empire, over which he ruled with justice and kindness for many years and at his death bequeathed his power, honors and wealth to his descendants.

The Brahmins are divided into numerous castes or grades, namely: From Brahma the Great—The Undiscernible One's—mouth, springs the high priests; from his arm, soldiers; from his thigh, merchants, farmers; and from his foot, the servile class.

Emoclew-Houssein Rao was of the former, the very highest order, his first schooling being under a thatched shed on sanded floor; his early learning included astronomy, astrology and physics. Then, later, his father, a stern, orthodox follower of the Brahminical creed, commanded his son to study the sacred gayu-tree and subsequently adopt the priestly dress, with the kosh-grass *poita* removed and a real thread *poita*, with three strands spun by Brahmin women, substituted, which he must wear ever afterward. At which the boy (by no means an adherent to this faith, and while he was a close attendant at the Dusseral festival) secretly rebelled against the ridiculous rites which he was bade to perform. His father's creed was totally different, foreign to his own views and fancies. Thus he neglected Vishnu and Siva (almost universally acknowledged the patron god of Hindustan) entirely, and worshiped Doorga, an inferior diety by far. For was it not to her he had knelt; once when his young mother

lay—when arts, medicine and prayers to Vishnu seemed alike to fail—ill unto death? Again for a favorite horse? Another time a pet dog—and Doorga had always hearkened and, after Siva and Vishnu cruelly ignored his supplications, invariably granted his request.

At his father's and mother's death—the latter heroically manifesting her constancy and affection by sacrificing herself upon the funeral pyre, in the fond belief of their souls' quick reunion in happier, purer realms—thus deprived of both parents, the young priest still struggled between his religion and his philosophy and the latter conquered. He could not discard his philosophical convictions; with this result—he abjured his orders and his faith and straightway shook the Brahminical trappings from off his back, wholly repudiating his race and all pertaining to their teachings, save a few, and at others he defiantly snapped his fingers, casting aside the gods—everything—with the sole exception of his tutelary deity, Doorga, and, marking out his own path, meant despite all obstacles to follow it to the end; a decision never regretted.

And even now he remembers with a shudder of repulsion, the hideous red garment which he in his youth was compelled to don upon assuming the *dunda*, and the unsightly piece of deer-skin they forced him to wear, strapped across his reluctant, boyish shoulders. And with what untold aversion

he regarded *Saligram Sulu*, that stupid round stone, the ordinary household god, whom his simple parents bade him worship. 'Tis true, his old uncle, Amajee Baber, a devout votary, follower and patriarchal priest, highest in Brahma's calling, uttered fearful maledictions and roundly cursed him for a renegade, a pariah dog, a vile chandalah, who must wander forever ostracised, his name a word of fear and loathing, an outcast from his kind. But what of that? Bah! Don't curses, like chickens—as the English say—come home to roost?

Emoclew's mind, broadened by travel, observation and learning, his ideas and principles now became almost thoroughly Europeanized. He had studied, become inundated with the philosophy of all the old-world thinkers, which has now merely left him coldly cynical, his innermost soul still unsatisfied; and, in this condition, philosophy is of small value or comfort to him. What is the cause? Not religion—he has none. He observes neither Pagan nor Christian creed; nor is it doubt, nor longing, natural regret for his caste, which feeling he knew to be totally dispelled.

When he formed the friendship of Mahmud-Akber, the Mullah in charge of the Kahriye Mosque, and listened to the fanatical Mussulman's harangue and retrospective yarns (who lived in the hope of both Hindoo and Christian faith being exterminated and the Koran established by the aid of the sword),

enthused narratives teeming with treason and remembrance of Abder-Rahman and his Arabian cavalry—he would listen without the slightest resentment, in amused, interested silence, for hours; and if a lazy contempt mingled with his thoughts, the enthused speaker never suspected it, as he would cry:

“Yes, yes! We had extinguished the Seven Churches of Asia, had almost swept North Africa of its Christianity; passed the Hills of Hercules, conquered Spain, crossed the Pyrenees, ascended into France and Germany with the intention of completing the Mediterranean Circuit and making Europe as Mohammedan as we had made Asia Minor and Palestine. But now, alas!” dolefully, “instead of the Mosque, the minaret and the muezzin’s cry calling the faithful to the Koran and to prayers, there arise the spires of the Christian dogs’ church and the stupid clanging of its bells.”

To these frequent tirades Emoclew neither agreed nor disagreed; his mind completely passive, indifferent. Those mighty exploits of by-gone years, savage, chivalric strife, had no power to arouse, only merely interest him. Though of higher caste, Emoclew-Houssein Rao much resembles in looks and physique the Aryan type of Kanoujya Brahmins, who seldom hold priestly office, the majority preferring military service. They, though not esteemed

of purest stock, are nevertheless perhaps the finest physical race in India.

Emoclew-Houssein Rao is unusually tall, slight, graceful, with limbs straight as the Narcissus; but at will, or when danger menaces, those same slim, supple limbs, capable of enduring immense fatigue, instantly become firm, containing muscles like finely-tempered steel, which have been tested, the truth of which his grateful friend Guy Erlynde, whose life hung for one dread moment in the balance, could vouch for in the following incident:

While passing through an Indian jungle, Erlynde, by some carelessness or mischance, became separated from his companions, which fact, dimly-realized, was suddenly forced on him, being confronted by the crouching form and blazing yellow eyes of an immense tigress. Horrified, powerless, the unfortunate man awaited the furious spring which meant certain death, well knowing the slightest movement on his part would hasten to hurl him with agonized suffering into eternity.

Dumbly he watched the huge, red tongue rolling in cruel anticipation across the gleaming fangs destined soon to tear, devour his yet-living flesh, and shudderingly closed his eyes in momentary expectation of that panting body flung against his own, that hot, fierce breath at his throat, and braced himself, imagining the final preparatory doubling of the haunches, and then—— A sharp hissing sound cleft

the air, followed by a surprised, stifled snarl. A rope had been swiftly flung with unerring aim around the animal's neck, and Emoclew, cool, calm, smilingly held the end of the lasso. The tigress rolled, struggled with baffled fury upon the ground, and when its intended prey stepped from direct bullet range, his deliverer sent a shot whizzing straight between those angry eyes.

Emoclew-Houssein Rao, though bordering a trifle upon effeminacy, is singularly pleasing; there is a certain nobleness in his erect carriage and a charm about the set of his head; his nose is purely aquiline; between the eyes, shaded by narrow, arched brows, is a decidedly wide breadth which gives to his countenance an uncommon expression. Those eyes, so darkly pensive, melancholy, filled with unbounded depths of romance, poetry, passion, are seemingly fraught with powerful magnetism, for a woman seldom glances beyond them, nor is she heedless to the soft, low tones of his voice which possesses a wonderfully seductive, caressing quality. A pathetic nonchalance, characteristic of all ascetic, fatalist nations, a morose resignation, clings about him, heightening the mysterious, fascinating influence of his personality.

Emoclew - Houssein Rao's brilliant qualities (though never affecting superiority) all who come in contact with him feel instinctively, while gazing upon him and listening to his half-serious, half-

bantering remarks, and involuntarily acknowledge him their superior. Yet he is inclined to be retiring, never thrusting his knowledge forward. He seems to know everything they know or could impart, and retains the mysterious source which inspired, nourished those hidden thoughts and meanings, those idiosyncrasies, cynicisms, evidently inherited from paternal channels, which fit him like a glove, combined with such amiability that they forget and forgive him an occasional shaft at their expense. Emoclew's cynicism is quite devoid of that vulgar sarcasm so often engendered by petty jealousy, malice or envy, and which is so fatal to popularity. He is exceedingly fond of his friend, Guy Erlynde, with whom he occasionally amuses himself by scoff and jest. This friendship Erlynde reciprocates, and admires the Brahmin beyond measure, whose presence gives an impetus to his life and lulls his morose sensibilities to rest—a moroseness caused by seeing, from earliest childhood, people draw back frightened, and children scream in terror at his forbidding exterior. When in Emoclew's presence the hunchback entirely forgets his ugliness. Erlynde always has a vague dread and is constantly haunted by the fear of losing this true, yet incomprehensible, friend.

Though many soft feminine cheeks have flushed, bright eyes drooped, and hearts fluttered at his word or glance, Emoclew-Houssein Rao has never wedded but once. Some ten years previous, while sojourn-

ing in fair, sunny Italy, he met and with vehement ardor wooed and won the beautiful maiden who became his wife, between whose sweet, dead memory and the one child of their brief, blissful union and passionate young love his heart is now shared. The loss of this idolized young wife was the only instance in which Emoclew's steadfast belief in Doorga ever wavered. The goddess, despite his wild entreaties, protestations, prayers, remained obdurately blind, deaf to all pleadings, and in despair, when the white soul took flight, he bitterly renounced, forsook this deity. But when later a wee morsel of humanity, with its mother's soft, sweet eyes, lay within his arms, then that faith in Doorga returned tenfold, For was she not wise and good, knowing what is best; nor had he the right to censure, question her methods or purpose who had thus so thoughtfully, kindly chastened the blow of his affliction?

In that quiet, sleepy, little Italian village, amid the sun-kissed grapes and flowers, Nestora, his daughter, lives and thrives, a living image of his dear, dead love; and that is where he now passes the happiest days of his life.

Italy, also, is where Emoclew found Paolo—a very much frightened Paolo, indeed—fleeing for his graceless life from an irate husband's just vengeance, when the Hindoo's ready arm stayed the gleaming blade of the frenzied Italian's stiletto and thus averted the scamp's death. This act gained

Paolo's love and everlasting gratitude, who swore no idle boast: his life was henceforth from that moment at his rescuer's disposal, to whose side he straightway allied himself, blithely twanged his guitar, smoked limitless cigarettes, made love to every pretty face he saw, and managed to enjoy himself in Emoclew's service generally; his master meanwhile smiling in easy tolerance, for strange to say, though pedantically moral both mentally and physically himself, Emoclew is wonderfully lenient regarding such deficiencies in others.

Paolo, from extensive travel with Emoclew through different countries, has acquired, mastered many languages, and become in an incredibly short space of time a proficient linguist, and it is not unusual to hear his rich tenor voice lilting in the tones of a passionate love ditty, rendered equally persuasive, pleasing, in almost any tongue under the sun.

These years spent with Emoclew were not without their risks and adventures, for the gay rascal, unable to resist an amour whenever the possibility or slightest opportunity presented itself, was continually running hairbreadth escapes from the vengeful fury of husbands, brothers or sweethearts, with the result of no sooner being out of one scrape than into another; and no danger from such, however great, as to prevent its repetition.

Threats, warnings by the dozen were poured into Emoclew's ears, regarding his valet's unscrupulous

conduct, to be received with a laugh, indifferent shoulder-shrug, or a—

“Tut, tut! Let your women take care of themselves and their virtue, or else reconcile themselves to that which may betide them through their folly and frailties.” Sensible doctrine, doubtless, but not always consoling nor satisfactory to the injured one’s feelings.

Out upon the bright, clear horizon of Paolo’s happy existence floats little feathery, rose-tipped clouds, above whose edges the roguish, laughing eyes of Master Cupid peep, with his arrows ever ready; and nothing else definite, save a certain undefined bliss for the warm, strong, young life beating within him, never permitting his heart and fancy to stand still, but to run riot in any line Love’s compass points, heedless to what direction or peril it might lead him.

Occasionally Emoclew would regard this Lothario with a mixture of compassion, admiration, contempt and, yes—a considerable amount of envy for his lightness of mind and self-manufactured ideals—ideals which Emoclew-Houssein Rao’s soul, buried deep amid the gray ashes of the past, strive as it might, could never again create nor hope to awaken, and which he knew by psychological experiments to be decisive.

This strange art which Emoclew possesses was acquired when relinquishing his own class and when

temporarily residing with a secret, mysterious sect terming themselves Brahmo-Sornaj, by whom he became, after energetic pursuance, an adept in occultism which enables him now, by the slightest effort, to summon, command, subject to his will that which threatens soon to rend, overthrow, perchance destroy, that skeptic part of his second self not in commune with the other—that indomitable other half which is filled, seething, with mighty, conscious power.

XV

“ And this too must I suffer—I, who never
Inflicted purposely on human hearts
A voluntary pang!”

“ W—A—N—T—O—N—saint!”

This positive, triumphant assurance, which the speaker fully expected to be greeted with hearty bursts of acclaim, has, however, quite the reverse effect, being received in blank silence—a silence so sad, so profound, one could imagine the elfin chant of impish spirit voices raised in derisive mockery of all things mortal, mingled with other softer, sweeter tones which seem to lament over the sins and follies of mankind.

It is a troubled, embarrassing stillness, and to Bobs' infantile mind (who has prided herself upon her alphabetical prowess, over which she has struggled, diligently studied in the proud, happy anticipation of astonished comments, plaudits), horribly annoying, wholly ungrateful.

Alas, little maid! Like many another older, wiser head, you have unfortunately seized the wrong theme and opportunity to distinguish yourself. Thus, if your heart is filled with indignant chagrin, who is to blame?

The stifling, awkward silence stays unbroken save by an occasional angry clamp of Nero's toothless old jaws as he snaps crossly at a brilliant, sapphire-winged dragon-fly which is pestering him unmercifully by darting hither and thither across his nose or fluttering aggravatingly before his sleepy eyes, seriously interfering with his afternoon nap—or else the shrill, incessant chattering of a little stonechat perched upon one of Venus' swelling busts—calling, scolding its truant mate who, scornfully ignoring his wee wife's upbraidings, is faithlessly carrying on a bare-faced flirtation and is in amorous persistency pursuing a pert brown sparrow, who, having for the nonce caught his fickle fancy (and like all female things when conscious of their power) is coyly alluring, leading him a merry dance from rose bush to shrub, until his spouse's conjugal feelings can stand the sight no longer and with a last angry squawk she takes flight, leaving the guilty pair to their own diversions and conscience.

The lawn is crowded, for it is long past the noon hour and the guests at Castlewalls, sitting or lounging about in speechless awkwardness, have dined.

“W—A—N—T—O—N—saint.”

Surely, thinks Bobs, whose baby forefinger has spelled, traced out the letters which form the word—surely they are all stricken with deafness or some other ailment, for dismay, consternation is plainly

decipherable upon every countenance, and still they do not speak.

Rosamond's face blanches, her nostrils dilate, the delicate lines about the sensitive mouth contract and quiver, her eyes fill with a dull film like that in those of a wounded animal.

Mrs. Fairfax commences to stammer something apologetically, when Bobs continues :

“Everybody says her is a saint. Nursie has been learning me to read pen-writing, and” looking around with a puzzled, troubled expression for information, “doesn't these wiggley letters on Rosey-mond's forehead say 'saint'—eh?”

The child's words are followed by grief so violent that the innocent author of it, now thoroughly alarmed, slips from the weeping woman's arms and scampers to Dacre's knee for safety, whilst tears of shame, contrition and humiliation stream unchecked from Rosamond's dovelike eyes. It is the first time in the whole course of her cruel martyrdom that any human has hinted at this affliction, and that a child should cover her with shame is agonizing.

The sun ruffles and breaks the clouds; the long, yellow shadows steal, creeping ribbon-like, toward her, touch, kiss as if in sympathy the edge of her white gown.

It seems so stupid, so heartless to sit in silence watching her sorrow, but what can they do? There is that waste of sunlight separating them. Who will

cross it to give consolation to this grief-distraught woman who finds it so easy, so natural, and is never loath to administer comfort to others?

“Come, Bobs,” cries Invorarity, in a mad attempt to avert further painful complications, “Come, Bobs; let us go and feed the goldfish.”

“O, glorious inspiration! O, blessed fish!” says Dacre, *sotto voce*.

“Come,” entreatingly.

“I won’t,” whimpers Bobs, whose soul is filled with trepidation and future mysterious forebodings. “I won’t! There’s a nasty old swan there; her’s got chickens, an’ is cross, an’ always tries to bite me.”

“Do come, Bobs,” pleads Julian Dacre, “I’ll go and chase her away.”

“Yes, yes!” joyfully. “Let us all go.”

“I’ll wring her neck,” bloodthirstily asserts the phlegmatic Mr. Hyde.

“So will I—and I,” echo several voices, frantically seizing this blessed chance of escape, and Bobs submits to their boastful or tearful entreaties.

The men, in their moral cowardice of a woman’s tears, flee.

Emoclew, now the sole representative of the male element, who has been quietly reading, seemingly oblivious to the foregoing incident, flings aside his book, arises and steps across the glowing space.

At his approach Rosamond lifts her hand, half imploring, half commanding; but with his soft, low

"Pardon, with your permission," suffers him to take the seat beside her.

Rather shyly she raises her eyes, about which violet shadows lie, for a moment, and catches, reads in his look a meaning which causes her heart to quicken, throb as it has never yet done at the glance of any man, and within, past the innermost recesses of her being, at the very sanctuary of her life itself arise a troop of hitherto unknown, glad, undefined longings, kneeling in homage and adoration before him.

As Rosamond sits with bowed head, pondering upon what basis has she for the foundation of this sweet, delusive dream, the golden sunbeams have shifted, and like the strong, slender fingers of the dear Creator's mighty hand rest as if in mute, loving benediction upon her smooth, dark head. Every faculty of her soul seems concentrated in an endeavor to fathom this divine feeling.

Nothing but casual, commonplace remarks, the merest civilities of society, have ever passed between Emoclew and herself since their brief acquaintance. Yet she knows instinctively that this sympathy is deep-rooted, his admiration an involuntary tribute to her womanly purity and grace—sincere. An unknown new influence has seized, stirred to its deepest depths her virgin soul, and asserting its right, answers affirmatively in responsive passion to his; a faint, rebellious sense of pain intrudes, associating

her thoughts regarding his dalliance with Mrs. Demaris. Is it jealousy? Nay, surely not that. What is it then? Since his advent, too, a wild resentment has arisen in Rosamond's gentle breast against the false, hideous letters branded on her brow, and against that dead husband whose unfounded suspicion has marked, banned her an alien from her kind. Rosamond is not a vain woman, and if she regrets her disfigurement it is simply prerogative to her sex, for countless generations, to charm by personal appearance the one they love.

"I am foolishly sensitive," murmurs Rosamond, striving to smile a welcome, and nervously brushing the heavy crystal drops from cheek and lash.

"And with good reason, dear Madam." The lawn is now totally deserted save by these two. He leans toward her, speaking low. At his words she lifts her hand, passing it quickly across her brow.

"Yes, I have a fluid which I will guarantee to banish forever those unsightly letters upon your forehead. Will you permit me? I assure you it will be absolutely painless, harmless, and will leave the flesh unseared."

Noting the swift, glad flash of acquiescence in his listener's eyes, Emoclew draws from his pocket and uncorks a small vial from which into his palm he slowly, carefully measures several silvery drops; then presses this same hand with contents for one moment tightly against Mrs. Arbuthnot's forehead,

rapidly passing it back and forth. And lo! When his hand is removed, Rosamond's brow is smooth, firm as marble, not a blemish nor sign visible. Those hateful letters are wholly, entirely obliterated.

XVI

“I speak not of men’s creeds—they rest between
Man and his Maker—but of things allow’d,
Averr’d, and known,—and daily, hourly seen.”

“Humph! What’s he up to now, I’d like to know, stalking around at cock-crow without stopping to make any toilette to speak of.”

“I believe those are his regular habiliments when on his native heath,” answers Julian Dacre, “and the secret of his early rising may be attributed to the same cause as your own.”

“I—I—” stammers the lady—“I came out at my maid’s suggestion, to try the dew from off the leaves and flowers. Marie says there is nothing to compare with it for the complexion.”

“Ha! That may also explain Mr. Emoclew Rao’s early appearance. His complexion could stand a little improvement.”

“Bah!” tartly, “nothing short of a miracle could do that. He’s a regular Blackamoor. He had the impudence to salute me in those abominable things, and said something about me reminding him of Perdita in the flower garden,—whoever the creature may be——”

“ Hold! ” cries Dacre. “ I believe I’ve solved the mystery. This may be the month in which the Hindoos celebrate the Hooly Feast. They bespatter themselves with a red powder called phang, and if that can’t be procured, red pepper answers the purpose—and walk about in a Bacchanal state, with a garland of roses, tulips or thistles about their necks.”

“ He professes to know something about the unseen, doesn’t he? ” asks Patrick Invorarity, with a side-wink at Dacre. “ Quite a Mahatma sort of person, I’m told. In fact, a regular Mephistophelean.”

“ Yes,” acquiesces Mr. Dacre, “ it’s awfully awkward, ’pon my honor; you’ll have to contrive to keep out of his clutches, Mrs. Stryker. I verily believe he has a contract with His Satanic Majesty.”

“ Pshaw! I defy him to find his stupid Marguerite in me; I’m made of sterner stuff. Ah——” with a little scream, “ here he comes now, indecent clothes and all.”

“ Run, darlint,” cries Invorarity, “ run, I implore you, and save an unnecessary shock to your inherent modesty.”

But while the lady hesitates, Erlynde and Emoclew-Houssein Rao pause to wait for Nero, who is slowly ambling on behind.

Priscilla sees that the chance of her life has come, and being in fine fettle for an argument, doesn’t

propose to miss it. And if she can nonplus this audacious heathen—as she delights in designating Emoclew, who frequently brushes her ideas aside like cobwebs and has, too, a most provoking propensity for sandwiching nasty, sarcastic little remarks and innuendoes between her speech, so amusing to the listeners but which has a decidedly exasperating effect upon Mrs. Stryker—it is clearly her privilege and duty to do so.

Thus it is not difficult to diagnose the lady's antipathy toward Emoclew, who is certainly a most disturbing element, and furthermore shows a decided tendency to infringe on her domains. And therefore the joy of disputing her empire and queenly rights is not to be lost; consequently Priscilla is grimly bent upon making an example of this interloper, and give him to understand *she* is not to be trifled with; and accordingly awaits, firmly determined to render herself as disagreeable as possible—an easy task for Mrs. Stryker.

As they slowly approach, Emoclew conspicuous in the distance by his Oriental costume—what is the problem of this woman's vindictive nature? Possibly the mere pleasure of clashing ideas; for no sooner has she caught sight of her prey than she becomes quite amiable. She laughs gaily at a sally from Invorarity, and, snapping a wall-flower from its brittle stalk, sticks it in her dust-colored hair.

For the immediate prospect of a wordy war stimulates Mrs. Stryker as would an alcoholic draught.

“I'd be a butterfly born in a bower
Where lilies and violets and roses meet,”

blithely warbles she, in her high, shrill voice, hopping mincingly about, the tips of her fingers resting on Grosvenor's arm.

“She's in a most delightful humor this morning,” says Hume, dreamily watching the lady as she loiters amongst the shrubs and flowers.

“Charming,” agrees Kath.

“Never saw her *quite* so pleasant before,” avers Invararity.

“Perfectly angelic,” replies Valentine Hume, touching a match to his cigarette.

“Wonder what has happened,” queries Invararity.

“Happened?” iterates Dacre, mournfully. “Good Lord, man! It's not what *has* happened; it's what's *going* to happen.”

“Yes, she's got something up her sleeve, sure enough,” acquiesces Kath, moodily.

“You can depend on it,” answers Dacre.

“Why!” exclaims Invararity, as Priscilla, suddenly standing on tip-toe, snatches Grosvenor's hat which she coquettishly perches upon her own brows. “Why, she's positively growing playful! First she wanted to be a butterfly, and now——”

“Just wait,” interposes Dacre, gloomily, “and see what she’s up to.”

“True,” answers Hume, meditatively, “I’ve never seen her in such a mood that there wasn’t the deuce to pay.”

“Nor anyone else, either,” answers Dacre.

“Wonder what she’ll do next,” laughs Kath.

“Don’t know,” sighs Invorarity, shaking his head; “wouldn’t dare venture a guess; however, nothing would surprise me now, though; she might stand on her head, perhaps, or,” moodily, “kiss somebody, or—or else——”

“Kill somebody, more likely,” retorts Dacre.

“It’s extremely evident that someone’s going to catch the dickens,” says Val Hume, placidly puffing his cigarette.

“I’m afraid it’s me,” answers Kath dolefully. “Bobs told her something I said the other night, and I’ve been momentarily expecting my doom ever since.”

“No, no!” shivers Invorarity. “It’s me, bedad! I can feel it in me bones.”

“I may be the culprit,” says Mr. Hume, casting aside his cigarette. “I accidentally stepped on her gown last evening, and tore a yard or so of the puffles—er—what-de-ye call ’em, eh? Oh, yes!—ruffles, off.”

“No, I’m the one *must* suffer,” sighs Dacre. “Yesterday I unthinkingly remarked what a thun-

dering fine-looking couple Teddy and Peg would make, and," sadly, "I'm reconciled to whatever punishment is in store for me."

"Oh, then," cries Kath in relieved tones, "she may pitch into us all together; if so," cheerfully, "we can easily withstand any onset. There is strength in numbers, you know, and surely we are equal to her, alone and single handed, eh?"

"No," answers Julian Dacre, gloomily wagging his head, "not if she charges at us full tilt and——"

"Leaves us all dead or dying on the field of battle," sadly interpolates Hume.

"Dead or dying?" repeats Dacre. "She'll leave us all slaughtered; there won't be one left to tell the tale."

"Things are beginning to look serious," sighs Invorarity dismally, as Mrs. Stryker, reaching up to adjust Grosvenor's necktie, now stands with both hands resting on that gentleman's shoulders, smiling archly into his eyes, the straw hat cocked rakishly to one side. "She's liable to make an attack at any moment, and knock us into smithereens."

"Jove! Yes!" groans Dacre. "She's getting worse and worse, if——"

"Faith!" cries the Irishman in mock terror, loudly chattering his teeth together. "I think we'd better skedaddle while there's yet time, eh?" anxiously. "Flight, in a desperate case of this kind, is the better part of valor."

“Too late,” answers Dacre sorrowfully, for Erlynde and Emoclew, the subject of their recent discussion, approach. The latter has, by some impulse, discarded his European dress for Oriental robes in which he looks very handsome and picturesque indeed, with a snowy coif twisted about his head and a long, white gama bound at the middle with an embroidered scarf.

Mrs. Lighton-Stryker, after taking a quick, keen survey, accepts the situation in secret glee, complains of faintness and asks for a glass of water.

“There’s no water here, Ma’am, but perhaps a little of this brandy will revive you,” answers Invorarity, solicitously producing from his pocket a flask. “Try to swallow a drop or two—do.”

But she happily recovers without the required refreshment.

“The top of the mornin’ to ye,” cries Mr. Invorarity blithely, as the two men approach.

“Jove!” says Dacre, eying Emoclew approvingly. “What a refreshing sight you look in all that cool white toggery.”

Emoclew, after making some complimentary remarks to Miss Brabazon and Mrs. Stryker (who apparently takes due umbrage at his native attire), commences talking on different subjects.

“Oh, how good it is to live; surely, the sky was never quite so blue!” enthusiastically cries Kath, throwing out her arms in girlish exuberance of

spirits. "Such a deep, pure blue as in England, and the sun—dear old Sol! does he ever shine as bright in any other land?" turning to Emoclew. "Surely you ought to know; does he?"

"Yes, awfully jolly place, England," soliloquizes Invorarity. "Perfect Arcadia; no one can find fault with it."

"I love the sun," cries Kath, stooping to pick a white-faced fuchsia framed in its crimson bonnet, which she sticks amid her short, boyish curls. Kath, in a delicate mauve muslin, is looking exceedingly sweet and dainty. "I love, adore the sun!"

"I see you are not proof against its rays, though," sneers Priscilla Stryker, who has been impatiently awaiting an opportunity to say something nasty. "How dreadfully sunburnt you are getting. I declare, you are positively brown as a salamander. You should really be more careful; your skin is about your only good point. And that red flower dangling in your hair is *so* unbecoming."

"Yes, I know I'm a perfect fright, but I feel like a lotus-eater this morning."

"She doesn't mind her appearance as long as she finds favor in my artistic eyes," draws Dacre.

"The glare of the sun makes me as blind as a bat," says Mrs. Stryker, lamely apologetic for the use of Grosvenor's hat.

"Possibly," answers Dacre, who has come generously to Miss Brabazon's rescue; "but when one

is but eighteen one can stand the most searching sunlight, eh, Katherine mia? And you look a regular Peri this morning in that gown."

"No accounting for taste, jeers Mrs. Lighton-Stryker," and, discharging this poisoned arrow she feels happier and relapses into an almost amicable state again.

"What a glorious thing life is," says Miss Brabazon, plucking another fuchsia which she listlessly pulls to pieces.

"Faith! Life is a game of chance," shouts Invorarity. "Hurrah! More power to the winner!" Then waxing sentimental, "Life! Life—what is it? Can we answer more plainly than the insects?" touching with the toe of his boot a small black beetle crawling nimbly over the grass. "No; we are things hatched by the elements."

"Christianity teaches us different," answers Priscilla sharply.

"Pardon, Madam," says Emoclew, "you Christians, as you style yourselves, have borrowed your philosophy from Plato and Aristotle. You preach of your creed and the divine justice of your Creator, who, unless you are radically contradictory in your assertions, is to my mind plainly injustice personified——"

"Oh——" cries Priscilla, "Oh——"

"Take for illustration the absurd fable of Cain and Abel. Did not your Deity—for some unex-

plained reason, or whim, rather—accept one brother's offering and reject with scorn the other? Where is the justice there, pray?"

"We are taught not to question the Divine will, but to submit uncomplainingly to His methods," replies the lady, piously.

"And yet, Christians, you who extol your Maker and religion as the foremost on earth, are the very ones for whom death holds the greatest terrors. You boast of your strength, blind faith in your belief——"

"We have faith," says Mrs. Stryker, bridling up.

"Then why so grossly belie it by the cowardice a Christian usually displays upon contemplating or entering that condition called death? Your childish idea of a hereafter is adjusted to please your own ludicrous notion and pleasure, which reality you fully delude yourselves into believing; and yet your nonsensical faith belies your belief, for you are the only humans who dread death. The Ascetics obey its summons without a murmur; you Christians alone cower, shrink at its call."

"You talk like a heathen," crossly. "But then, to be sure, you are one, aren't you? Don't you worship images of stone or wood, or—er—something of that sort, eh?"

"What an unpardonably rude speech," says Miss Brabazon aside to Dacre.

“ Good Lord! yes; she’s true to her instincts. The worst-tempered woman in the world, and the rudest.”

“ Ha, ha!” whispers Invorarity, nudging Julian. “ This explains it; he’s the one.”

“ Jove! Yes!” grins Dacre. “ Emoclew in the snare of the enemy.”

“ Bet she’ll find her Waterloo this time,” says Hume gleefully.

“ I’ll wager he’ll meet her more than half way,” answers Dacre.

“ Never thought she’d dare tackle *him*,” whispers Invorarity admiringly, as Priscilla persists.

“ Don’t you worship images, eh?”

“ Oh, Mrs. Stryker,” entreats Kath, with crimson cheeks at that lady’s rudeness. “ He——”

“ Tut!” angrily retorts Priscilla, turning on the speaker with a scowl. “ What does a silly chit of a girl like you know——”

“ You’d better run for it, Mavourneen,” whispers Invorarity aside to Kath, which advice the frightened girl speedily takes, and departs, leaving Mrs. Stryker sole mistress of the field, who continues:

“ See!” scornfully indicating Emoclew’s raiment by a hand sweep. “ See! Such a rig is only worthy of a harlequin; but then, to be sure,” sneeringly, “ it is adorning one now.”

“ My dear Mrs. Stryker,” interrupts Dacre in

mirth-stifled tones, "pray don't be—er—personal; he might——"

"Mind your own affairs!" answers the irate woman, stamping her foot in passion. "I will express myself to this—this *person!*" It would be difficult to describe the slurring insolence conveyed in the last word—"I *will* express my views, as any Christian woman should, and——"

If Priscilla Stryker were wise, and not altogether blinded by fury, she would have hesitated long before attacking so formidable a foe as Emoclew-Houssein Rao. She should have heeded, been warned by, the thunder brooding beyond the starry depths of his brilliant eyes, which gleam now with the deadly, fascinating intensity of the cobra—which Emoclew instantly assumes the aspect and attitude of—for ere her words cease, his head darts forth from the white coif with the swift, snake-like movement as that of the hooded serpent, and there is rage—scathing rage—in his fiery glance as he hisses,

"A Christian woman, you? Bah! A thing to be despised as a creature of intrigue and malice——"

"Whew! Now she's getting a dampening down," gleefully mutters Hume.

"And deserves it jolly well right, too," answers Dacre, *sotto voce*, as the lady tearfully turns to Invorarity, angrily stuttering:

"I appeal to you for protection, Mr. Invorarity. Why, oh, why!" clasping her hands, "do you re-

main passive while I am so grossly maligned and——”

But Emoclew, cutting her words short, continues, though in a milder strain. The glitter has left his eyes; the venom his lips, while the cadence of his voice has grown wonderfully sweet in its mournful, prophetic, dreamy intonation, and the musical current of words sweeps, rippling in firm conviction from his mouth. He continues:

“The Christian era will pass, nay, is passing now. It has lasted, held sway, long enough—too long. Another faith will succeed, usurp it. Your once mighty nation is dwindling to decay. Ah, you exotic Anglo-Saxons! Whilst you have been busy losing a world, the Ascetic-Orientals, outstripping you in endurance and science, have been quietly but surely gaining one; and are now, with determined, steady rhythm of feet, advancing near, nearer, till they are at your very gates, and will spread, swarm like locusts over the length and breadth of your land, extinguishing you completely. And whose fault is it? Your own. You who had the power and means grossly slighted, neglected the chance, till now, now it is too late. Your puny posterity has almost ceased. The shrubs, bushes, bud, bloom; the trees bear fruit; the animals multiply. All, all willingly obey the universal mandate, save she,” nodding contemptuously toward the now cowed Priscilla. “The vaunted Christian woman: she who forfeits the world’s re-

spect; this thing, this creature of froth and folly, the only rebelling element, who, to her everlasting shame be it said, declines, absolutely refuses to perform her bounden duty, to propagate her kind, and is therefore as useless as they," pointing toward a couple of black butterflies fluttering near. "Faugh! Christian women are the direct instrument of race destruction. In ancient times a barren woman considered herself accurst, whilst now, forsooth! the majority of her modern sisters deem motherhood a disgrace.

"Take a lesson from the savages whom you would scorn to be classed amongst; yet their women uncomplainingly bring forth, suckle their offspring. Discard your vanities! Live, and accomplish your life's mission. The world rests with you. Make your frail, sickly bodies strong, wholesome—both within and without; your brains clear, so that you can give to posterity men—fine, strong, athletic fellows; not puny dolts and idiots!

"And yet," continues Emoclew, disregarding Mrs. Stryker's attempted remark, "and yet, who can blame you? Life, my friends, is a very trying ordeal. We humans are a lot of helpless puppets, dancing, smirking, bowing to the music and constant tugging of the string of circumstances. We are children and delight in fairy tales. We court glamour, not reality; and seek diversity by thrusting fact-matter aside. We clutch, seize delusion as a

drowning man catches a straw. Death, through life, is our bugbear."

"And now, my friends," briskly exclaims Dacre, breaking the rather awkward silence which ensues, "now come; breakfast is nearly over. I can see my sister madly signalling us the fact from the window."

"What?" exclaims Invorarity, "breakfast nearly over? Oh," groaning dismally, "and those delicious muffins perhaps stone cold!"

When they enter the breakfast room a few people are still dawdling over their meal.

"You naughty, bad mans," cries Bobs, sternly shaking a teaspoon at her Uncle Julian, but the loving glance she bestows upon him utterly belies her anger, "You naughty, bad mans! You is late."

"I'm sorry, Bobs," patting the child's curly head. "Awfully sorry, but the truth is, I couldn't persuade Mrs. Stryker to let me leave her side."

"Faugh!" is the sole remark that lady vouchsafes, flouncing into her seat.

"Oh, you laggards!" laughs Mrs. Demaris, motioning for Emoclew to take the chair by her side, and looking charmingly cool and handsome in a crisp, white gown, the lovely color in her cheeks rivaling the rose at her bosom. "You are all very late. Mrs. Fairfax had some letters to write, and requested me to attend to your wants."

"My wants are few," says Julian Dacre, helping himself to a plump pomegranate.

“So are mine,” chimes Invararity. “A muffin——”

“I’ve ordered some hot——”

“Oh, bless you——”

“Some hot chocolate and toast——”

“Toast?” echoes Invararity, turning pale. “Toast! Where’s the muffins?”

“Gone. You’ll have to be content with toast. Bobs devoured the last.”

“Oh, cruel Bobs!”

“I didn’t!” indignantly retorts Bobs. “Mr. Hyde eaten ’em.”

“I thought so,” grumbles Mr. Invararity, moodily. “It’s proverbial that from out of the mouth of babes comes wisdom and truth. Dear Mrs. Demaris, couldn’t you manage to find a few?—er—bribe the cook?”

“No,” with a decided shake of the red-gold head, “no, cook’s in a tantrum. She declares it’s long past breakfast hours, and has given Trixie notice.”

“What?” gasps Mr. Hyde, in wild alarm and letting fall the peach from whose rosy cheeks he has been tenderly brushing the down. “What? Oh, surely not that! Her patties and clear soups are the very finest I have ever tasted. Say, old chap,” turning to Erlynde, “implore her to change her mind. Raise her wages—anything, only don’t, for my sake, don’t—don’t let her go!”

"If it rests with me," laughs Guy, "I'll see that the threatened calamity sha'n't occur."

"What's he has his nightie on for?" queries Bobs, eyeing Emoclew disapprovingly. "Did he forgot his clothes?"

"Oh, hush, Bobs!" entreats Miss Brabazon. "That's not a nightgown; it's a—a—"

"Shirt?" interpolates the incorrigible Bobs.

"I see she has inveigled that hateful Hindu into a flirtation," whispers Mrs. Stryker, still smarting keenly from her late encounter with Emoclew, to Jane Carew.

"Yes, it looks rather like as if it were going to be a serious case," giggles the other.

"Curious on her part," says Mrs. Stryker, her eyes resting on Lalage's beautiful profile. "She hooked him into it, though. It's plain to be seen that the wretch doesn't care a fig about her. She made a dead set at him from the very first."

"One can hardly blame her. He's very handsome, I think," replies the other.

"Hideous, I think, though *she* would give her eyes for him."

"Queer, Dacre didn't jib when she threw him over. Your prophecy, my dear Priscilla, looks as if it were about to fail."

"On the contrary," answers Priscilla, "things are going beautifully—just beautifully!"

“ You still believe there is a probability that she and the hunchback may marry? ”

“ For mercy’s sake, speak lower! Not a doubt about it. He’s rolling in money. Don’t you think his wealth will counterbalance his deformity? ”

Across the table Kath is chatting gaily with Grosvenor and Invorarity, and the latter, despite the lost muffins, seems to be making a capital breakfast. As Miss Brabazon vigorously shakes her head at some bantering sally of Grosvenor’s the fuchsia falls from her hair and alights upon the edge of his plate, and he picks it up and thrusts its stem through the lapel of his coat.

“ I had a little tiff with Mrs. Lighton-Stryker this morning, ” says Emoclew.

“ Indeed? ” answers Lalage, refilling his cup with chocolate. “ I presume that, then, is the cause of your tardiness. Mrs. Stryker has a decided mania for adjusting everyone’s affairs to suit her own ideas, and if she can’t have her own way, there’s sure to be war. ”

“ Yes, one has only to glance at her to know what a sweet, amiable creature she is, ” replies Emoclew. “ Her name is charmingly pat and suited to her character. ”

“ Yes, she is certainly a discordant character. Upon what subject was your argument? ”

“ Religion. ”

“ A dangerous topic, ” smiles Lalage, uplifting her

straight, narrow brows. "Politics would have been far safer."

"Perhaps," agrees Emoclew, "though almost any subject would suffer at her hands. She and Miss Brabazon seem to be forever at it, tooth and nail."

"Yes," answers Mrs. Demaris. "Kath's wonderfully brave to contend with Priscilla Stryker; far braver than any of the others."

"And you?"

"I? Frankly, I'm afraid of her, and so will you be when she fixes that basilisk eye of hers upon you; and, besides, I'm under her ban."

"Why?" asks Emoclew, folding his arms across his breast and leaning back. "Why?"

"She objects to my size."

"Impossible!"

"A truth, I assure you. She doesn't like my style; she also credits me with numberless evil designs, finds fault with my complexion—skin, she calls it—takes exception to the color of my eyes, and utterly taboos my hair."

"How unkind," answers Emoclew, softly, "to pick flaws in a goddess—a goddess amongst goddesses. Your beauty is evidently the head and front of her dislike."

Oh, flatterer! laughs Lalage, blushing a deeper pink at Emoclew's compliment and adroitly changing the subject by saying, "Mr. Erlynde tells us you are thinking of going away."

“ Yes.”

“ When? ”

“ In a week or ten days.”

“ Where? ” eagerly.

“ Italy, first.”

“ And then? ”

“ I’ve not yet decided; my movements are never certain.”

“ You love Italy? ”

“ I do. Give me France for wit and science; Germany, virtue, stupidity; America, cleanliness, enterprise; England, wisdom and practicability; but ah! Italy—Italy is the home of Romance, Art and Love.”

She essays to speak again, but checks herself and turns her head aside that he may not read, see the bitter pain which suddenly fills, dims her eyes. Then, turning, makes a last effort.

“ You will remain away? ”

“ Indefinitely.”

For a short time longer they talk upon various matters, though Mrs. Demaris has not a very clear idea of what the subjects are, until arising from the table with forced gayety she cries:

“ Come, the sun is melting the butter and turning the cream sour; we’ll go into the drawing-room, it’s cool there, and I’ll sing to you. Come.”

As they pass Erlynde, Nero, who is crouched at his master’s feet (the dog, for some strange reason, has always evinced a hatred for Mrs. Demaris),

grows ominously, furtively catches a fold of her dress and holds it an instant, unobserved, between his yellow fangs.

And now Erlynde is left alone, he who through the foregoing exchange of brilliant raillery, compliments and conversation, remained silent, oblivious to it all, seemingly absorbed in his voluminous correspondence. Amongst so much happiness he alone was wretched, mingled feelings of anger, resentment and jealousy struggling within his breast.

“Great God!” he groaned, in silent anguish. “What an insane fool I am!”

And now—now the solitude he craved is his. The windows of the breakfast room are open to the lawn, through which the sweet morning air sweeps, rustling his papers from his hand and lightly touching his forehead. From the many feathered throats hid amid leafy branches comes the joyous song of gladness. But alas! the wind’s soft kiss, caroling of birds and beauty of nature are powerless to soothe this stricken heart.

Time passes; he is still there, his head resting on his hand. Gladsome laughter greets him. Merry voices call him from within. White hands beckon him from without. He heeds them not. Old Nero arises and lays his black muzzle upon his master’s knee, gazing wistfully, with mute, loving sympathy, into the down-bent eyes.

A woman’s voice rings out strong, high, pure.

Lalage Demaris is singing the Mermaid's song from
"Oberon," and when that ceases,

"When, in thy dreaming, Moons like these shall shine again,
And daylight beaming, Prove thy dreams are vain,"

sings Dacre.

Yet still he does not stir. And so they—the man
and dog, and that something else which the Fates
are surely procreating—remain alone and undis-
turbed.

XVII

"The shrug, the hum or ha, these petty brands
That calumny doth use—O, I am out—
That mercy does, for calumny will sear
Virtue itself: these shrugs, these hums and ha's."
—*Winter's Tale*.

"You look seedy, old chap; in fact, completely bowled over. What's the cause? Nothing wrong eh? I'm afraid that fiend *ennui* has you in his clutches." Then, catching the other's eyes resting upon the tall, swaying figure sauntering with unconscious grace about the bed of tiger lilies, a great sheaf of tiger lilies in her arms, a tiger lily in her hair, "Ah! That's the star you sail by, is it?"

And by that exclamation, Erlynde knows Emoclew has possession of his secret and denial would now be worse than useless.

"Her face is like a lily; her hair an amber veil. She's the most beautiful woman I've ever met!" in defiant self-defense.

"I don't quite agree with you," coolly. "In regard to beauty, Mrs. Arbuthnot is a vast deal more to my liking. Can't deny she's got a goodish head and figure; too animalish for me, though. In her taste and splendor she's truly barbaresque."

“I believe you’d resist Venus herself. She’s a goddess,” enthusiastically, “gloriously divine. See! she seems to catch the sunlight as she moves.”

“If you’re so hard hit, why the blazes don’t you go in and win?” intently studying the other’s face from between the half-closed lids of his keen, dark eyes. “The field’s open, isn’t it?”

At this blunt suggestion a feeling of dizziness assails him, joy gone mad riots in his heart. A sudden light gleams within his eyes. A brightness illumines his face. Then his countenance assumes the agonized, despairing expression a soul in purgatory might wear who, having been permitted one glimpse of heaven is shut from its sight as quickly as it came.

“Don’t mock me,” he groans. “You might as well speak of mating a bird-of-Paradise with a sea-gull. Besides,” bitterly, “what chance have I against you and Julian?”

“Julian be dashed! As for me,” with a short laugh, “consider me out of the running altogether; never aspired to the honor; not worth while. Faint heart ne’er won fair lady, and you possess that which has more magic than all else besides (in a woman’s eyes). Gold, my dear Guy, reigns supreme.”

“You find it ‘not worth while,’” repeats Erlynde, ignoring the latter part of his friend’s disclaimer, “while I—I’d gladly give my soul for her possession—aye, and think it well lost.”

“Do nothing rash,” sneeringly. “Don’t barter

your soul for any woman living; they aren't worth it, and she least of all."

Emoclew hesitates, fearing words too plainly expressed might sever a friendship which he prizes; for Erlynde is regarding him in dumb wonder, looking the inquiry he dare not ask. Then recklessly continues:

"What's the use in beating about the bush? In plain words, she's a Sappho, who——"

"A Sappho, perhaps," quietly answers Erlynde. "The traditional Sappho was, I believe, small, dark, insignificant. No Phæon could resist this one—unsullied, unattainable. A man's honor would be safe in her pure hands."

"Don't be too sure on that score," sneeringly.

Erlynde stands regarding Emoclew in blank astonishment; then, in a sort of frenzy, cries, "Hold! How dare you assail her? Another word, and by Heaven! I'll smite the infernal lie upon your lips!"

"Chut! thrusting aside the menacing hands. "I believe you're as mad as a March hare over the infernal woman."

"Upon what," asks Erlynde, sufficiently recovering his composure to speak with anything like his usual quietude, "upon what slanderous gossip do you base your allegations?"

"None," drily; "yet do you think she pays old Demaris the compliment of remaining in virtuous widowhood? He whose memory, if report speaks

true, can only be a source of disgust and loathing to her? No, sensuality rests too plainly on those full, red lips of hers. This Sappho has found her Phæon, a counterpart of that other Phæon whom Aphrodite transformed from an humble ferryman into a demi-god, an Apollo with the added glamour of the paint brush about him; but unlike the Libian poetess, this is not a deathless passion, for she has already wearied of her love and would willingly bestow her light favors elsewhere."

"Even so," pausing, as a slight sound on the other side of the shrubbery distracts his attention for an instant, "even so," sneeringly, "taking everything you say for granted, I'd marry her like a shot if she'd have me."

"I'm sorry for you, Guy; 'pon my word I am. It's hard lines," taking Erlynde's hand and holding it with womanly gentleness. "When this confounded love trance seizes one, it's horrible."

"You think me a fool; but am I a man of stone? And by God! I'm mad, Emoclew—mad with love for her."

"Yes, I see that," drily, "head over heels in love."

"Yes, desperately, irrevocably," groans Erlynde.

"It's providential that I'm here to look after you. Better leave England for awhile, till this madness blows over," speaking tenderly, as if soothing a rebellious child. "Come with me to Italy. Little

Nestora will cheer you up; then later we'll go cub hunting, eh?" coaxingly.

"What good would that do?" moodily.

"Bring you to your senses, if nothing else," curtly answers Emoclew.

"I cannot," sadly replies Erlynde. Andromeda chained to the rock is no more helpless than I. Fate has transfixed me firmly here, and from here, where she is, I cannot move. It is heaven to be near her, to hear her speak."

"Then," anxiously, "what will you do?"

"Don't know," shortly; "grin and bear it, I suppose."

"Well, remain here, then; but listen, pay heed to this and remember, Guy: Don't allow the skirts of your Wisdom to get caught between the ponderous doors of Passion and Obstinacy."

* * * * *

A worthy daughter of the Pharaohs she stands, whose feet were wont to tread panther skins and Nile-rushes, and within whose sultry eyes lurk shadows, secrets of the East's hidden past; secrets of countless arts long dead; of strife, intrigues, confidences exchanged—betrayed; all, all slumbering amid the inscrutable depths of her languorous, dark eyes, as she leans, with both strong hands glistening with gems, heavily upon the frail dressing-table littered with costly baubles so requisite to a luxury-loving woman's needs.

One could imagine her reclining amongst soft cushions, floating upon the Cydnus, surrounded by ebon-skinned attendants eagerly alert to obey the slightest disdainful glance of their imperious mistress whose beauty—that strange, maddening beauty—had captured Caesar, enslaved Antony, and yet whose charms were powerless to conquer Octavius.

One could imagine all this and more, as she leans, contemplating her reflected loveliness from off which the loose gown has slipped, revealing the matchless arms, neck—with its haughty, small head—and shoulders gleaming whiter, smoother than Italian marble—a delightful contrast to the golden hair and tiger lily therein. And now, after this long survey, the anguish on that face is terrible. The discarded Eurydice, brooding over her wrongs, and, perchance, mentally picturing Bernice's younger charms, or, perhaps, an Egyptian woman who loved the detestable Ptolemy Alexander, might, when listening to this craven when fighting for his worthless life in the public gymnasium, have worn such a look. As a shuddering breath arises, every nerve tingles with shame; its pink flush spreading from face to neck, as now, for the first time, she fully realizes the true depth of her own degradation.

In an abandonment of despair the woman sinks upon the floor, hiding her scorching face between both hands; yet no sigh nor tear escapes her whose

sufferings are too intense to find relief by such means. This grief is far beyond that.

Lalage Demaris has received a mortal wound; and by the hand she loves best on earth. Yet there is no anger against him whose interest in his friend's behalf rendered his words, in her unintentionally listening ears, so cruelly brutal. No anger against the vain, shallow mother and pompous domineering father who, in her youth, had sold her. No anger against him whose gold had bought—whose coarse hand had brushed the fresh, maiden bloom from her shrinking chastity.

No—no resentment against any of these. But a wild, furious anger against *one*; and arising, she lifts from the floor and replaces the fallen garment about her, slowly turning to earnestly regard a face—a fair, handsome, bonhomie face—surmounted by crisp, light hair, in a frame opposite, whose mouth seems to the woe-stricken woman's distorted imagination twisted with devilish derision at her humiliation. As she looks, a slight smile, difficult to define, parts her lips; her breast and shoulders heave spasmodically. Lifting from the table a dainty, ornamental dagger, she mechanically toys with its jeweled handle an instant, then flings, sends it with even, deadly aim through the canvas, pinning the smiling lips firmly to the wall. Then, tossing both arms high above her head, laughs, shrill, discordantly—laughs till the room rings and the various

guests, scattered throughout the spacious rooms of Castlewalls, smile in unison, wondering at her mirth, laughs, till its echoes reach the servants' ears, who enviously comment upon the gayety of their betters.

“What jolly times they do be ’aving,” sighs Judy, the tired scullery maid, snuffing the candle with red, work-begrimed fingers. Then, disconsolately resuming the brushing of her scant, ashy locks before the mirror whose cracked surface rudely reflects her ugly, freckled face, “wot jolly times they do be ’aving. ’Ow I wisht I was one hov ’em bloomin’ quality folk, who ’ave hall the ’appiness and nothink to worrit about.”

XVIII

“You say, when ‘I rove, I know nothing of love;’
’Tis true I am given to range;
If I rightly remember, I’ve loved a good number,
Yet there’s pleasure, at least, in a change.”

“Out upon you!” thunders Mr. Maggs, who has again come to loggerheads with Kate, Mrs. Demaris’ maid. “Out upon you, for a worthless, crack-brained Jezebel, gadding around with that lick-spittle forever dangling at your heels.”

“He isn’t a lick-spittle,” indignantly retorts the girl, who is finding her path strewn thickly with thorns of domestic strife. “He isn’t a lick-spittle, I’ll let you know, and I’ll stick to him through thick and thin.”

“Silence, you baggage!” bellows Maggs.

“Tehee!” titters Judy, the scullery wench, who, having been unable to make any impression on handsome Paolo’s heart, now basely seizes the opportunity for revenge. “Tehee! Hi sawr ’im a-kissing hov ’er down by the west gate last night, ’e——”

“It’s a lie!” cries poor Kate, flaring red.

“Hit ain’t,” doggedly. “Hi sawr ’im with my hown two blessed heyes, a-kissing ’er an’ a’-olding hov ’er ’and, an’ a-squeezing hov ’er waist. Hit ’orri-

fied me, hit did, hindeed." And at this point of recollection the speaker lifts the corner of her grimy apron and commences to blubber. Then, after wiping her eyes and casting a vindictive glance toward pretty Kate, continues:

"Hand, whenever she sees 'im a-coming, she marches haround has bold has brass, an' commences a-singing an' a-'umming, ' 'Ere the Conquering 'Ero Comes,' just has hif 'e was the Hemperor hov Chiner hor King Hedward 'imself."

A groan from a score of throats succeeds this speech. Judy has the whip hand, which fact she knows and fully intends to make use of.

"Well, well," mournfully ejaculates Mrs. Burton, jingling her keys nervously, "there'll be something to pay soon, and no mistake. Them's *my* sentiments."

"Hand mine too, hexac'ly," says the scullion, tragically brandishing a scrubbing brush, "has sure has heggs is heggs."

"And mine—and mine," cry almost the entire household staff of flunkeyism, who seem to be in a complete state of revolt against Paolo, whom they persistently regard as an interloper.

"Bah," retorts the persecuted maid, "you are like a lot of frogs, always croaking."

"Hoity-toity," snaps the housekeeper, sharply, "you should learn to treat us with proper respect, Miss."

“You’re none too quick with respect to others,” truthfully answers the girl, verging on tears.

“Respect,” angrily roars the blustering old butler, “respect for you, you jade? We——”

“Stow that,” orders a threatening voice somewhere in the rear, and for a moment pandemonium reigns at this unexpected interruption, interference, by one of the grooms, an interference inspired by a generous desire to champion the absent Paolo and the hapless girl pitted against so many.

Who knows? Perhaps there is a trace of noble blood, inherited from long-past, long-forgotten ancestors, in this humble stable-man’s veins—ancestors who, clad in knightly armor, fought valiantly for love and country, whose swords were ever readily unsheathed to redress a wrong or gallantly assist Beauty in distress. Devil-may-care fellows, who died with laugh or song upon their brave, careless lips; and now, doubtless, that one drop of gentle blood, which naught can ever quench, which sparkles as a radiant diamond set in a dung-hill, instantly awakening, asserts itself, and, coursing like molten lava through this man’s hitherto sluggish veins, compels hereditary chivalry, as he repeats:

“Stow that! d’ you ’ear?” Then, in a calmer tone. “Wot’s yer hall a’-ollering an’ a’-owling habout, Hi’d like to know; ’anged hif Hi wouldn’t.”

“Hit’s hall along hof that hinferral Hitalian,” replies the scullery maid.

“Wot hov ’im? ’E’s a fust-rate sort hov chap has fur has Hi can see.”

“Then, Jem Feathers, you’re a thundering block-head,” sneers a tall footman.

“An’ you be a passel hov blooming blowpipes,” coolly says the groom, whose correct appellation of aristocratic “Featherstonhaugh” has dwindled into the plebeian abbreviation of “Feathers.” “Yes, ’e ’s a fust-rate sort hov chap, has fur has Hi can see, hand hif ’e likes the lasses a bit too well wot’s the ’arm; many’s a better an’ wiser cove ’as done the same.”

This philosophic boomerang has the effect of silencing them, but only momentarily.

“His master carries a bottle of brimstone around in his pocket,” says another envious footman in awed tones.

“Yes,” eagerly echoes another, “and didn’t he burn the letters off Mrs. Arbuthnot’s forehead with it?”

“’E ’s a saucerer,” says Judy, “that’s wot ’e his—a saucerer.”

“A saucerer! Bah, you ijits!” scoffs Feathers. “That’s nothink but magnertism——”

“Well,” interpolates Judy, “yer can *call* hit maggotism, hor yer can call hit hipertism; but Hi calls hit Hold Nickism. Hi fully believes ’e ’as dealings with the Hold ’Un.”

“Pooh, wot do you know habout hit?” scornfully

jeers Feathers, industriously whittling a stick with a bulky clasp-knife. "Hi fully believes 'as you be the hinstigator hov this 'ole trouble. Wot *do* yer know, anyway?"

"Hi hain't a-going," angrily expostulates the scullion, with arms akimbo, "Hi hain't a-going to cremate myself by saying 'arf Hi knows hor suspects, but——"

"Whot's the hodds, wot yer knows hor suspects," turning to the others. "Why don't yer behave yerselves like 'uman hindividuals, hinstead hov listening to this 'ere lunertick's jabber——"

"Hi hain't a lunertick. Didn't yer——" appealing to Kate, "didn't yer say yerself has 'ow yer mistress frightened yer t'other night 'arf hout o' yer wits by laughing like a wild 'un? an' w'en the door was busted hopen they found 'er a-lying flat hon 'er back, cold an' stiff an' whiter nor death, han' shakin' like a hasphaltum leaf, han' 'as looked pale an' 'oller-eyed hever since. An' there was a turrible murderous-lookin' knife a-sticking into Mr. Dagher's pitcher hon the wall; an'," triumphantly, "an' hit's hall hon haccount hov them cussed Hindians has his casting hov their dierbolickal hinfluence an' mistick spells hover this 'ole 'ouse. Hi says it now, han'——"

"Hi'm thinking," says Feathers laconically, "Hi'm thinking that yer jealerous——"

"Jealerous?"

“ Yes, yer jealerous hov Paoly. Yer wants ’im fur a sweetart, an’ cause yer can’t ’ave ’im——”

“ Hit’s er lie!” cries the girl shrilly, “ hit’s ha hinfernamous lie. Hi’ve guarded hagainst ’im from the fust.”

“ Oh, yer ’ave, ’ave yer?” sneeringly.

“ Yes, Hi ’ave. Hi’m prepared. Hold Muther Sorrell, the gypsy, gave me some plasters to guard hagainst such hevils, an’ Hi’ve got ’em hon my hel-bows an’ hon my ’eels. Hi says hit now, an’ Hi’ve said hit from the fust——ah!——”

With a shrill scream the speaker suddenly breaks off, as she catches sight of a pair of laughing, dark eyes regarding her from the doorway.

“ What’s up?” says the owner, courteously raising his cap before entering, and looking remarkably handsome in a natty suit of velveteen. “ What’s up, *Carina?*” blithely addressing Kate, as they all draw back at his approach. “ ’Pon my word, they look like a lot of sheep frightened by a wicked wolf.”

“ Yes, we be,” mutters the scullery lass, sullenly, “ afeared hov a wolf hin sheep’s clothes.”

“ Eh?” bowing mockingly before Judy. “ Eh, sweetlips? What’s the row, Feathers?” turning to the only friendly face amongst that sea of scowling countenances. “ What are the duffers driving at?”

“ Hit’s nothink. They—they be a bit hexercited,” lamely, in a loyal attempt to screen his mutinous associates. “ A bit hexercited, that’s hall.”

“Humph!” answers Paolo, aggravatingly twirling his whip. “Humph!”

“Humph!” repeats Kate, who, now that her lover is near, regains courage.

And then the silence remains unbroken, save by the sharp, hissing switch of the whip, until simultaneously, after a muttering tumult of incoherent words, two powerful footmen spring suddenly forward, firmly pinioning the Italian’s arms. A crowd, with wildly-gesticulating hands, surround him, who stands helpless, pale and cool in their midst, whilst a pair of hands with brawny fingers encircle his slender throat, when——

“Good Lord, men, are you mad?”

They fall back and slink away like whipped hounds, for Erlynde, with Emoclew by his side, is regarding them in amazed disapproval.

“What do you mean?” asks the master of Castlewalls, “by allowing this rumpus?”

And while the butler stammers awkwardly, Paolo shakes himself with a careless, free laugh, and, replacing the fallen cap jauntily upon his head, leaves his assailants stupid, dumfounded at their master’s unlooked-for appearance.

“Feathers,” says Mr. Erlynde, who, having noted the stable-man’s futile efforts to stem the recent riot, now regards the faithful fellow with new and kindly interest, “Feathers, I wish to see you in my study at ten tomorrow morning,” and taking the aston-

ished hostler's hand, shakes it in a warm, friendly manner.

Thus is merit occasionally rewarded, for by the clock which registers ten on the morrow, sees Feathers promoted to head groom of Castlewalls.

And let us devoutly hope that Feathers' ascension will not cease there, but continue, step by step, till finally he reaches the pinnacle from whence he originally sprang; which will surely come to pass, for even now a be-wigged judge and assistant colleagues are interestedly glancing, pondering over some curious, important-looking papers, yellow and musty with age from their long detention in the slow, tedious Court of Chancery, and which mysterious documents will eventually restore him to former honor and prestige.

XIX

“Our life is twofold: Sleep hath its own world,
A boundary between the things misnamed
Death and existence: Sleep hath its own world,
And a wide realm of wild reality.”

“Yes,” soliloquizes Patrick Invorarity, flecking a small, green caterpillar from off his ear with a pink-tipped daisy which Bobs has just slipped between his fingers. “Yes, those wonderful castles which we spend the best days of our youth in erecting, when completed, merely awaiting occupancy—then, presto! they cave in, tumble about our ears, the ruins blinding, choking us with their dust——”

This philosophy is cut short by Trixie, “Julian, don’t you think you’d better give that seat to Guy?” Mrs. Fairfax pauses an instant from the act of slicing a huge loaf of bread, to administer this rebuke to her brother.

Trixie, attired in a blue muslin gown the exact shade of her eyes, and with the hem of its skirt pinned up tightly about her plump, shapely hips, thus showing the snowy, lace-beruffled petticoat from underneath which glints the tiny, high-heeled shoes, and—Mistress Trixie knows what she’s about—a suggestion, just a wee suggestion, of trim,

dainty ankles to be tantalizing, and with sleeves rolled up to her dimpled elbows, the pink glow of exertion on her peach-like cheeks, her golden hair twisted awry, in which a fallen oak leaf nestles, is looking ravishingly lovely; indeed, a veritable Queen Mab—that is, if Queen Mab's pretty brows were puckered into an unbecoming frown.

The truth of the whole matter is this: Everything seems to be at cross purposes, and Trixie's calculations likely to miscarry. Her cherished plans are at variance—sixes and sevens, so to speak. Truly, affairs are progressing badly; for instead of Guy, here is that stupid Julian monopolizing Mrs. Demaris' whole attention. It is really too discouraging! while, to make matters doubly worse, Emoclew-Houssein Rao—or whatever his tiresome name may be—is forever nagging at Guy to go gallivanting over the world again, just when she—Trixie—is most anxious for him to remain home where, now that the visitors are shortly leaving, affairs could be arranged so charmingly. But, the Fates have stuck their digits into this matrimonial pie, and Trixie fumes inwardly and is near—very, very near—what she never was in her life before, cross with Julian for being such an idiot and not seeing one inch before his handsome nose.

“Julian!”

No response.

“I honestly believe he's growing deaf as well as

stupid," mutters Trixie. "Julian!" sharply. "Don't you hear me? I think you'd better give that seat to Guy, it's—" lamely, "it's *so* comfortable."

"No, it ain't," answers Dacre ungrammatically, "it's got a beastly hump in the middle," wriggling about on the log. "Imagine I'm riding a camel. I've been begging Mrs. Demaris for the last half hour to move over to the beech-tree yonder, but," tranquilly, "she won't."

"Did you ever hear such a donkey?" says Dacre's sister, *sotto voce* to Trevor, who seems to be acting as a sort of aide-de-camp. "I vow, I'm tempted to cuff his ears. I verily believe he's doing it purposely to aggravate me."

"Doing what?" asks Trevor, innocently.

"Oh, nothing," laughing in some confusion. "Only—only I imagine Guy looks tired."

"And so he does," agrees Mr. Trevor, "looks completely knocked over."

"Eh?" anxiously, "Do you really think so?"

Here is another evil to contend against; they seem to be springing-up as thick as mushrooms. If Guy dies wifeless and childless—perish the thought!—the whole of his wealth (Trixie shivers) reverts to a distant branch of the family. Such a dire catastrophe is truly appalling. But how to avert the issue, with Julian pulling one way and Guy the other? In the face of such a calamity, Trixie asks herself, was

there ever a poor woman so beset or put about as she?

“Pooh,” sneers Mrs. Lighton-Stryker, in reply to some whispered comment by Jane Carew regarding Peggie. “Pooh, she’s always making love to somebody’s husband, and if Edward wants to encourage her, I’m sure I don’t object.”

“They’ve known each other since infancy,” answers Miss Brabazon hotly, with a withering glance toward the two women. “No one could possibly make harm out of such friendship.”

“Oh, no, of course not,” with that customary little snicker always so hateful to Kath’s ears. “Oh, dear, no; none whatever, eh, Jane?”

Mrs. Lighton-Stryker is in a most villainous temper this afternoon, and makes Peggie (who looks like a Naiad in her simple white gown and pale green ribbons) the butt of her spleen.

The secret of the lady’s ire can be traced to various causes: Firstly, the gown which she fully intended wearing, not being completed, she was therefore at the last moment compelled to don another, the delicate hue of which she well knows—but alas! too late for remedy—has, under the clear, penetrating sky, turned her complexion—faulty at the best of times—horribly blotchy and sallow, thus making her appear ridiculous amongst the others present.

We can rail at the vanities of dress as much as we please, but to know one’s self well and tastefully at-

tired is the pinnacle of womanly satisfaction; it being usually a powerful motor to confidence, reliance and self-esteem. Ill-clad persons of either sex are invariably at a grave disadvantage amid their fellows, and what is more galling to the evenly-balanced human heart than such knowledge?

For which sorry plight Mrs. Stryker blames her hapless maid, who basely persuaded her into the folly of wearing the "horrid rag," the term by which she designates the offending garment to Mrs. Carew's sympathetic ears—thus making a complete guy of herself; and mentally settles to send the huzzy packing at the very earliest opportune moment.

Secondly, the house party is now drawing to a close, and Mrs. Stryker is looking ahead with chagrin at the unwelcome thought of departure. Castlewalls is an ideal retreat, and Trixie an admirable hostess, who, being luckily retarded by her own little affair, which will not permit her to place any too prudish restrictions upon another's conduct, allows her guests full sway.

Thus, naturally, these events have tended to irritate Priscilla, with the present result—a temper completely out of gear and as hopelessly past repair as that wonderful "Humpty-Dumpty" of our childhood's story book (which required more than the united skill of all the King's horses and men to put together again) as she sits, savagely digging deep holes in the moss with the ivory end of her parasol

and watching a chance to say disagreeable "*things*," as Kath calls them.

Yet, Mrs. Lighton-Stryker should not be judged too harshly. Faugh, my dears! we are all tied to the apron-strings of Vanity—call it Folly, if you will, but then Folly and Wisdom are twins whom we fondly dandle on either knee. However, she is a discordant character, true enough, but her mind and disposition, from youth up, have been soured by repeated disappointment and discontent, until vindictiveness has become a malady. She, like many another of her sex, has unwittingly cherished a pet in her bosom—an obnoxious pet called Animosity—which her arms have fondled, her bosom nourished, until now, full grown, vigorous, it has eventually gotten the upper hand, become her master, ruling her with a rod of iron, and like an ungrateful child, threatens to destroy her.

The afternoon is delightful, and Trixie's visitors are enjoying a picnic beneath the trees in the furthest depths of the thickly-timbered forest. The scene, in the extreme, is entrancingly romantic. The sylvan glade which harmonizes so splendidly with the surroundings might be a scene from "Robin Hood," even including Mr. Hyde, standing with legs wide apart, munching half a pie, and the brilliant peacock, stepping expectantly about him, craning its long neck in fond but vain hopes of catching a few falling crumbs.

At a little distance Miss Padelford and Teddy Stryker, on their knees, are earnestly striving to kindle a fire. Peggie, with Mr. Stryker's straw hat, is fanning the sticks briskly, bravely unmindful of the smoke which audaciously kisses her sweet face; but the stubborn green fagots refuse to burn.

"I'm thirsty," says Mr. Hyde, who, having demolished the pie, advances, wiping his mouth. "Isn't the tea ready yet?" A negative shake of Peggie's head. "What a nuisance," in an injured tone, and stooping to select a choice apricot from amongst a lot upon the ground. "Can't you hurry it, Stryker? I'm about famished."

"Hear the infernal ass," growls poor Teddy, looking up from the smouldering logs with streaming, smoke-filled eyes. "He's a perfect gourmand, and I swear thinks of nothing else in the world but feeding."

"Yes," laughs Peggie, "Vivian has a perpetual appetite; that's an open secret. I overheard Judy declaring to Feathers yesterday that 'hall Mr. 'Ide thought habout wos 'is stumick.'"

"Hi, Trevor!" shouts Teddy, "Make yourself useful; fill the kettle, will you?"

"Can't," roars Trevor, brandishing a murderous-looking knife aloft. "Got to help Trixie cut the bread."

"Grosvenor," yells Teddy, "fill the tea-kettle."

"Zounds!" howls Grosvenor, who, squatted on

the grass with arms held stiffly at right angles, each thumb pointing skyward, around which is twisted a skein of gaily-colored silk which Mrs. Arrowes is deftly winding into a smooth round ball—"Don't you see I'm busy?"

Teddy groans at this second rebuff, knowing further appeals for help will be futile, for Hume, seated with his back propped against a tree trunk, is reading aloud to Mrs. Carew; Desmond, Mrs. Nettleton and several others are seated around a huge stump playing bridge whist with six-penny points, while Chatwin is patiently instructing Bobs in the art of daisy-chain manufacture, and Barnaby, blissfully unconscious, is asleep, his head pillowed on (luckily for him Bobs' attention is engrossed with the daisy-chain) Bobs' doll.

"Invorarity," bellows Teddy, wellnigh desperate, "Invorarity, will *you* fill the tea-kettle?"

"No," placidly drawls Mr. Invorarity. "Faith, I've got other fish to fry."

"Humph, the devil you have," grumbles Teddy. "I wish you were frying with 'em!"

At which heartless assertion Miss Padelford breaks into a fresh, merry peal of laughter, causing the timid deer, herded deep amid the fern, to sniff the air and erect their delicate ears inquisitively as to who is trespassing in their domain, and gnomes and pixies of the woods to echo, re-echo—with

goblin voices, arousing Mrs. Lighton-Stryker from a siesta to remark, lifting her fretful brows :

“ How vulgarly boisterous that Padelford girl is, to be sure.” And then, “ Can’t you hurry, Edward? I’m faint for a cup of tea. It seems to take ages to get that fire started; I could have built twenty while you are dawdling over one.”

“ Better come and try, then,” growls Teddy, fiercely breaking a stick across his knee. “ You’d not find it such a jolly easy job, I’m thinking.”

“ I’ll fill the kettle,” cries Miss Brabazon, seizing the slighted utensil and fleeing with the speed of an antelope toward the spring which sparkles cool and clear beneath one of the big oaks near by.

“ Thanks, Kath! You’re a trump,” says Teddy gratefully as she returns with the dripping vessel.

“ She’s a great beauty, and no mistake,” says Mrs. Carew, whose attention is caught by Lalage’s low, soft laugh.

“ Oh, humbug!” flouts Priscilla, instantly aware to whom the other alludes. “ Entirely too gigantic; I never could abide grenadiers and May poles.”

“ Good gracious, yes!” laughs Joan; “ she is big, but charming in a way, and——”

“ Damn!”

Sudden, sharp as a pistol shot comes this forcible epithet, while they all, spellbound, are still gazing at each other’s lips suspiciously, and toward Joan

Nettleton in particular, who is ten shillings to the bad.

“What?” ejaculates Mrs. Lighton-Stryker, scenting a quarry and sitting bolt upright in an instant to fix her spouse with a glassy stare. “Eh, was that you, Edward? If so, such an expression, to say the least, is——”

“Damn!”

It is repeated, and if possible more vehemently than before.

“Oh, Bobs, for shame!” protests Trixie, whose maternal knowledge is the first to pounce upon the guilty one.

For Bobs it is, sure enough, who, happening to glance up from the daisy-chain and spying Barnaby and—his pillow, rips out the oath like a veteran, and, arising with fury in her eyes, strides (as well as a chubby pair of legs *can* stride) majestically toward the object of her wrath, and unceremoniously jerks the doll from beneath his head, which rolls (his head) with a dull thud upon the sward.

“See!” shrilly, see what you has did?”

“Eh?” ejaculates the culprit, rubbing his head and gazing about in bewilderment, “Eh, what’s up, Bobs?”

“You. You has rumpled Maudie’s best frock, and is the worstest mans,” severely, “the worstest mans I never did saw.”

After Bobs and Barnaby have adjusted their dif-

faculties to the former's satisfaction, to wit: with the latter's solemn oath and promise of a boxful of doll clothes from London on the morrow, peace is once more restored.

"Do you not occasionally experience a most agonizing dream and the relief upon awakening be a keen sense of joy and thankfulness to realize that it is only a dream?" asks Mr. Invorarity, who is clearly in a most philosophic mood, and speaking in his loud, clear voice as he lies stretched full length at Mrs. Arbuthnot's feet.

"Yes," answers Julian Dacre, "and many's the time, quite the reverse. I dreamed once I'd fallen heir to a fat fortune."

"Now," continues Invorarity, scorning to heed this flippant interruption and tilting his hat further over his eyes to screen them from the sun sifting through the branches overhead, "now I often imagine those dreams are, in truth, at the time actual realities, a test by the Almighty, don't you know, just to gauge our strength, and when, upon finding that He has chastened us heavier, or, in short, a bit too severely—more than our transgressions justify—mercifully relents and His powerful will changes that erstwhile punishment from fact into a mere hideous nightmare."

"How about the pleasant dreams, eh?" interrogates Mr. Dacre. "Are they too sweet to last?"

"The same principle precisely sways them both,"

replies Invorarity, manfully stifling a tremendous yawn which sends his hat slipping far backward. "Yes, the same principle, precisely. Complete, perfect happiness, save in rare cases," casting a languishing glance into Rosamond's soft, dark eyes, "complete, perfect happiness on this globe is an unknown element."

"I believe Invorarity's right," says Erlynde, who, with Emoclew, stands somewhat aloof from the various picturesque groups. "Perfect happiness on this earth is an unknown element."

"Tut!" replies Emoclew, dryly. "Only in such cases when we cry for the moon."

Emoclew speaks scoffingly, but his eyes have a troubled look as he notes the sad havoc Love has wrought in his friend's countenance. During the past ten days he has watched with pain and anger the alarming change creeping into and endangering Erlynde's life. At first he really gave it no serious attention, merely concluding that in a short interval it would pass, and if not wholly forgotten become at most nothing but a memory, a phantom. But now his deep affection and interest for Erlynde's welfare renders the elder man decidedly uneasy, and with a muttered curse he glances wrathfully toward the unconscious author of the trouble, who, despite the unnatural pallor of her cheeks and feverish brilliancy of her eyes, is looking unearthly beautiful as she smilingly converses low with Dacre who bends de-

votedly over her, his lips touching the handle of the tiny jeweled dagger thrust through the massive coils of her tawny hair.

It is with untold anguish Emoclew has watched Erlynde making so palpable an effort to conceal his secret and heroically strive to appear his ordinary self, which to Emoclew's eyes is such a woeful farce, filling his soul with trepidation and forebodings of coming evil, as he groans:

"He'll never get over it, never. Another fellow would, but he is different. Curse her for a senseless, heartless minx! No, Guy, poor beggar, will carry this grief to the end of his days. If he'd only leave the confounded country there might be some hope for him, but not here.

"You look downright ill, Guy," anxiously scrutinizing Erlynde's wan, emaciated face and almost transparent hands. "Are you so absorbed in your love-sick occupation?"

"Go on; rally as much as you like," moodily.

"Guy, dear friend, I meant no offense; but this is folly, this cursed infatuation, and your life may be the forfeit."

"Nay," quietly, "not cursed; fatal, if you will, but not cursed, for its fatal influence is over me, its deadly poison in my heart, and yet I would not escape the fearful joy of it if I could. Oh, Emoclew," imploringly, "help me—I am going mad—mad! I have been on the rack so long, my bewildered brain

is only fit for Bedlam—I dare not tell you what madness possesses me since this wild delirium has entered my soul.”

“ You can’t sleep, eh? ” eyeing him critically.

“ No, ” briefly, “ not one hour out of the twenty-four. ”

“ Poor chap! ” sympathetically, regarding him in deep concern. “ I’ll give you a drop of something that’ll set you right in a trice. Come with me. ”

And docile as a tired child, Erlynde follows at his friend’s bidding.

“ Here, ” says Emoclew, holding aside the heavy mass of foliage from the almost imperceptible aperture of the vine-covered arbor. “ Come in here. ”

Within, a few nesting birds, affrighted at their entrance, flutter giddily about, then skim through the swaying tendrils of the narrow doorway. At one corner a white brier-rose has thrust itself through from the outside, filling the place with a delicate fragrance and waves them a cheery greeting.

“ Swallow a couple of mouthfuls. ” Emoclew holds a flask to Erlynde’s lips—that selfsame flask which has done duty in Italy—“ Down with it, man; it won’t hurt you, but do you a world of good. No—no—not too much. Now—— ” brushing a few dead leaves from off a rustic bench—“ sit down and rest; you need it. ”

The queer-tasting, albeit delicious, liquid sends a most peculiar feeling scurrying over Erlynde’s whole

body; a feeling rightfully, if vulgarly described as "groggy" rendering for a time all things and impressions hazy, coupled with an unexplainable foreign sensation of contentment altogether pleasant. Emoclew's voice sounds leagues distant; but this divine feeling of lassitude only lasts the space of a few seconds, then his truant faculties return with tenfold power, but happily unaccompanied by that oppression which has borne him down for so many days—a mild exhilaration has usurped its place.

"Ah, you look better," says Emoclew, gratified. "I can see the change already."

"Yes," nodding, "that flask of yours must be filled with the virtues of Pandora's box, the waters of Lethe, or something equally as meritorious, for it has performed a miracle; I feel like a fighting cock," and Erlynde closes his eyes, to open them again with a start.

"Eh, what were you saying? I beg your pardon, Emoclew, but I believe I was asleep. What were you talking about?"

"My journey; I must start the day after tomorrow."

"So soon?" drowsily, though making a desperate effort to listen. "Decidedly shabby of you to make your stay so short."

"I've already overstayed the specified time," answers Emoclew, seating himself at the other end

of the bench. "Can't you pull yourself together? Take my tip, dear boy—cut it."

"Easier said than done," laconically. "Yes, I know you think me a miserable fool, and perhaps you're right, but," in a rapt voice, "God! To possess her I'd burn in hades, for nothing but death or her possession can assuage this cursed pain in my heart."

At these reckless words Emoclew starts violently, regarding the speaker curiously.

"You are hard hit, my friend. I'm shot if I can understand why you're so completely daft over the woman." Then, after a slight pause, speaks low, quietly, "Say, Guy, if it could be accomplished, this—" hesitatingly—"this thing you speak of; if, if, for instance, some unforeseen circumstances could conspire to grant your wish, preposterous as it is, and send her temporarily to your arms, would you then be willing to renounce her afterward?"

"Ha, ha!" laughing outright. "Ha, ha! A good joke, upon my word!"

"Hush," commands the other, springing to his feet, a dark frown of displeasure knitting his brows. "Do you want the whole tribe of them flocking in here?"

Then, after glancing apprehensively about, Emoclew steps stealthily to the door; but this precaution is entirely unnecessary, for Erlynde's eyes following him can see that the picnic is over and the crowd dis-

persed, the only evidence of their recent presence being the fire, which, after so stubbornly resisting Miss Padelford's and Teddy's laborious efforts, is now, owing to the slight breeze which has arisen, burning brightly with a sturdy, yellow flame; and save for the rustle of leaves, shrill chirrup of birds, and Nero (who duly shows his appreciation of the situation by thumping his tail violently on the floor, thereby causing a small whirlwind of dust to arise), or, in the distance, Dacre's voice faintly heard blithely singing

“And, daylight beaming, prove thy dreams are vain,”

all is silence.

Erlynde drums on the arm of the settee, impatiently awaiting Emoclew's pleasure; his tired brain and exhausted limbs are vastly refreshed. It is delightfully cool in this corner of the summer-house; through several gaps a few rifts of sunlight stream, causing Nero to blink lazily while the brier-rose pats his master lovingly across the mouth with its scented petals, as he yawns:

“Well, my dear Emoclew, what mighty secret have you got up your sleeve? Pray unbosom yourself.”

Emoclew, standing in a meditative attitude, lays a warning hand upon the other's arm, and bending, whispers some words into his ear.

“ You?—You—What do you mean?” stammers Erlynde.

Once more Emoclew puts his lips closely to his ear.

“ Eh! What twaddle!”

“ Twaddle?” Emoclew-Houssein Rao smiles grimly, drawing himself up to his extreme height, standing in his dignity and stern, dark beauty a tall King Saul. “ Well, call it such, if you choose; it matters not.”

“ But, in the infernal fiend’s name—what scheme have you concocted?”

Emoclew regards him gloomily, shrugging his shoulders without reply.

“ That insane nonsense is all bosh,” persists Erlynde, twisting and breaking the brier-rose from its thorny stem.

“ Again I say, have it thus, if you will; yet I swear, with your permission, to free your soul from the thrall which this Circe, this enchantress, has woven by her spells so close about you, and for whom, forsooth! you tragically rave of selling your soul. Bah!” contemptuously snapping his slim, brown fingers, “ such poppycock will do for the mimic stage only.”

“ It’s no idle boast,” avers Erlynde. “ I love her, do you hear? Do you understand? God! How I love her!”

“ And you want her?”

Erlynde nods mechanically.

“You shall have her. Yes, wholly, entirely,” speaking with the deep, tense calm of the fatalist; “but, I repeat, only temporarily. Is that satisfactory?”

“Yes,” dreamily mutters Erlynde, into whose inner consciousness has crept a vague, positive conception of the other’s wondrous powers, and with it, too, that same fearsome speechlessness which so mysteriously, forcibly assailed him that night, scarce one month previous, in Alexandria, while those same events cross, recross his mental vision with faithful accuracy.

XX

“Forth from the abyss of time which is to be,
The chaos of events, where lie half-wrought
Shapes that must undergo mortality.”

“Pff! What infernal rubbish are you talking?”

“Then,” arising to his feet in quick suppressed anger, “I will talk rubbish no longer. Is it well for you—” sternly, “Is it well for you to scoff at Nature’s science—Nature, whose evanescent laws I—” proudly tapping his breast with a slim, brown forefinger, “have fully mastered, whose dark arteries I have drained to the last drop—aye, human and animal combined?”

The other’s skepticism is fast vanishing; these strong, convincing words fraught with warm enthusiasm compel his attention. That there is a latent, hidden agency of supernatural character about the speaker, who learned beyond his fellows, from whom his ideas, theories drift wide apart, he has never doubted, the evidence in his mind being too complete for question; and that in his insatiable thirst, pursuit of knowledge, he has succeeded—aided by Alchemy—now able (as he avers) to a certain extent to control nature, is no idle boast. Yet this bold announcement which he has just so calmly

made, nay, laid claim to, is by far too fearfully startling for serious reasoning, consideration or sane contemplation.

“Hold on, old man,” reaching out a detaining hand, “if there is any virtue in your argument—absurd as it sounds—I’m willing to listen; but I still adhere to the belief that your puny power will not dare permit you to cope, interfere with the Infinite.”

“I do not aspire nor claim to meddle with the Infinite,” says Emoclew-Houssein Rao, who, instantly mollified, resumes his seat. “That is far beyond my ken. When Death seizes the body its spirit becomes unattainable, immediately soaring into that spacious region which secret location I know naught of. With Death my power ceases. I merely profess to control that which pertains to Life, and, when two spirits forsake their sleeping bodies, the limited power to disconnect that electrical current linking soul and body together, and, by turning aside the magnet which attracts each to itself, can transfer, exchange them; though only temporarily, however, for this reason: The twain will be aware of the change, and he who has been defrauded out of his handsomer body will naturally resent the difference and strive to reclaim his own. Hence, should the two subjects sleep at the same hour, that invisible cord, charged with attractive matter, will surely again unite with its natural self, for as the steel draws the magnet so does the earthly body allure its

astral mate, which neither atmospheric conditions, elementary force, nor celestial bodies, will allow to remain asunder."

"Well," questions Erlynde, doubtfully, "if you really possess this miraculous gift, why not experiment on yourself and slip into some gay young dog's carcass?"

"With myself it is not possible, and even if it were I would reject the opportunity. This strong, flawless body suits, contents me. No woman—" with his swift, cynical smile, "will ever tempt me to discard it. 'Tis the body Nestora knew and loved," raising his eyes heavenward. "It will remain so till we meet again."

"But," hazards Erlynde, "upon what foundation do you base your assertions?"

"Practically I have proven what I say."

"Impossible."

"Primarily I started on my shadowy quest with this theory paramount to guide me: If agricultural scientists have discovered a method by grafting, and transmission of pollen changes the nature of fruit or flower; and surgeons, transfusing the blood of one person into another's veins transforming his disposition, why, then, if performed locally, could not the same principle—a reversed form—apply, be accomplished in a spiritual sense to life. It is a poor rule which refuses to work both ways; so with this scrap of logic to work on, and sanguine of recompense, I

was urged to the task with the determination manifest neither to fail nor lose courage. But ah! my friend, with what tireless, unremitting study have I toiled to solve and at last contrived to gain my cherished object, one of Life's greatest secrets.

“It was at first, I confess, baffling, perplexing; but happily patience and an exhaustless faith were my firm, my chief allies, and a clew once gained, the rest was fairly amenable to materialization. Thus I prosecuted my search by which this marvelous power enabled me to peer, probe through the narrow tube of nature straight, direct to its innermost recesses of heart and pulse; which subsequent developments to this wellnigh intactable problem, and establishment of facts, I am ready to demonstrate, substantiate my statement—not by words alone, but by proof positive, which can leave no doubt of its verity. The motive has been neither mercenary nor selfish; my one desire through such endless researches, crowned finally by achievement, was impelled by the thought and hope that it would be beneficent to Science. After all, it is simply a profound, thorough understanding of the underlying channels, principles and maintenance of life; no conjurer magic assisted me; there is no mystery about it, the only wonder being that in this enlightened, progressive era, this age of improvements, inventions and discoveries, it should have remained hidden so long, proving beyond doubt that in a spiritual

sense Science is yet in its infancy. To you alone I have confided; you alone I now invite to view the test. And I will prove the veracity of my words, illustrate that which no mortal other than myself has ever witnessed. Are you willing?"

"Willing?" Erlynde starts, repeating the abrupt question, a tremor, though not of personal fear, assailing him. "Willing? Yes."

"Then," briefly, "follow me."

So saying, Emoclew advances with long, gliding step, to the door leading into the adjoining room; a noiseless twist of the knob, and it swings open. Silently he points within. Nero is placidly dozing upon the immense bearskin spread before the hearth, whilst in close proximity is Beppo, Trixie's pet Persian kitten. Emoclew jerks his thumb over his shoulder significantly toward the windows, and divining his wish Erlynde drags together the heavy outside shutters and lowering the blinds excludes the hot afternoon sun and leaves the room in almost total darkness.

Then, as a preliminary to what follows, Emoclew, after removing his high, stiff collar, vest and coat, kicking off his shoes, fills a basin with water, seats himself upon a mat of Kooshu-grass, washes his teeth, face, hands and feet, utters a few words of Hindustani as of invocation, and pours some sort of mixture into his mouth, after which he slowly arises to his feet, touching each animal lightly with the toe

of his bared foot. They stir drowsily. He now makes a dozen rapid passes across their heads, incoherent sounds issuing from his loosely-parted lips. Meanwhile the cat and dog, after several convulsive, grotesque antics, gradually stiffen out until rigid, apparently lifeless, all respiration seemingly stopped.

From his bosom Emoclew now draws a small crystal vial partly filled with an inky substance which, upon removing the cork, exhales a pungent odor, flooding the apartment with such unearthly sweet perfume that Erlynde reels.

Emoclew, kneeling, pours a trifle of the contents (which roll in tiny, quick, silvery balls) upon the brain base of the beasts, then, quickly arises, makes a few swift, twisted passes with his long arms high above them, then, stands motionless, his hands folded across his breast and eyes fixed steadily upon the unconscious brutes, muttering incantations. A fleck of light shot with myriads of brilliant irradant colors floats, oscillating, slowly about his head. And this same opalescent, milky vapor spreads, enveloping him in its maze as he chants softly, musically, calling on Brahma, Vishnu, Sooryu, the Gayutru, the Spiritual Guide, Nine Planets, the Ten Guardian Deities of the Earth, the Five Airs of his body, and lastly, his favorite goddess, Doorga. Then after bowing thrice supplicatingly toward the East, stands listening in an attitude of rapt mental absorption until suddenly dropping upon hands and knees, he

alternately blows great draughts of breath into each animal's face, repeating the name of Doorga at intervals. Lifting the eyelids of either, he gazes long, penetratingly into the film-glazed optics till finally a slight shiver of resuscitation shakes them and the creatures commence to pant, breathing softly.

With long, caressing touch Emoclew strokes the shaggy-coated dog, calling him "Beppo—Beppo!" The huge beast, responding with a feline mew, turns lazily on its side. He next pats the kitten's head roughly as it slowly arises to its feet with a sharp, quick bark.

Nero, fully awakened by the cat's loud barking, springs nimbly on all fours, and purring loudly passes back and forth, pressing his sides closely against the alchemist's knees.

"Behold," says Emoclew-Houssein Rao, turning to Erlynde, who, with wonder-dilated eyes has regarded him throughout the performance—"Behold the test. Are you satisfied?"

"Am I awake?" gasps the other. "Is this a dream, or—man!—man, what damnable sorcery do you possess?"

Disregarding Erlynde's horrified exclamation, Emoclew produces another bottle. This time the fluid is colorless, unmistakably chloroform, and spilling a trifle upon his handkerchief applies it to the animals' nostrils, who, sinking to the floor, again lie in deathlike inanimation. Once more Emoclew,

accompanied with a few fantastic gestures, utters the same queer gibberish. The fog-like blur, so weird, mystic, beautiful, disappears, and while Beppo and Nero sleep peacefully, presumably to awaken later their own individual selves, Erlynde questions is it an hallucination of his morbid senses, or has his brain counterfeited visions with reality? Emoclew speaks.

“Thus far have I penetrated, the task not terminating, simply impeded by the lack of material for further construction. Yes,” sadly, “thus far only have I penetrated, for which I take no credit nor vain-glory, fully aware of the fact that another more worthy could have stumbled accidentally—as I have done—upon the enigmatical subject. But assuredly nature, in its series of continuous changes, will eventually (despite the unretardable course of conflicting events) produce a master mind whose hand will take up, resume the task where I have laid it down, and bring it to its full, perfect development, with what result can only be a source of speculative conjecture. As I said before, science is yet in its infancy. Its possibilities are tremendous. Prehistorically our progenitors surely ruled the heavenly spheres—their peculiar nature, all logical reasoning, indicates it. Up to the present our researches, investigations, discoveries have been confined to the earth only, our interest, save in ludicrous schemes, never stretching beyond it and grossly ignoring, neglecting the planetary realm which offers vast scope, unexplored fields

and meadows to work on. But the ground must first be tilled, plowed and sowed by that seed called—"dropping the word into his listener's ear, who starts aghast, then, with a smothered, wild ejaculation smartly smites his hands together. Then with face aglow, awed wonder, reverential admiration struggling for supremacy, seizes and wrings Emoclew's hands.

"The symbol! sure enough. Jove! You are—by the gods! you *are* a genius—wizard and genius rolled in one; for you have revealed the hidden mystery of Life with a vengeance—a mystery so glaringly apparent that, as you said, the only wonder is how it, in open view, should have remained hidden so long. But who except yourself, Emoclew, could have ever guessed, imagined it?"

"Yes," answers Emoclew, quietly, resuming his wearing apparel and fastidiously adjusting his white silk necktie, "yes, this world should be utilized as a workshop merely. Steam and electricity are well so far as they go, but they require a third, a more important companion, to acquire success. The only instance approaching my object is Marconi—the young Italian's modest efforts, recent attempts to step outside the earth's environments; but he cannot proceed far without the aid of that third indispensable factor."

* * * * *

Because you are handicapped in a couple of in-

stances you have allowed, nay, encouraged your mind to become embittered. Take my advice, accept the gifts the gods provide.”

“ True, but the grist of my life is not worth the soil it thrives in. Broken in health and spirits, why should I strive to conquer such obstacles? No, my conscience will never permit it.”

“ Let the weeds of indifference overgrow and cover the path to your conscience.”

“ See here, Emoclew! I am a miserable ass—freely admitted—and loathe myself for much more than paltry words can express; yet to accept—even consider—your proposition, I would be a scoundrel of the deepest dye.”

“ Uncomplimentary to me,” answers the other meditatively, emitting the smoke in a thin, spiral thread from his lips. “ Well, stay and read your Aristotle; but, my friend, you will find him a sorry comforter and in a week hence implore me to return.”

“ Never!” The younger man grows very pale. “ For that purpose, never.”

“ You cannot thwart Destiny nor escape Fate.”

“ No,” answers Erlynde, “ I will not, must not, dare not, think of it. ’Twould be shameful, abominable.”

“ Humph! I’ll stake a couple of ponies on it that you’ll change your mind, regret your decision, and urge my return.”

“ Never ! ”

“ Then, farewell ; but remember, ‘ beyond the Alps lies Italy.’ ” And after a moment of immobility and silence, Emoclew sorrowfully turns away, Erlynde duly laying his friend’s oracular prediction to inborn fatalistic imagination.

And in this condition of mind they part.

XXI

"I'll give no blemish to her honor, none."

—*Winter's Tale.*

"A woman's honor, forsooth! Very few of them are proof against flattery."

"You mistake there," sneers Julian Dacre, directing a furtive glance toward the quiet figure at the window. "A surer way, my dear boy, is gold."

"Well," answers Desmond, "either one, flattery or lucre, wins 'em."

"You talk like a couple of libertines," quoth Patrick Invorarity, gravely rebuking this callous speech. "I have—thank heaven!—a far better opinion of women than that."

"So have I," says Grosvenor. "Dacre and Desmond are a pair of hardened old roués, who should be cut and drummed out of every woman's society in Christendom."

"There are women—and women, I admit," replies Julian Dacre, chalking his billiard cue, "but take them as a whole they are a sorry lot."

"Gospel truth, there," interposes Trevor. "I'm not discrediting their virtue, but they have faults, are capricious, full of whims, petty jealousies—" evi-

dently remembering the tilt he has had with Trixie Fairfax a few hours previous regarding his too ardent attentions to Mrs. Arrowes, in which he was considerably worsted—"and then there's their beastly uncertain tempers."

"Well, you know the old rhyme—

"A woman, a dog and a walnut tree,
The more you beat them the better they be"—

laughs Dacre, taking careful aim and scoring a loser off the red.

"A brutal maxim," expostulates Invorarity, playing a rattling break of sixteen.

"Regarding the dog and tree, perhaps," retorts Dacre, "but in the woman's case—"

"Gad! Yes," growls Roger Barnaby. "Deliver me from women. One moment they lead a fellow on with no end of significant allurements till they get him badly hipped; then coolly send him adrift, making him a laughing stock."

"That's their nature," chides Mr. Invorarity, as the red kisses the white and knocks them both in baulk. "That's their nature; they like to tantalize us; can't help it—born in them."

"I'll take jolly good care none of them shall snare me," boasts Chatwin.

"Your time will come, as it does to us all sooner or later, see if it doesn't," declares Hume.

"Serve us right, too, for being such asses," says Grosvenor, mixing himself a brandy and soda which

he polishes off neatly. "Especially him," indicating Dacre by a nod. "He always manages to attract them."

"Yes, and by what charms I can't imagine," plaintively sighs Chatwin.

"Dashed if I know," answers Hume.

"Nor I," echoes another, all bent upon tormenting Dacre, as on a former occasion.

"It's that spice of nonchalant insolence about him," jeers Barnaby.

"Oh, go to the devil," laughs Dacre, laying down his cue to take a long pull at the seltzer.

"Better leave him alone," whispers Grosvenor audibly. "He's got a nasty temper."

"I think the real secret is his profession," drawls Hume. "An artist—so deucedly romantic, you know."

"Here! Bolt that chaff; I want to finish the game," cries Dacre, bringing his cue down sharply on the speaker's pate. "'Pon my soul, you're like a lot of cackling hens."

"Bah! Woman may go hang, for me," yawns Desmond, who has drank a little more brandy than is good for him.

"And for me, too," agrees Hume, totally disregarding Dacre's protest. "Women are too damned egotistical."

"Jove, yes!" says Chatwin. "A year or so ago I was horribly smitten with a sweet, modest little

flower of a thing, and on the point of proposing, when, bless my soul! at the opera one night, if that girl didn't actually accompany Sanderson through the whole libretto of "Manon." It was beastly annoying—spoiled my whole evening. I've often wondered since," with a short, grim laugh, "if she guessed why my ardent courtship ended so abruptly."

"Rest assured," answers Desmond, "her vanity would never permit her to grasp the correct solution. I know of just such another case; the moment a piano or other musical instrument is touched, she forces that abominable voice of hers upon one."

"Self-egotism dominates society belle down to country rustic," muses Desmond aloud. "Before you have been in their company fifteen minutes they will mysteriously hint at some latent gift, pet hobby, ambition or mission, and insist upon thrusting their mawkish confidences upon one. Lady Maude, for instance, will solemnly declare her forte is Literature; Arabella yearns toward Art; Phyllis, throwing herself into impossible, tragic attitudes, suggests her aspirations to rival Bernhardt, whilst another will inanely prate of her musical endowments, each one confident, in her own silly heart, of the power to outshine her famous predecessors. Bah! Such a mixture of geniuses, and, oddly enough, not one ounce of genuine talent amongst the lot."

"It isn't genius; it's a fad," retorts Dacre.

“Queer,” rejoins Hume, lighting a cigarette and reflectively casting the match grateward, “passing queer that none of them are blessed with the sensible gift pertaining to domestic duties.”

“Oh, no!” exclaims Desmond. “Their sphere lies far beyond such trifling, yet natural, instincts, and——”

“Women—bless them!” interjects Mr. Invorarity, “are God’s own angels, sent here to give us a foretaste of heaven, if——”

“Or hell,” scoffs Dacre, making, by a vicious side-stroke, a cannon, a loser and a red double. “History’s full of such angels, from Cleopatra down——”

“Nay,” replies Invorarity, “I’m not speaking of Cleopatra nor other famous courtesans of the world—the numerous saintly women overshadow them. Nor need we seek so far back as beautiful Queen Esther who heroically released her enslaved people, nor the gentle Rebecca, nor loving Ruth, to find them. Modern instances are too plentiful. Louisa of Prussia, that fair queen who freely, for her distressed country’s cause, cast aside all personal feelings to humbly supplicate, plead with the arrogant Napoleon; or brave Lady Sayle, in the power of the treacherous Akbar Khan, cheering her fellow-hostages in Afghanistan, or our own dear Florence Nightingale, or America’s noblest daughter, Mrs. Ballington Booth, or——” as the clear, sweet voice

of Rosamond Arbuthnot echoes from the drawing-room, "others directly within our midst furnish a fair illustration."

An affirmative murmur follows this significant speech, all knowing to whom it is Invorarity refers; and some of them present recall an incident of the morning and see her again, with tears of sympathy in her soft brown eyes, carefully bandaging Feathers' injured hand.

"Yes," continues Mr. Invorarity, running five long fingers through his mop of bright red hair, "yes, there are countless others—others foremost amongst which is one for whom our hearts through all remembrance yearn, one whose hand has the magic charm to sooth and cheer; so gentle, so tender is its touch that through all life's prodigal journey we crave the chaste caress of its loving fingers. Ah, men, men, sons of those women, who, I repeat, are God's own angels, sent here to guide and give us a foretaste of heaven."

The solitary man, his back to the speaker's, takes no part in and is heedless to the foregoing conversation; standing with eyes riveted upon the outside, he is intuitively seeking to solve the reason why a kinder fate has not been his, a question as vain to probe as the obscurity beyond. He can no longer patiently endure his present wretched existence, which seems heavier the past few days than ever before. This heart anguish is constantly with him;

awakening in a rapturous start from sleep he imagines her white arms about his neck, her fragrant kisses on his lips. So powerfully realistic are these mighty visions, he can plainly inhale that curious Indian perfume which she invariably uses, its essence setting his pulses whirling. In his waking sense, too, he is tormented, his jealousy fanned by the sight of her and Dacre together, and yet, "Oh, fool!" he mentally groans. When the opportunity presented he rejected it, and now—now it is too late. Yet stay! Is it too late? His brain throbs as if permeated with the delightful fumes of hasheesh, for it answers no, and that proposition which he indignantly refused so short a while since, by degrees assumes form and plausibility.

"O, fool! To have hesitated, toyed like a witless child with his happiness so long. Emoclew was right to remonstrate against his idiotic obstinacy; and now, to find the trysting place of the Fates and cajole, threaten, bribe them to his bidding is what he will do. He will send for Emoclew on the morrow." Thus his pent-up passion bursts the bulwarks of all reason. To feel her thrill within his tightening clasp, submissive, responsive to his love—to reach the haven of her lips—yea! his senses reel with ecstasy. This decision reached, he is overwhelmed with a delicious dread akin to pain which always accompanies anticipated pleasures.

These are Guy Erlynde's thoughts as he stands

with loosely-clasped hands behind him. The thread of his meditation forbids him joining in the jolly gibes and good-natured raillery around him, whilst velvet-footed Nox, ebon-hued daughter of Chaos, descending, softly spreads her calm presence and sable mantle over all outside creation. So he remains alone, gazing out upon the night. There is no moon, yet he can plainly distinguish the immense hedge of pink and white geraniums and a great tree of crimson roses clearly outlined against the black arena of night, and in the far distance the tall row of elms looming sullenly athwart the gloom. The pitchy background transforms the window, for the nonce, into a huge mirror, disclosing the warm interior of the brilliantly-illuminated room in which he stands, faithfully portraying the shades and wreathing witch-like shadows darting about the frescoed wall, glinting around the massive, gilt-framed pictures, and, caressing the shining billiard balls, scampering across the green-covered table around which the laughing group of coatless men are gathered.

“It is Invorarity and Desmond’s last night at Castlewalls, both departing early in the morning, the former returning Londonward and to resume the practice of law in Lincoln’s-Inn-Fields, the latter his diplomatic duties abroad.

Whistling beneath his breath, Erlynde, now his resolution made, is happy, and observes in amused

interest the majority of them making frequent demands upon the decanter, smiling slightly as he sees Vivian Hyde fill to the brim and toss off a glass of Chambertin, then with one bite scallop a biscuit into a half-moon.

“May we come in?” asks Mrs. Lighton-Stryker, popping her head around the door; and straightway suiting the action to the word, followed by Trixie and several others, enters.

“Ugh!” she protests, elevating her hands and nose. “Ugh! the smell of brandy is positively sickening. Edward,” authoritatively, “for goodness’ sake, open one of the windows.”

In a serene and placid mood Erlynde regards with a possessive glance Lalage’s queenly form sharply defined against the glass. No longer his gaze is mournful, covetous, but all-conquering, complacently sure of her soon possession he watches every detail. The soft, dull-gold draperies, the white fingers loosely clasping a huge fan of purple feathers, blossoms of the same hue nestling in her irradiant hair, as like a gorgeous tropical flower she seems to droop beneath the weight of her own drowsy loveliness.

“Oh, my love beautiful,” he mutters, a frenzy of admiration and delight sweeping over him and his heart thickening at the joys so soon to follow. “My love—mine—mine!”

“Julian,” remarks Trixie, moving to her brother’s

side, "we want a game between you and Mrs. Demaris."

"No, no!" cries Lalage quickly.

"Yes, yes!" mimics Trixie playfully. Then as Mrs. Demaris still demurs, "Do, dear," coaxingly. "I insist; we want to make a little wager on the result."

"Then," answers the other, making a wry face and shrugging her superb shoulders, "I'll have to submit."

"Musha, do," says Mr. Invorarity, gleefully, handing her a billiard cue, and I'll lay a pony on you, Mrs. Demaris, darlint."

"That settles it," laughs Lalage. "Mr. Invorarity, will you kindly take charge of my fan, and watch Mr. Barnaby carefully that he plays no tricks with the score?"

"Devil a trick. I'll see to it that you have fair play. Here, Kath, me jewel," cries Invorarity, "hold the score card."

They now proceed to string for leads, which Lalage wins, and after giving a miss, Dacre ditto, she runs on with the utmost sangfroid in breaks of 74, 56 and 30, including a dip. Mrs. Demaris is an expert billiardist, playing freely from the shoulder with a strong, graceful sweep of the arm, brilliantly illustrating the scientific beauty of the game.

Starting now at 302, she makes 17, and attaining the spot-stroke position maintains it, scoring 50 red

hazards consecutively, frequently and adroitly leaving the balls so situated that her opponent cannot score, until, under the fusillade of taunts from the assembled crowd, he partly redeems himself by a splendid cannon off the top cushion. His luck is only temporary, however, for on, on, on, Lalage goes, making by her magnificent playing the 50th spot-stroke when Kath calls the score.

Erlynde continues to survey the woman's lithe, graceful body, swaying, bending with the requirements and action of the game, manipulating her cue so skillfully, and dreamily glad of his late resolution bitterly condemns his former senseless scruples which have made him a pariah from happiness so long. Then his eyes rove, resting with the calm, critical glance of a purchaser, upon the handsome face and herculean form of his half-brother, who, endeavoring to make a difficult hazard close against a side cushion, is leaning far across the table.

Then, as Erlynde looks, he involuntarily recoils, a sudden horrified exclamation escaping his lips, for there, directly above Dacre's heart the dark red blood is slowly oozing, spreading in a circling blotch, upon which ghastly sight Erlynde gazes as one fascinated, a million beads of perspiration bursting forth upon his clammy forehead. The next moment, the illusion dispelling, he could laugh aloud. It is naught. The strange hallucination is caused by one of the roses outside vividly shadowing the splendor

of its crimson petals against the white bosom of the player's shirt. But the shock is keen, and only when his hand comes in contact with Nero's head, does Erlynde's composure return. Nevertheless, his long-tortured nerves must surely be on the verge of collapse, for he still shudders, trembling violently, and turns his head fearfully to better reassure himself.

"Come here, Guy, mio," calls Kath Brabazon.

"Zounds! What a face," exclaims Dacre, who has just finished the game a sorry loser.

"Yes," cries Miss Brabazon in mock alarm, "I'm shaking in my shoes."

"Have you been fraternizing with ghosts, Mr. Erlynde?" asks Lalage Demaris, flushed and radiant after the game. "Your face is like a sheet."

"Mr. Erlynde is fey. I'm sure it would take something more serious than a poor, harmless ghost to make him look like that," says Mrs. Stryker with a grin. "A heart affair, more likely."

"Faith," laughs Invorarity, "he is a regular Knight of the Doleful Countenance order, sure enough."

"Pray cheer up, Guy," entreats Desmond, "or you'll make us all weep."

"Humph!" sneers Roger Barnaby, "that would not be a very difficult matter, considering the fact that the sixth glass always makes *you* blubber."

"A libel," replies Mr. Desmond, serenely light-

ing a cigarette. "A cruel, malicious libel. You have the choice of weapons."

These sallies pass unheeded by Erlynde, who has returned to the window, standing motionless with a look of gladness upon his face. Strange things have taken place within his breast tonight, resulting in a restful lull after the furious storm of fierce mind-contentions which have so cruelly racked his soul for so many days. There is now no contrition in his heart—only deep, unutterable rest; from the fearful suffering has come peace, for now that incongruous sense of desolation has disappeared, and he, so wrapped in the mantle of idolatrous passion, lounges upon the threshold of Bliss, lingering there to contemplate the interior of Love's domain, loath to cross and claim those brief delights, with the end in sight so soon, alas! to follow.

XXII

“Is this my skill? my craft? to set at last
Hope, power, and life upon a single cast?
Oh, Fate!—accuse thy folly, not thy fate!
She may redeem thee still, nor yet too late.”

The Fates, inexorable rulers of our destiny, keeping us in touch condition alternating between rain and sunshine, tears and laughter, offering us the choicest sweets of life one moment, bowing servile to our bidding; thus, having them under subjection, we triumphantly brandish our cudgel. But no sooner are we comfortably ensconced within Fortune's lap, when lo! the Fates (who are tricky fellows and only gingerbread friends at best) slyly creep from out the wellnigh forgotten depths of yesterday, and with cruel, ruthless fingers snuff, extinguish the flame burning so brightly in Ambition's candle, throwing to the winds, setting at defiance our authorities and securely riveting the clanking chains of bondage once more upon our indignant limbs, and our new line of Hopes, which we had built with such ecstasy, built alas! with frail, pretty moonbeams of the Present, are turned to tombs of Mockery.

Perchance their act is not prompted by personal

aversion, but merely a playful desire on their part to make prankish psychological experiments to ascertain how many trials we can bear.

A word of advice to those who have supped with Grief and been buffeted by those impish instruments of some mighty, unseen, controlling power—that continual, moving, efficacious strength at whose command they ever are.

Don't sit dejected by Failure's dusty roadside, bewailing your lot, rending your garments and heaping ashes of repentance, useless remorse, upon your aching head for the passerby to jeer, revile your suffering. So ho! A toast! Come! Fill a bumper and merrily drink to those Fates who plague us, who wantonly scatter our dearest wishes, and mercilessly flicker out the light of our cherished aspirations. Escape from their tyranny; pay them back in their own coin, and they, shrinking to half their inflated size, won't appear nearly so formidable.

Put on a smiling front; entertain cheerful reflections; cultivate self-confidence and an earnest consciousness to accomplish something true and worthy. The task may be long, arduous. What of that? You can do it. Don't get discouraged; resist to the utmost every worrying thought. Don't allow your mind to dwell on, harbor, morbid subjects; melancholic brooding, if not speedily eradicated, will lead to a premature grave, or what is worse by far, madness.

Cheer up! The existing condition of mind produces the precise condition of body. Discard superfluous misery, and above all avoid that fatal germ, Discontent. Inoculate yourself with the priceless lymph of Contentment; it is the only positive cure against such ills. Remember that the sun shines as warmly bright on the roof of the poor man's humble cot as upon the stately palace walls.

View the world as your kingdom—not a treadmill, and that the dear Creator in His divine wisdom has slighted none of His creatures and bestowed a gift upon us all which we should struggle to discover. It may be but a modest little gift—we can't all be geniuses, else the world would be too evenly balanced—search for that gift; its cultivation will fill a void.

“Know thyself.” What greater words than these? Nature is a fearful, wondrous study to us mortals, who are, in so many instances, entire strangers to our inner selves, comprehending not to what heights we can aspire, ascend, or to what depths of moral degradation sink. Ah, how beautiful a thing it is to understand our own character. And, truly, manly courage is the noblest of God's many noble gifts. In moments of extreme danger courage instinctively asserts or entirely forsakes us, deciding without doubt our inherent valor or cowardice.

Unquestionably, a dauntless heart, undismayed

at mortal sufferings, may face death boldly, when, perchance, the sight of a loved one's pain or peril will cause him to flinch, rendering this erstwhile hero the most arrant, pitiable craven. While, on the other hand, another, branded with the vile stigma "coward," creeps timidly along through life until, peradventure, queer to state, when threatened by immediate, unavertible disaster, all hitherto timidity vanishes, disclosing his true strength of purpose, which swiftly maintains supremacy, winning our commendation, surprise and admiration and naturally shaming us for our late injustice.

Be brave, then. Courageously gird up your loins and go prepared for the fray and victory. The scorching south-winds can't blow forever; the whirlwind will eventually spend itself, veer, succumb to gentle, refreshing zephyrs.

Recollect this, and that there are cool, blue seas rolling in the hidden distance whose currents and tides are conspiring to bring, perchance, happy, unlooked-for changes to you, and amid, beneath those deep, majestic caverns the shells are dreamily singing songs for your welfare and white-capped waves ripple, dance gaily upon the yellow sands of Prosperity's beach, forming a marked, delightful contrast to the ugly, green, turbulent waters dashing their spray angrily over Adversity's barren rocks.

Thus the sun once more peeps cheerily out from between the sullen clouds of Despair and the sky of

your Destiny is again clear, serene. Now, when you have attained your desires, mastered those tremendous obstacles, don't fall a momentary prey to Delusion and thus become a vagrant from peace of mind. We must not mount the dazzling steps of Fancy too high, those glittering stairs of enchantment which lead us up—up—where? else, becoming dizzy, we first lose our head, then our footing, consequently tumble, and the higher our flight the more painful be our fall. Therefore use Hope as an anchor; not a Kite.

Let today and the Past suffice; encourage not those innumerable, illogical fancies which ever and anon intrude, puzzle your brain; those vague, shadowy reflections, spectres of some by-gone, worn-out age. Waste not your time, energy upon them; let them with their pathos go, and your conscience will never accuse you of infidelity.

But, ah, those others! Those sweet, calm images, so different, which ever hover in the soft, cool twilight gently about us—let not them depart. Those sacred phantoms of the past are our safeguard, our mainstay; they are our own. Circumstances can cheat us of today, tomorrow; but the chaotic, visionary future cannot compensate us for the sweet, sacred Past which has slipped, alas! from our then too careless hold; yet of the Past—the dear, dear Past, with its trials, its bitter sorrows, joys and

crucifical sufferings around which a halo of brilliancy clings—naught can rob us.

A hymn of praise and thankfulness to Him who knoweth and doeth all things well, who sends us blessings in disguise—trials given us to work some good and wonderful purpose which we, in our stubborn, pitiable ignorance, unable to discern, foolishly rebel against.

A hymn of praise and thankfulness to Him, then, who has mercifully given us the blessed consolation of the Past, left its portals open wide, through which we can look, enter, wander at will through its ripening fields of waving yellow corn flecked thickly with blue, star-like blossoms, and its verdant meadows filled with quantities of various bright-hued flowers coyly offering us their fragrance as they bend, tossing their brilliant heads with every straying zephyr.

To the right a river gleams; to the left, a suggestion of a valley with sloping hills arrayed on either side, peaceful, fair, calm. Wherever the eye rests is greenery, broad, vast space, stretching to the rim of the horizon glowing splendidly red in the distance.

At our feet, half hidden by reeds, a tiny brooklet sings and ripples, speeding swiftly on its way. From amid the tall grasses near by a lark springs, its joyous song filling the air with a flood of richest melody above which sounds the sonorous clang of Sabbath bells; a peal of gladsome laughter; a young lad's

whistle, a faithful dog's well-known bark or a voice—a voice falling on our ears whose entrancing cadences thrill us strangely, so sweet it is—sweeter than distant notes of a Stradivarius when a master hand lightly draws the bow across its quivering strings.

Aye! We can see and hear all this, which is visible to us alone. The fields, meadows, flowers—all these; and Love, that innocent, enduring, tender young Love, whose place within the Sanctuary of our heart none other can ever reach.

Thus fortified with reminiscences of the Past, let us accept Nature's coming favors thankfully, not merely as our due. The Fates are hard task-masters, 'tis true. It would require the wisdom of the Seven Sages to contend against them; but, courage! and you will find life bearable, nay, enjoyable, and can afford to pity the blasé cynic of the world who has become ennuied from a surfeit of its unwholesome sweets.

XXIII

“Meanwhile—long anxious—weary—still—the same
Roll’d day and night—his soul could terror tame—
This fearful interval of doubt and dread,
When every hour might doom him worse than dead.”

“Eh?” He draws a sharp, deep breath between his teeth. So it has come at last. A thousand times during the day he has pictured, momentarily expected it, imagined it in many different ways, imagined it by a peremptory tap on the shoulder, a word hissed in his ear, an angry hand on his arm, or a timid touch on the sleeve, bracing himself accordingly; and now—now the eventful hour is come, when he must answer that question in those eyes which have followed him continually since morning. He cannot speak nor move; stupidly transfixed, speechless as the actor who for the first time has been assigned a speaking part of one single line, which, speedily memorized, he rehearses, declaims with tragic stride and valiant gesture to the mirror, “letter perfect” till he proudly, thrillingly impatient awaits his cue, when, alas! the prompter’s call plunges him into the throes of stage-fright, a horror overcomes him and those half-dozen words, written indelibly on his brain, so glibly prepared on his

tongue a moment previous, where are they? taken flight; left him an automaton foolishly staring across the yellow footlights at the misty sea of uplifted faces turned expectantly toward him, as he—in confusion wildly praying that the trap door beneath his feet would open and precipitate him to the regions below—stutters, mouths idiotically.

So it is with this tall man. The long-dreaded meeting, so carefully prepared for, is here. His accuser confronts him, and he, at the crucial moment, is in wordless confusion. A stinging flash of heat, succeeded by a shower of frozen rain, sweeps over him, numbing, deadening his every living faculty, rendering his brain powerless to form ideas, his tongue refusing to frame words.

The silence of the night is about them; a leaden, oppressive stillness only relieved by the occasional click of billiard balls or the twang of Paolo's guitar somewhere in the distance. Time is passing, and those interrogative eyes are still flaming into his, expecting, demanding an answer.

"Eh?" he repeats, shifting uneasily and stepping from the slab of light streaming from the window. "What?" stammering awkwardly—"what do you infer?"

As he utters these words his cheeks burn hotly with shame and he averts his head, a keen sense of anguish and his own dishonor bitter upon him.

"You know to what I allude," grimly, "you

and—” turning to Emoclew-Houssein Rao, standing with half-shut eyes and smiling lips directly in the lightened space, “this cursed grinning fakir here, who, with his devilish arts has transformed me into this—this monstrosity and——”

“The master of Castlewalls,” quickly interjects Emoclew.

“Yes,” cries the tall figure on the rim of light. “Yes, it is yours—yours; and the money—all—just think of it,” eagerly, “every farthing. God knows it has been nothing but a curse and burden to——”

He stops suddenly. An icy finger seems laid across his lips and he shivers, remembering how near he came to betraying himself.

“You tell a likely story, truly,” sneers Emoclew, turning to the other. “Just take it in there,” pointing toward the billiard-room, “and see if you can find any one of them fool enough to believe you.”

At these words the hunchback, with a gesture of despair, groans, “Are you in league with Satan? or, by God, man! what diabolical secret of some miracle-working witches’ philtre do you possess?”

“You rave,” answers Emoclew, shrugging his shoulders contemptuously. “You rave.”

“You lie!” shouts the other. “If——”

“Hush! pray be reasonable,” implores the tall man, glancing fearfully toward the window. “Pray be reasonable. Remember, my dear Guy——”

His further speech is stopped, for at the name the

other, uttering a fierce exclamation, springs upon him, assailing him with oaths and blows. A terrible struggle follows; the hunchback is suddenly endowed with the furious strength of a thousand fiends, as swaying, wheeling, they cross, recross the silvery patch, then pass into the blackness on either side beyond. Back and forth they stumble. Against the gray, massive stone walls their gigantic, distorted shadows fall like a pair of savage beasts at mortal combat. Again they whirl across the illumined space, again the darkness envelops them and nothing is distinguishable except the white, set faces of the combatants, one livid with rage, the other with fear.

Down, down the hedge of pink and white geraniums are trodden; down goes the bush of crimson roses trampled beneath their heavy feet. It is an unequal battle, for, as the tempest bends, twists the frail sapling, so the tall man sways as a reed in those strong, fierce hands of his assailant to whom anger and despair have given superhuman power. The tall man's strength is ebbing fast; an odd, lethargic spell is on him, leaden weights seem to hang on every limb. Mechanically he moves his head from side to side, endeavoring to avoid those crooked, talon-like fingers seeking so determinedly to clutch his throat, ah!—at last pressing tight—tighter—they encircle his neck, pressing with evil, sinister purpose, until his head is bursting. The commingled sounds of

many waters and forest winds are roaring in his ears. A blur of blood swims, dances fitfully before his bulging eyes. From between his aching lips his tongue rolls, black; horrible, clammy drops ooze from his brow and roll down his swollen cheeks. He strives to move, to speak, but his efforts are as a child's in the grasp of him whose terrible eyes, filled with hellish fire, are glaring into his own, and in which there is no mercy. Senses and life are departing when strong hands pull that vise-like clasp away and——

“A pretty close shave,” says Paolo, whose deft fingers are rapidly loosening the gasping man's neck-gear. “Just happened along in the nick of time; another minute and you'd have been a goner. Here, lean your full weight on me, Mr. Dacre, and you'll be all right in a jiffy.”

“Fool!” says Emoclew sternly to the struggling demon in his grasp. “Fool, do you want the gallows? Would you murder him?”

“Aye!” madly striving as a hound vainly tugs at his iron chain for freedom, “Aye, and you,” frantically, “you cursed Hindu devil!”

“Pooh! You damned maniac, behave yourself, or——”

Some one throws open a window of the billiard room, and several figures lean out, amongst them a beautiful, white-faced woman with starry eyes.

“What?” says Mrs. Lighton-Stryker, standing

electrified at the unexpected sight of the three men (for Paolo, standing behind, still supporting the tall man, is entirely hidden from view), "What—" in comical surprise, "what's up? What are you three doing; wasting your sweetness on the desert air, eh?"

"A pretty fix you've got us in," grumbles Emoclew, releasing his captive, who now stands quietly enough, with scowling brows, by his side. "If this cock and bull story leaks out, they'll swear you are stark staring mad."

"You arch-fiend," is the sullen retort, "it needs the devil himself to cope with you."

"What's up?" still persists the inquisitive dame. "Why are you prowling around with your hats off like a lot of—of—" catching sight of Paolo's guitar which has fallen at the tall man's feet,— "of troubadours, as I live; ah!" with happy inspiration, "you were going to serenade us. Now," shaking a forefinger playfully, "don't dare deny it; the evidence is quite sufficient."

"Oh, good gracious! How very romantic," exclaims Trixie Fairfax, wedging her yellow head between the others. "I'm sorry your fell designs were discovered; it will spoil half the charm."

"Discovered and frustrated," replies Emoclew.

"No, no!" Miss Brabazon leans far over the case-ment, "not that; surely not frustrated," in mock

sentiment. "It would be cruel, shameful to disappoint us."

This appeal, however, meets with no response. The trio stand like statues in the narrow rift of light, while Nero, walking from one to the other, seems sorely puzzled and distressed.

"Ho, Sir Knight, pick up your lute," commands Kath, "and sing to your ladye-love ere you depart for Palestine's land. It was Palestine, or some such place, wasn't it, where all those handsome belted knights and Crusader fellows in shining armor went, mounted on fiery, gaily-caparisoned steeds, eh?"

"A song," cries Trixie. "A song!"

"Bid them sing, Mrs. Demaris," says Kath coaxingly. "A heart of stone couldn't refuse you. Select your song, and I'm sure they won't say nay. Come, what shall it be?"

"Juanita," briefly answers Lalage, directing her eyes straight toward the tall man.

"Ah!" The hunchback utters a half-articulate cry, excitedly turning to Emoclew. "You say I'm mad; a proof, then," exultingly. "His voice," nodding toward the tall man standing motionless, both hands thrust within his pockets, "his voice for melody was ever like a raven's croak. I've noticed his efforts at disguise, all day. Let him sing and I will believe you and know myself mad indeed. "What," scoffingly, as the other vouchsafes no answer, "you'll surely grant so slight a favor?"

“ Let him get his wind first,” mutters Emoclew.

“ A song—a song!” still cry the merry group at the window.

“ You shall have it,” jeers the hunchback. “ Come!” calling loudly; “ Julian—Julian Dacre will sing.”

The tall man, standing on the rim of outer darkness (to him the edge of heaven or hell), casts a quick, helpless glance upon the speaker. Then his eyes rest once more upon that beautiful face framed in leaves and shadows. Against the wall, in rich clusters, the jessamine clings, knocking its scented blossoms against her cheek, and a soft tendril of glowing hair, lifted by the evening breeze, sweeps lightly across her forehead.

Seemingly quite oblivious to the others, his adoring eyes drink in the sight. The glamour of her imperial beauty is strong upon him. His heart beats wildly; he whispers her name beneath his breath—every nerve aches with pain.

And now, when he remembers how brief that happiness must be, a death-like chill falls on him, for it seems that life must surely end, and——

“ We are waiting for you, Julian.”

At the unexpected sound of her voice he starts violently, shivering from head to foot and manages to stammer some confused, apologetic reply.

“ Bah!” cries Kath Brabazon, “ The night air,

forsooth! Don't accept any such flimsy excuse, Mrs. Demaris."

He shrinks from those lustrous eyes which are regarding him in surprise and evident displeasure.

Unobserved Emoclew makes Paolo a swift, mysterious sign. The tall man moves back a step, leaving his face in deeper shadow, and instantly a magnificent, rich tenor voice bursts forth, singing—

"Soft o'er the foun—tain, Ling'ring falls the southern moon;
Far o'er the moun—tain, Breaks the day—too soon"—

firm, clear, to the end of the song; then repeats the following lines—

"When, in thy dreaming, Moons like these shall shine again,
And, daylight beaming, Prove thy dreams are vain."—

at the conclusion of which, quick, sharp, a shot rings out, and the hunchback falls lifeless at the supposed singer's feet, a red blotch of blood circling, slowly spreading, flowing from his breast to mingle with the crimson roses growing near.

And at the window, the laughing jest is frozen on their lips.

* * * * *

"I said there were risks to run, dangers to encounter, but, by Brahma!" gloomily, "I never expected, reckoned on this."

"Yet is it not well—better thus?" Clasp the Hindu's hands. "You are my salvation."

The other shakes his head gloomily, and the shadows lay dark upon his brow. There is a shadowy change in Emoclew's demeanor; his manner is, as usual, kind, gentle; but the shadow remains.

XXIV

“Flowers in the valley, splendor in the beam,
Health on the gale, and freshness in the stream.
Immortal man! behold her glories shine,
And cry, exultingly, ‘They are thine!’
Gaze on, while yet thy gladdened eye may see;
A morrow comes when they are not for thee.”

“By all the powers! You?”

“Yes, I’m like the proverbial bad shilling.”

“Poor, abused shilling,” with a breezy laugh and hearty handshake. “Thrice welcome.”

“Thanks awfully, old chap,” sinking with a sigh of contentment into the comfortable chair placed for him. “I’ve been wandering through the rooms for half an hour—not a servant within sight nor ear-shot. All the place seems asleep; should have given up the search in despair if Nero hadn’t understood, taken pity on my sorry plight and guided me here.”

“It is past the noon hour, and you forget what lazy beggars the Italians are.”

“Phew! Deucedly hot. The day is a furnace; my head reels like the dickens. Didn’t meet a soul on the tramp over except a couple of monks.”

“You do look nearly frizzled,” sympathetically.
“The walk in this broiling heat has been a little too

much for you. Just wait a second," touching a small bell, "I'll offer you a glass of the finest Chambertin you ever tasted; it's been on ice since morning, and you'll be as fit as a fiddle in no time if," dubiously, "I can manage to awaken one of those sluggards."

"It will require a Hercules to do that, and my throat's as dry as parchment.

"Patience, my boy," sending another louder, more determined peal echoing through the deathlike stillness—"Ah, Marco," to the yawning attendant, "a couple of goblets, the wine, some fruit, and look sharp about it."

"And now," after the man returns with the tray of desired refreshments, "what good wind has blown you here? Come, give an account of yourself and your doings."

"Oh, I've been knocking around in Germany, Norway, Russia and different places."

"So you've come to Italy to rest, after all the gayeties of the world, eh?"

"Humph! Just got in from Naples this morning. Beastly dull; missed you awfully."

"Yes," and with another laugh the debonair young host clinks glasses with his guest, "Yes, we've had some ripping old times together, and," soberly, "it's good of you to look me up so soon. But what's the matter?" noting for the first time the other's haggard face, the crow's-feet around the

eyes and the hair about the temples so scant, gray.
"You don't look up to much; been ill?"

"Not physically."

"And Nestora?"

"That is what has brought me to Italy—Nestora," gloomily, "is ailing; they sent for me. The doctor orders her immediately to the south of France."

"Nothing serious, I trust?"

"I think, I hope not. It is merely the climate which is too debilitating for so delicate a child. The doctor assures, encourages me with the belief that with the passing years she will outgrow her present fragility and become strong, robust."

"Well, cheer up, old chap," answers the other, refilling the glasses, "and let us drink to little Nestora's health and speedy recovery."

"With all my heart," says the visitor, lifting the glass thirstily to his lips.

The young fellow resumes his seat on the window-ledge, and catching each side of the casing with both hands, elevates his somewhat effeminately-shod heels in the air, swinging far backward.

From where he sits he can see Nero, who has again returned to his nap on that part of the verandah which is visible, supported on its slender white marble pillars against which the hot sun glares dazzlingly.

Beneath, the lawn rolls smoothly green; a broken

statue, further off, a gardener's ladder leans propped against a gnarled tree; a sun-dial, a bucket of water on whose edge several pigeons are perched, dipping their bills therein or pluming themselves industriously. Then his eyes turn longingly, lingering with a dreamy intentness upon a variegated patch of color from whence a delicious, languorous odor creeps. *Her* rose garden. His heart quickens, and catching a firmer grip he leans farther out. It is deserted. What an idiot he is; much as she loves her roses, she could not venture out in this beastly heat.

Through the narrow spaces of the interlaced trees he catches fitful visions of the beach and a few picturesque fishermen sitting or stretched dozing in the impromptu shade made by their upturned boats, wet leaves twisted about their heads and swarthy brows to guard against sunstroke; while gleaming far away in the level distance is the calm, blue Mediterranean, not a ripple nor fleck of foam on its placid surface, dotted sparsely with tiny craft whose white sails hang motionless. The air is hushed; the heat intense.

But the interior of this long, low villa, so carefully screened by gaily-striped awnings, and especially here where the two men are, is almost cool, for from the marble-paved vestibule a miniature fountain plays incessantly, tossing sparkling drops upward to fall, dash, splatter the huge urns of brilliant

flowers near by and ferns and moss growing thickly at its base.

“Jove! old chap,” says Emoclew, filling his glass for the third time, “you dropped into jolly comfortable quarters. How happened your lines to fall in such pleasant places?”

“By chance; owner gone over to America to study the voting system, I understand, or something connected with politics. Got it for a year; mere song.”

“You are fortunate; the house is an Elysium, and the garden a Paradise.”

“Yes,” laughs *il signor*, still balancing himself lightly on the window-ledge, regardless of the sun streaming down in broad, yellow ribbons horizontally upon his unprotected head. “Yes,” surveying the tangled background over his shoulder, “though some of those old trees want lopping, sadly; the garden is a perfect wilderness.”

“You have no eye for the picturesque, evidently. An artist would go into rhapsodies over those ancient olive and orange trees. Tell me,” says Emoclew suddenly, “you have not been idle, not merely an uninterested spectator of Humanity’s struggle—what masterstroke have you attempted for the commonwealth of the world? You have,” eagerly, “accomplished something—what is it?”

“No; I let everything in that line rest on the knees of the gods. Briefly, I’ve done nothing.”

“Nothing?” in an awed tone of dismay, “nothing, with your literary talents and——”

“Faugh! my friend; literary talents, forsooth! Better clothe the naked with the rags consumed; build them houses with the forests destroyed for the useless manufacture of paper.”

“It appears the sugar still sticks to the wings of your Pegasus. Hold on; be careful or you’ll pitch heels over head out of that window yet, Guy——”

“Hush!” The young fellow brings himself up sharply, lifting a warning finger. “Hush! Don’t remind me of that; it’s so long ago—ages—since I’ve heard that name. Sounds odd; I’d almost forgotten, so completely is my identity sunk in the Bygone.”

“And your conscience, that troublesome conscience,” bitterly, “is at rest; laid deep beneath the daisies, I suppose.”

“Yes,” casting a furtive, fleeting glance toward the mirror opposite, “as utterly extinct as the dodo.”

“Hem!” dryly, “I see your beauty recompenses you for everything.”

Il signor laughs at this little thrust, once more gazing complacently into the glass to give a fastidious twitch to his azure-hued tie. Indeed, he seems to have a decided penchant for contemplating his pleasing reflection, seemingly prompted by an al-

most childish delight and pleasure entirely devoid of either vanity or conceit.

“Hem!” continues Emoclew-Houssein Rao, disapprovingly regarding a crimson rose upon the table, “I’ll wager you read Tennyson, too, and that you are a regular attendant at drawing-room meetings. You’ll be going in for crewel-work next.”

“Perhaps,” is the good-natured rejoinder.

“Well, you’re certainly a queer fellow to resign a vast fortune for— What the devil——?”

“Pardon!” throwing the lighted match which he has just snatched from the other’s fingers, “Pardon, old man, but that stuff in those bottles at your elbow is highly explosive; a spark near them, and pouf! we would both be blown to Kingdom Come.”

“Going in for chemistry, eh?” glancing around with swift, keen eyes, and noticing for the first time that the room is fitted up as a sort of laboratory with its glass jars, twisted tubes, etc. Then gazing ruefully at his unlit cigarette, “Well, if you want to potter with anything so dangerous you’d better wear a mask, as the Borgias did, or you may spoil that handsome face of yours. A dangerous business, my boy; better find some other hobby or fad.”

“No,” gravely, “I have no time to gallop around on hobby-horses, and a poor man can’t afford fads. It’s a scheme which has haunted my brain for years. No—oh, no!”—laughing lightly at the other’s swift

look of inquiry—"not that. It's—in short, it's a camera."

"A camera?"

"Aye, an instrument that will portray color."

"So!" heaving a ponderous sigh and filling another glass of wine; "so this is what has kept you a recluse while I erroneously imagined you still tied to a woman's apron-string, when, if I'd stopped to consider, I might have known you'd gotten over all that damned foolishness long ago. Forgive me, Guy—ah,"—noticing the other wince—"er—of course,—Julian, I have wronged you and am glad to learn you've been better employed; though," eyeing the surrounding paraphernalia narrowly, "I haven't much faith in your undertaking; it's been tried before."

"True," quietly, "everything's been tried before. I've almost perfected my purpose."

"The deuce you have?" admiringly.

"And with it I hope to retrieve my lost fortune."

"Ha!" setting down the empty glass. "Has the fabulous price which the Prince di Dernovi paid for 'Rose-Doomed'—a sum which set the tongues of two continents wagging—has that colossal sum vanished so soon, then?"

"Soon? It is six months since, and——"

"Ah, I see," answers Emoclew with a covert sneer. "I've been mistaken, then. Some luxuries,"

significantly, "come expensive, and—you still love her?"

"Love her? God, man! I——"

He stops abruptly, and Emoclew, following his eyes, drops the cigarette to the floor, for Lalage, clad in a white gown, which, unconfined by either belt or ribbon, falls in long, loose folds from neck to toe, her beautiful hair, rumped in pretty disorder about temples and nape, indicating that she has just awakened from sleep, stands on the threshold. Starting perceptibly at sight of the unexpected visitor, she hesitates an instant, then smilingly extends her hand with a few gracious words of welcome. Lifting the rose from the table, she moves slowly over to *il signor*, who, drawing her close within his arms, tenderly kisses lip and brow.

* * * * *

"You have an ideal retreat here," says Emoclew an hour later as he idly stirs his glass of iced tea surmounted by a thin slice of lemon, "an ideal retreat; an excellent substitute for Heaven or the Garden of Eden."

"Yes, either one," answers Lalage, who, like a tall, white calla lily, swings languidly back and forth in the low rocking-chair, "but we—I am growing abominably lazy. My husband has not yet succumbed to the Italian indolence; he is working like a Trojan, poor dear. When we first took this villa and he fitted up his laboratory the people around

here imagined we—" with a happy laugh, "were Nihilists and were manufacturing dynamite and bombs. Droll, wasn't it?"

"Just think how wonderful it will be, though; an instrument that will instantaneously capture nature, no bother with brushes nor nasty, vile-smelling paint to daub and smear over everything. My husband is so enthused over it he positively refused an exorbitant offer to produce a companion piece to 'Rose-Doomed,' and," proudly, "there are several art connoisseurs now clamoring for 'Phryne,' one of his earliest works. He is everlastingly experimenting on me, and is so disconsolate, claiming the lens will not do me justice nor catch the exact shade of my eyes and hair."

"That's true," answers *il signor*, "she is a veritable chameleon. I swear her hair this morning was the color of gold, her eyes gray—gray as that bird's wing," pelting the pigeon, who has ventured within the vestibule, with a bread crumb, "and, presto! this afternoon, look! her hair is red, her eyes greener than emeralds."

"You are hopelessly color-blind, I think," laughs his wife, "or what a weird, uncanny creature I must be."

"Weird, uncanny—yes. Yet beautiful withal."

"Oh, flatterer," cries she, tapping him on the shoulder with the rose. "Do you know," turning

to Emoclew, "do you know that I am a very silly woman?"

"Silly?" interrogatively, "Why?"

"Because I'm so ridiculously in love with my husband. No," willfully, as *il signor* protests, "I *won't* be still. Yes, madly, hopelessly in love. And strange, too," suddenly lapsing into a graver mood, "at one time I positively hated him; but now, somehow, he is—in fact—vastly different—that is, I mean in actions and disposition; and he's become altogether my ideal—the ideal I'd been longing, waiting for all my life."

"Oh," exclaims *il signor*, "sweet wife, spare my blushes!"

"It is queer, and may be only fancy on my part," she goes on, "but ever since that wretched Erlynde shot himself, Julian is changed—completely changed. I could almost, as that poor fellow in his madness did, imagine him another person; if so," with a low, soft laugh, oblivious to the swift, significant look which passes between the two men, "I am the beneficiary. But apropos to changing the subject, which, by the way, seems to bore you, tell me," appealing to Emoclew, "whom you met abroad?"

"Well," slowly stirring his tea, thoughtfully, "to begin with, I met Mrs. Fairfax—I humbly beg her pardon; I meant, of course, Mrs. Trevor—she and

her husband and Bobs, in Vienna; in fact it was from her I learned your present whereabouts."

"Dear Trix," pensively sighs Lalage, scattering a handful of crumbs to the pigeons who flock apprehensively about them. "And Bobs?"

"Bobs is still—Bobs. That reminds me," laughing somewhat awkwardly, "I'm commissioned by that small person to deliver a—kiss in her name, which pleasure I'll waive in favor of your husband, who, no doubt, will be delighted to present it personally."

"Then," smiles she, leaning coyly toward *il signor*, "I'll claim my due, sir, without delay."

"I," continues Emoclew, "met Mrs. Nettleton at Monte Carlo, who immediately begged a small loan."

"Ha, ha!" laughs *il signor*. "Exactly like her. Joan's an inveterate, thorough-paced gambler; you'll never see the color of your cash again."

"Don't expect to," with an indifferent shoulder shrug. "I also ran across Mrs. Lighton-Stryker, and—er—" hesitatingly, "Mr. Hyde at Carlsbad."

"Yes," tranquilly replies Lalage, "they eloped a month ago."

"Indeed?" with a slight uplifting of his brows. "I noticed the women all seemed to give them a wide berth. Hyde was confined to an invalid's chair—bad attack of the gout and cross as a bear; Mrs. Stryker looked downright miserable."

"Serves her right," calmly, "for her folly. Yesterday's paper stated that the courts have granted Teddy a divorce, and now I presume he and Peggie Padelford will marry—. But why don't you drink your tea? It is not," anxiously, "too strong, is it?"

"No, no," hastily. "It's nectar for the gods; but——"

"You've drank too much horrid wine," severely, "and now you want to smoke that cigarette you're so plaintively regarding. Well, light it. I enjoy an occasional smoke myself, and will join you if," stretching her hand toward him, "you will let me have one of yours. Of course," nodding laughingly toward her husband, "he will be cross with me," as Emoclew appears a trifle discomfited at the suggestion. "See," looking over her shoulder with a little deprecatory grimace, "he's looking horridly savage now; he may even beat me after you have gone—ah, thanks."

"And now, a fair exchange," says Emoclew, contentedly puffing his long-delayed cigarette. "What's the news here?"

"None," promptly. "The truth, I assure you," at his incredulous look, blowing a perfect set of rings from between her lips. "We live such uneventful lives in this place; though next month it will be somewhat different. Mrs. Arbuthnot," with a fleeting glance from beneath her long lashes, "and

Miss Brabazon are coming to make us a visit. Kath and Valentine Hume are to be married soon; she is preparing her trousseau now. Mr. Invorarity has also promised to run over for a week."

"Ah!" shortly.

"It's really a thousand pities," with a gay nod, "that you can't contrive to remain till then. Can't you?" pleadingly.

"No," drawing a deep breath, "much as I should like to, it is utterly out of the question."

"But," insists she, "you may return?"

"I may return?" vaguely. "When?"

As he speaks his glance strays to his host, whose eyes are resting with a curious, dreamy look upon an ominous, dark cloud sullenly sailing toward the east; and then with a few brief words of farewell, Emoclew departs, stubbornly refusing all inducements to remain.

Long, long after his departure, and Lalage has retired, *il signor* still lingers gazing wistfully at the murky cloud. He had noticed a strange repression in Emoclew's manner—an austere air of self-reserve. 'Tis true he scarcely alluded to the past, yet his demeanor suggested its vivid remembrance. And then, too, he is greatly changed, as if suffering under a severe, harassing strain. What is it? Something, surely; a nameless something, hinting at the probability of that which covers him with terror, as his thoughts fly naturally toward Lalage.

Hitherto there had never been a crumple in the rose-leaf of their married happiness, which has been complete; in truth, the very *dolce far niente* of love. And now—now, when he has allowed himself to become so inured, secure in that love, this first visit from Emoclew-Houssein Rao awakens within his breast a chill presentiment of impending peril.

* * * * *

“Great heavens, man! What’s up?” regarding the other in amazement, who, without acknowledging his cordial greeting, stands moodily with down-bent head before him. “Well,” impatiently, “speak!”

Emoclew lifts his heavy eyes, letting them rove vacantly about the room, then through the open window, steadfastly avoiding the other’s glance, who sits clutching the arms of his chair, and gazes at him with strong, fierce intensity.

“Come; out with it, man! What’s the row?”

“Doorga,” Emoclew’s voice is low, sepulchral, “Doorga is displeased.”

At these words a cold thrill of horror assails his listener; a hand of ice is at his heart; his limbs quake beneath him.

“Yes,” repeats Emoclew, his eyes fixed gloomily on the swaying branches, “ma Doorga is displeased.”

“What insane nonsense is this?” the other gasps. “What are you raving about?”

"I tell you," sullenly, "Doorga is angry."

"Awfully sorry, I'm sure," with a forced laugh, and by a stupendous effort gaining self-mastery. "Has," flippantly, "has your goddess eaten anything which has disagreed with her liver and temper?"

"Scoff! Jeer! You will, as I have had to do, accept the fact. Ah, when Paolo was killed I scorned, refused to credit it; but now, day by day, slowly, surely, my Nestora droops. She will be taken from me. Therefore," solemnly, "I must, as far as it lies in my power, undo the mischief I have unwittingly wrought. Will you assist me?"

"What?" A dull flush overspreads his face as he stammers. "What in thunder do you mean?"

"Doorga orders, insists, that you give the woman up."

"Not I."

"You must."

"Never!" The flush deepens, and Emoclew, glancing sidewise at him, is fully aware of the pain and anger he is inflicting upon him who returns the glance coldly, steadily, and slowly arising to his feet shouts:

"Never! Do you hear? Go—" hurling the words at him—"tell your infernal goddess that, with my compliments, and be damned to her and—you!" and lifting, snaps his fingers defiantly high in

the air. The action is contemptuous in the extreme—contemptuous and insolent.

Thus the solid ground upon which these two—more than brothers in affection—have stood, is suddenly cleft in twain; a chasm yawns between, separating them completely, hopelessly unbridgable—wide, wider than the North and South poles.

Emoclew-Houssein Rao and he have henceforth forsworn all fealty to each other and are now as enemies.

XXV

“‘My own free will and act,’ and yet you err,
For I *will* do this! Doubt not—fear not; I
Will be your most unmerciful accomplice!”

“Asura, Emoclew-Houssein Rao, thou demon sprung from the mouth of Brahma, thou enemy of the gods and the holy inhabitants of Palala, what wouldst thou with me, thou whose presence is poisonous and thy breath pestilence in the air? Speak quickly, that thou mayst be gone and pollute my sight no longer.”

“Oh, holy Brahmin! Thou who couldst destroy a Rajah, thou who by thy life-long sacrifices and divine imprecations can form new gods, new worlds, new mortals, help me, I implore thee, or my child dies.”

“So, thou apostate one returneth, carrying thy corrupt body along on thy belly as doth the snake, to plead with me—me, whom at thy birth thy parents summoned to give thee Yaman-putri,” (cast his horoscope) “me, whom later, in thy insolent youth, thou scorned, reviled and——”

“Cast not those manifold early sins upon me, O mighty one!”

“Ha! Like all cravens, thou lovest not to hear the truth. Didst not Brahma honor thee, whom he commanded to read, teach the Veda? Didst thou not, from thy eighth year, wear the three strands which gave to thee the title of the Thrice Born? And didst not thou refute all this?”

“O noble one,” wails the weeping wretch, his forehead still pressing the ground, “pity me in my extremity, I beseech thee.”

“And why now, with womanish lamentations, after thou hast embraced the false teachings of that vile sect, Brahma-Somaj, and wantonly slighted Gutama, Sankya and Visheshinka—those gods who have ever been our faithful guides since time immemorial—thou comest to me?”

“Help me,” moans the unhappy man, writhing amid the dust. “Ma Doorga threatens and my child’s life hangs by a thread. Thy words are true; thy wrath just, thy prophecy fulfilled. A chandalah must I be, O venerable sage! my home nowhere, compelled to herd with goats and asses, despised by all, yet will I complain not if thou wilt extend one grain of forgiveness, so that Doorga may deign to hear and understand. Help me, noble, generous one, and I will ever delight to do thy bidding, serve thee blindly, unquestioningly, as thy bonded slave. I swear by my dead wife’s memory to devote this life to thy will everlastingly.”

A swift look of exultation darts to the listener’s

cunning eyes, a blaze of triumph illuminates his stoical face, which instantly vanishes, leaving it dull, lifeless again, as he answers the reckless words coldly.

“Thy request, accursed one, is entirely beyond the annals of reason.”

“Mercy——”

“Silence! Listen. Yet will I consider it if——”

“Ah,” joyously, “thou wilt——”

“Yet, will I consider it; nay, even grant thee complete absolution, will reinstate, return to thee thy former home, and prestige—on conditions.”

“Name them,” eagerly.

“Leave forever, then, the country of the cursed Infidel. Return, abide thou in the land of thy fathers to mourn, expiate thy sins. Thus shalt thy young child’s life be spared, and thyself saved the chandalah’s ignoble fate; live once more in honor and affluence amongst thy people. Doth promise?”

“Yes, yes! Thy penance is only too light, most gracious one.”

“Good!” As he speaks, the priest, who has hitherto sat cross-legged, motionless, his hands loosely clasped across his breast, slowly arises, the extreme meagreness of his body plainly visible through his yellow robe, and signs for the kneeling supplicant to do likewise. “Good; come thou then with me.”

* * * * *

“Bhowanee!” recoiling with a smothered shriek.

“Yes,” lifting the flickering taper, thus revealing the colossal statue more plainly; “yes, my son,” with a sly leer, “thy precipitance is correct; this is in truth the hallowed sanctuary of Bhowanee.”

“But,” fearfully, why——why——?”

“Bhowanee, divine wife of Siva, who first appeared on earth upon the banks of the Hooghly. Prepare thou to do her honor.”

At these words Emoclew breaks into wild, mirthless laughter, mentally conjecturing why his uncle chooses to joke on such a grewsome subject at so unseemly a time, then pauses suddenly, struck with dumb wonderment, for Amajee Baber, regarding him sternly and pointing with shaking finger to the hideous idol whose ugly white eye-balls gleam evil, fiendishly from out the gloom, speaks angrily, a change coming over him horrible to see, whilst the calm, plaintive, even tones of his voice become nasal, strident.

“Hast so soon forgotten thy oath? Come hither. Bend thy knee in homage to her whom thou must henceforth worship. Prostrate thyself. She is love; she is hate; she is terror, revengeful, forgiving, harmful, benignant. She is the producer and the destroyer; the one whom thou must recognize, obey above all others, for I am but her vassal.”

Emoclew turns giddy, dimly grasping the appalling fact, the truth of which he had never the re-

motest suspicion of till now, as the frightful truth for the first time slowly dawns upon his bewildered senses—Amajee Baber is an impostor, a living lie, for instead of a priest of Brahma, as he pretends to be, he is, in secret, a votary of the dreadful Bhowanee, Goddess of Thuggeeism. The horrible knowledge stuns, sickens him, filling his soul with indescribable loathing, disgust, as he stands aghast; and as his shoulder comes in contact with a motionless, naked, loathsome something, covered thickly with gray ashes—a human creature, either doing penance or supplicating some gift from the goddess—it only serves to enhance his terror.

Upon each side of the huge, clumsy divinity are sacred wells, upon whose surface decomposed flowers float, while scattered about the floor lie masses of yellow jessamine, and from a copper vessel the blue vapor of incense arises. The odor of the place is suffocating; the fetid air reeks with a nauseating stench unbearable.

“Yes,” continues Amajee Baber, “since the first taste of that fatal goor, I have been secretly devoted to Bhowanee’s desires, and now that death the unevadable draws near, nearer, necessitating the appointment of a successor in my place, I have chosen thee.”

“No, no!” vehemently.

“To her,” unheedingly, “thou must present ghee and rice cakes. Seek converts to her faith, that the

sons of this mighty one may flourish as doth our sacred banyan-tree which constantly multiplies its roots and trunks. Accept her as thy chief deity; lay votive offerings at her shrine. Rest from thy fruitless wanderings; live, revere, and forever faithfully serve Bhowanee."

"I cannot! It is impossible. Release me, O Amajee Baber, from my vow. Bhowanee is the advocate of crime, cruelty and death, since her motto is, 'Kill—Kill.'"

But this appeal, as before, passes unnoticed, for his uncle, with bowed head and eyes resting on the idol, is mumbling a sort of plaint-chant in a dreary monotone, running thus:

"O, Kalee, Mahakalee, Great Goddess, Universal Mother! Even as the waters of the earth flow Eastward to the Ganges or Westward to swell the Sindhu. Thus they roll from sea to sea, arising from it as clouds, returning thence as rivers, which, having no longer any individuality, merge into one. So thus it is with mankind: We broaden, disappear, blended in one vast whole, and——"

"I refuse," interrupts Emoclew, whose head reels from the foul air, "to accept what thou offerest me. I refuse to kill. I——"

With a furious oath the priest hurls the lighted taper full into the speaker's face.

"Thou refusest, eh, thou fool? Yet kill thou shall, or shalt not leave this place alive, since Bhow-

anee, thy Mistress, commands it. Yea, Kill! Kill!" gesticulating wildly. "Kill the Sikhu! Kill all adherents to the cursed English creed, under whose government, arrogant law and rule we stand yoked today, since that past time we rebelled. Patiently, uncomplainingly had we submitted to that despotic will. Aye, even when, regardless of our prayers, protestations, they insulted our religion by openly slaughtering kine, and finally, when they consummated that crowning indignity by forcing the grease of the cow and swine upon our lips. Our outraged spirits could tolerate their affronts no longer, and we arose and would have won, but for the vile, treacherous Feringeea who betrayed us. Hast forgotten all that? Hast forgotten Tania Topee, who represented Nana? Fought desperately, but alas! lost. He who lived a devoted follower of Bhowanee, and died with her loved name upon his lips? Hast forgotten, too," speaking sadly, his anger slowly abating, "hast forgotten the noble Ranee of Jhansi? Most beautiful, bravest of her sex, who, clad in male attire, headed the gallant Gwalior Contingent Cavalry, whom the cowardly English dogs shot down and broke the aching heart of India?"

"Hast forgotten all this, my son? If so," solemnly, "Bhowanee remembers and patiently awaits vengeance." As he ceases Emoclew moodily asks:

"What dost thou and thy goddess desire of me? It shall be done."

“Thou cravest a life,” answers Amajee Baber significantly. “A woman-child’s life. Bhowanee,” as Emoclew nods an eager affirmative, “will grant thy wish; but for that life, *one woman* must thou kill.”

* * * * *

“Remember and be proud, then, in the knowledge that thou hast sprung from Sagartii, he who furnished Xerxes’ immense army with horse. Thuggeeism has lasted for centuries, and shall, despite all obstacles, continue. And now, my son, go. Peace be with thee! Thou hast sworn by the sacred Kussee. It is not murder by man’s deed, but through the will of the Deity. Journeyst thou quickly to behold with thine own eyes, and if thou findest from this hour thy child’s health not improved, I will offer my head to the noose.”

XXVI

“My dream was past; it had no further change.
It was of a strange order, that the doom
Of these two creatures should be thus traced out
Almost like a reality.”

“What! You here again? I was in hopes you had disappeared from off the face of the earth. Why——”

Stopping short, for the intruder, gloomily fixing his sad, hollow eyes upon him, now with one swift step has reached his side, and roughly seizing his hand, menacingly cries:

“Listen to me! Do you still refuse to accede to my demand?”

At these words a sensation of deadly fear, which the speaker had so often inspired in him before, now assails him, whose lacerated soul strives valiantly to conquer the repugnance and absolute loathing which Emoclew's presence now engenders, and he beseeches:

“Give me time, Emoclew, just——”

“No!” sternly. “I will not budge from my resolution, nor abate one jot of my demand.”

“And when you have gained your desire, what satisfaction will you have in the knowledge that in

rending our lives asunder you have broken two hearts? What," pleadingly, "will you gain?"

"Ah! What will I gain? That which will be the light of my existence, shedding sunshine on my desolate soul. One who will restore to me my peace of mind; the one existing love of my life, that pure passion whose roots are sunk deep within, and whose tendrils are twined tightly around my heart. The life," reverently, "the life of my dear child."

"But see," pleadingly, "I will give you gold; you shall build a temple of gold to your goddess, and——"

"No; ma Doorga scorns such gifts. Have I not ransacked the East in quest of priceless offerings? She rejects them all—everything, till we grant her wishes."

"I cannot, I cannot," looking imploringly into the Hindu's face, to meet naught but that fixed, glassy stare which fills his soul with more deadly terrors than death. "I beseech you, Emoclew, for her sake,—for that other—the child whom we so soon expect. It is impossible. Torture me no longer."

"Your talk is madness."

"Madness to you, perhaps. But for this I have paralyzed my moral nature; annihilated my conscience; destroyed it so completely I have no longer any conception of its meaning. When you tempted me, do you imagine I expected this?" falling on his knees and clasping the man's hands, which are an-

grily withdrawn. "It was a crime—a crime to cast me into this vortex of horror in which I am now struggling. O, Emoclew, once my friend, have mercy—have pity!"

But Emoclew's ears are seemingly as deaf, unfeeling as the wheels of the car of the Juggernaut as it rolls over the mangled bodies of its frenzied worshippers, and for the third time he sullenly answers, "No!"

"I never realized the consequence till now, and——"

"Realize it fully, then: if you suffer, do I likewise, and have striven by every means to spare you—by repeatedly puncturing my tortured flesh to offer the blood to Doorga; and now, as a last resort, I am here to advise you for the last time, to accept the unavertible.

"Your upbraidings are fully merited; but have you forgotten? The exchange was to be but *temporary*. With Julian Dacre's death, however, it was not possible to resume that which you had given. With death, as I before stated, my power ends. The dead man's body you must retain until the Infinities call, and his spirit wander ceaselessly till then."

Dumb with misery the man lifts his eyes to meet those of Emoclew, fraught with impatience, wrath, exasperation. Again he strives to reach those hands, and, failing, clutches, kisses the dirt-begrimed

hem of his garments, which are roughly jerked away.

“For God’s sake, Emoclew, I entreat you——”

“This is nothing but a foolish lot of tarriddle. Leave the infernal Circe who has bewitched you. She is a sorceress, a vile, filthy thing and——”

With an oath the other springs to his feet, but Emoclew lifts his hand warningly.

“Doorga commands that you give her up.”

“And,” suddenly grown calm with a terrible composure, “as I told you before, never, *never*,” slowly speaking with deadly earnestness. “Neither Doorga, devil nor you shall take her from me. Go! Your demoniac influence, magic power, or whatever it is, can avail you nothing. I defy you——do your worst! Go!”

And Emoclew, with a peculiar, destroying look, a glance suggestive of pity, hate, revenge combined, glides silently, without a word, from the room.

With his departure, *il signor* meditates on the direct results of this interview. Never, even in its earliest, wildest stages—he had never, till now, when threatened by Lalage’s loss, fully understood the intense depths of his mighty love—this all-absorbing passion. And now after possessing her, the harrowing possibility that he should resign her is madness. And these torturing thoughts sting like adders! Before the vast, black immensity of the Future his soul sickens, cowers in terror at the faint-

est chance of losing the happiness which is held in the white hands of this one woman.

These fancies exorcise the evil spirits by which he is tormented, spurring him to fury and desperation. He remains in solitude. Glancing into the mirror the deathly pallor of his face horrifies him, as, thinking of *her*, he groans:

“ My love—my dear, dear love! ”

Evening shadows commence to dimly touch the interior of the laboratory; and still he remains alone. A stupor, a helpless spell, is over him; that same queer, lethargic state which has so often overpowered him. He sees again that last glance Emoclew had given him, and quails, for well he knows that this man, now his most ruthless enemy, will gain his victory by some means, no matter how foul or desperate. One thing alone he is conscious of, and that is, on the morrow he will flee—take her to some unknown, foreign shore where the threat of separation shall no longer menace them.

Meditating thus, and tired with the day's labor, a drowsiness comes over him and he drops into a doze. How long it lasts he does not know, but awakes with a start, for meanwhile the dusk has crept closer, wrapping everything in a gloomy darkness. He arises, stretching his cramped, aching limbs to lean idly against the casement. The heavy, fragrant odor of heliotrope, mingled with the perfume from her rose garden, greets his nostrils.

The lawn and garden are folded in slumberous quiescence; the leaves are motionless in the breathless atmosphere; a young moon coyly sheds her radiance above the trees, glinting ribbon-like upon the lawn and broken statue.

Drearily he watches, mentally deploring, yet repeating the conclusion that he must leave this haven of bliss, where true happiness has been complete.

And now he starts like one shot, for something is approaching, skirting the high hedge of rhododendrons. Nearer the phantom comes, swiftly, with hooded head. Is it a wraith? No, that dreaded presence threatens him once more, winding snake-like nearer, stealthily approaching, tall, erect, corpse-like, grim, relentless, his Nemesis advances, whilst he stands, spellbound, unable to move, watching him emerge from the foliage, past the rose garden, he comes across the lawn, reaches the verandah, and disappears within.

The watcher awaits his persecutor's step and voice, girding himself grimly for the meeting. His pulses, heart, have seemingly ceased to beat. Mechanically he measures the distance, duly calculating how many seconds must elapse ere those harsh, dominant tones shall once more fall upon his ears.

The moments pass; the allotted time arrives, flits by. The man, still waiting, leans against the casement, when a slight noise below attracts his attention. He glances indifferently down. Emoclew is

gliding forth. With a gesture of reverence and triumph the Hindu raises his arms aloft.

“Bhowanee,” the thrilling accents, penetrating space, reach the other’s ears, clear, distinct. “Bhowanee,” he repeats, “I have obeyed thee. Let Door-ga’s wrath be at last appeased.”

What fatal thing has happened? For fatal it surely is. Blindly he stumbles from the room, his brain reeling, his limbs almost useless; yet he totters laboriously on—on—instinctively divining in which direction to search; struggling wildly against the terrible restraint which binds him, he reaches her room, drags the curtain aside, and lo! there, prone upon the floor she lies, a scarf or roomal knotted cruelly about her throat.

Vainly he endeavors to loosen the scarf, pulling frantically at the unyielding knot which stubbornly resists all efforts—and—oh, God! Lalage’s life is slipping, swiftly ebbing. Her eyes mutely beg him for relief, while he tugs madly at the hellish knot, which alas! he in his pitiable ignorance is drawing tighter. Ah! his knife—his knife! Searchingly his hand slips to his pocket. Oh, he has left it in the laboratory! Despair seizes him, yet—still she breathes—will there be time? Yes, he must risk it; it is the only hope. But is his strength equal to the task? His trembling limbs are weak, useless, as if in the grasp of a thousand giants. Desperately he battles for freedom, straining every nerve and mus-

cle in one mighty effort to escape this bondage and accomplish that which for her loved sake must be done and done quickly. And as he struggles, suddenly, as if by magic, the spell which has hitherto bound his body vanishes. Joy! He is free—free! He draws a deep breath of thankfulness; the relief is indescribable, and——

“Ho, lazybones!”

With a wild exclamation Erlynde leaps to his feet.

“Ho, lazybones!” repeats Miss Brabazon, holding a cup toward him. “Here’s the tea at last, Guy. I’m afraid,” apologetically, “I’m afraid it’s cold; but better late than never—as the copy-books say. You had a nightmare, I think; that is, if one can have nightmares in the daytime. Your face was awful. You were having a fearful tussle with Nero’s collar. I wanted to awaken you five minutes ago, but he,” nodding laughingly toward Emoclew, “wouldn’t let me; in fact, shook his fist in my face and warned me under pain of death not to disturb you.”

Erlynde shakes himself vigorously. Emoclew is regarding him with a quizzical expression, while Trixie, Invararity and several others, headed by Mrs. Lighton-Stryker, stand crowded, smilingly in the doorway of the arbor.

“Tea? Ah! Thanks, awfully,” accepting the beverage which Kath still holds invitingly toward

him. Yawning and once more shaking himself violently, to the immediate danger of the cup which bobs, rocks protestingly, "I believe," with a queer sense of unreality about him, "I believe I've been asleep."

"I should say you have," says Mrs. Stryker, stepping within. "Gave us the slip—stole a march on us, an hour ago."

With Guy Erlynde's awakening comes the blissful realization that he is free—entirely free—indifferent to Lalage Demaris' loveliness, whose beauty, as she comes forward, stooping to lift the white brier-rose from the ground at his feet, has now no further power to thrill him. For, from the moment that charmed potion touched his lips, it had miraculously slaked his soul of all love and passion, turning his blood—which so recently rioted like molten lava through his quivering veins—cool, placid; whilst enhancing his brotherly affection for Emoclew a thousand fold.

Yes, a happy sense of relief is upon Erlynde; yet he is puzzled, bewildered, as the thought frequently intrudes itself—and he often questions his inner faculties—was it indeed reality, or had Emoclew, with his strong magnetic power, taken advantage of his, Erlynde's, susceptibility to regulate the dream to suit his own interest and pleasure?

And then again, what is that mysterious symbol which ever mockingly plays hide and seek with his

treacherous memory; one moment almost within his grasp, anon eluding it by a hair's breadth? What is it? Who knows? The secret lies hidden in the unfathomable eyes of Emoclew-Houssein Rao.

L'ENVOI

In nature there is nothing puerile, everything being sternly matter-of-fact; yet dreams and realities often blend. Dreams are merely the brain's vagaries—however, which oftentimes come true. Nature is the book of the universe, containing more actual facts than all the literature ever written.

How frequently a bud, leaf, fruit, bird or insect will attract us by the lure of its beauty or peculiarity, the study of which contains a mighty lesson, a gigantic truth essential to human progress, embracing more practical knowledge than all the ponderous volumes ever written by gray-bearded wiseacres, and stupid philosophers' visionary theories.

Are we not growing weary of nature's monotony, and persistently deviating from its regular, time-worn path? Are we not trespassing, exploring other domains whose laws we boldly violate? Are we not venturing far beyond our hitherto privileged limits? Are we not daring to challenge the unknown—those unknown forces on whom we are beginning to thrust our ephemeral will? And every modest victory will some day hence disclose an infinity of the untold.

In ancient times torture and death awaited the oracle; yet his predictions—met with jeers and derision—came true.

This is an epoch of coming wonders—their shadow casts itself before us. Man is slowly transforming, improving upon nature, and the miraculous achievements to be performed by human minds, human hands, are incredible.

There are mighty secrets hidden, slumbering deep within the heart of nature—nature at whose lips the ever inquisitive ear of science eagerly listens for the faintest whisper, to immediately impart those secrets to its ally, man, whose supernatural powers will awaken, and magic touch develop, draw it forth to the gaze of the astonished world.

Who can foresee from this era the wonders to come? Time and patience will work miracles in a scientific way, which we of the present cannot realize. The approaching future will far eclipse the petty wonders of the past, and everything that has been, or what our puny minds can conceive; for nothing can exaggerate that which is possible and will be eventually accomplished by man.

Remember and heed what the apostle Paul says :
“Quench not the spirit. Despise not prophesying. Prove all things ; hold fast to that which is good.”

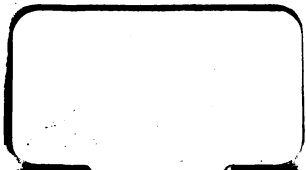
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