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THE

CORNHILL MAGAZINE.

JANUARY 1894.

MATTHEW AUSTIN.[1]

BY W. E. NORRIS.

CHAPTER I.

MATTHEW AUSTIN.

'I OUGHT to be ashamed of myself,' said Matthew Austin; 'upon my word, I ought to be ashamed of myself! What business has any man to be such a sybarite, while millions of his fellow-men are toiling from morning to night in coal-mines and hideous, stifling factories, without so much as knowing that they live in a beautiful world? Millions upon millions who haven't even been allowed to learn, except in the coarsest and most rudimentary way, what the gratification of the senses means—condemned to lifelong servitude, looking forward to no change for the better on this side of the grave, though many of them must dread a change for the worse, and only a very few have some vague hope of compensation hereafter. It is really monstrous; and even if their lot be inevitable, one hardly sees why they should accept it as such. We, the wealthy and educated minority, shouldn't accept it if we were suddenly forced to change places with them and found ourselves in an overwhelming majority. Some day there will be a vast social upheaval, I suppose.'

He finished his glass of claret and gazed across the fine damask tablecloth, the polished silver, the bowls and vases of cut blooms which had suggested these reflections to him, till his eyes rested upon the sunny garden beyond, where, through the open French windows, brilliant parterres and flowering shrubs could be seen basking in the still warmth of a summer afternoon. He had been eating his luncheon in solitude, so that there was no one to argue with him or to point out the futility of quarrelling with that unequal distribution of wealth which statesmen, philosophers, and divines have proclaimed from time immemorial to be the very foundation-stone of the social fabric. Presently he lighted a cigarette, not without a slight inward twinge of compunction—for the truth was that he could tolerate nothing save the very choicest tobacco and was somewhat ultra-fastidious in all his tastes.

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'After all,' he resumed, in a more cheerful tone, 'it is health, not wealth, that has the last word. A rich man is only a little better off, and probably feels much worse off, than a mechanic when he is told that he can never be well again. And rich people are often unhappy. More often, perhaps, than poor people, who haven't time to brood over their sorrows. Poverty brings disease? Yes; but that subject is being dealt with, and in that direction there is something definite to work for. The bigger problem looks almost hopeless. All one can see is that it will have to be taken in hand, and that there is no justification worth listening to for luxury and selfishness.'

This indolent cogitator was not—as may have been supposed from the foregoing soliloquy—a millionaire or a great territorial magnate; being in fact only a young doctor at an inland watering-place, whose professional earnings, scanty as yet, were supplemented by a small private fortune. Yet a comparatively small income will go far towards providing a bachelor so situated with those luxuries which Matthew Austin chiefly valued—pretty surroundings, good wine, a fair collection of etchings, a well-selected library, and flowers all the year round—and if he was not rich, he had, within the limits of his desires, all that money could give him. So, at any rate, he thought; and more than once during this slack season of the year, when patients were few and he had leisure to consider his ways, he had accused himself of unwarrantable self-indulgence.

His poorer neighbours would scarcely have brought that charge against him; for, like many another member of his profession, he would take no payment from them (save from time to time an extremely modest sum, which he accepted to free their minds from a burdensome sense of obligation), nor was he wont to spare himself in their service. He was every whit as attentive to a costermonger's wife as he would have been to a duchess, had any duchesses resided within reach of Wilverton, while it was pretty well known that he expended a good deal more in charity than in the purchase of wine or choice etchings or bulbs for his garden. Nevertheless, it remained true that he had a charming home and that most of those who sang his praises dwelt in crowded alleys or dark, ill-ventilated cottages.

'There's no getting over it,' he murmured, as he rose and strolled towards the open window; 'I'm too disgracefully happy and comfortable!'

He stood for a while in the recess formed by the window in the solid, oak-panelled walls of his old dwelling—a tall, slim figure, which conveyed an impression of vigour and activity, though of no great muscular strength. He was at this time just thirty years of age, and was accounted handsome by the unmarried ladies of Wilverton, to whose opinions respecting his personal appearance he had hitherto remained sublimely indifferent. His crisp, wavy hair was of a chestnut-brown colour, he wore a closely-cut reddish beard, and his dreamy grey eyes were shaded by long, curved lashes. His nose was too large and too undecided in outline for beauty, but to set against that he had a well-shaped, sensitive mouth, about which a faint smile continually hovered. If Matthew Austin was not strictly handsome, he was at least good-looking, and, what was perhaps more important, he had the unmistakable look of being a good fellow.

'His face is his fortune,' old Dr. Jennings, who would fain have kept the whole practice of Wilverton to himself, would sometimes growl; 'patients are bound to flock to a man who has the trick of looking so confoundedly sympathetic!'

As a matter of fact, he looked sympathetic for the simple reason that he was so. He generally knew, or thought he knew, how other people were feeling: a gift which has its drawbacks, as well as its advantages. For example, he could seldom bring himself to scold his gardener (who often deserved to be scolded), because he was perfectly well aware that Bush, notwithstanding an assumption of stolid, surly unconcern when rebuked, was in reality mortified beyond all measure by the mildest remonstrance. It was, however, imperative that Bush should be remonstrated with that afternoon, and in a few minutes his master stepped resolutely forward to say what must be said. Crossing the smooth-shaven lawn, and guided by the sharp, recurrent click-click of a pair of shears, he soon came upon this thick-set, grey-bearded retainer of his, who was busily engaged in clipping a dwarf hedge, and who forestalled him by remarking:

'Terrible weather for gardens, sir! No rain, nor yet no prospect o' none, and everythin' perishin', as you may say, for want o' water. 'Tis enough to break a man's 'eart!'

'But why should we break our hearts, and why should everything perish, when we possess a hose, in respect of which I am charged an additional water-rate of five pounds a year?' Mr. Bush's employer pertinently inquired.

'There's a deal of 'arm done to plants by over-waterin', sir—a deal of 'arm,' answered the old gardener sententiously.

'Oh, but not to *our* plants, Bush. They may suffer from mismanagement in many ways, and I am afraid some of them do; but surely not in that way!'

Bush sniffed in an aggrieved manner, but made no articulate reply. He hated the labour of manipulating a hose, and nobody knew better than he how effective a weapon judicious silence is.

'And talking about mismanagement,' Mr. Austin went on, 'I must say, Bush, that I wish you had treated those bouvardias as I told you to treat them. Not one of them will turn out satisfactorily now.'

Bush sniffed again, and continued to clip with tremendous energy. It was one of his exasperating habits to work vigorously and to make as much noise as possible over it while he was being spoken to; thus delicately implying, not only that he was far too conscientious a man to waste time, but that he attached very little importance to his master's views upon the subject of horticulture.

Matthew Austin kept up the monologue as long as he could: he had various complaints to make, and he was determined to make them. But before he had quite reached the end of his list, his patience and his severity alike gave out.

'I suppose it isn't much use,' he said, laughing; 'I suppose you will take your own way, whatever I may tell you to do. But you're wrong, all the same.'

'Maybe so, sir,' answered Bush imperturbably. 'I'm a mortal man, liable to herror, same as yourself, sir—though with more years' experience in the growin' of plants. I've heerd tell as even doctors makes their mistakes now and again, sir—killin' of folks as might ha' been kep' alive.'

Matthew Austin laughed again. 'Oh, yes, we make mistakes,' he admitted; 'much of our work is guess-work, just as yours is.

Some of us are obstinate, too, and cling to old methods after we have been shown the superiority of new ones—quite like gardeners.'

'Not like me, sir,' corrected Mr. Bush; '*I* ain't never too proud to larn.'

'Only you haven't yet been fortunate enough to meet with the man who could teach you anything, eh? That is exactly where you resemble a considerable number of medical practitioners.'

Bush laid down his shears, straightened his back and surveyed the speaker with a smile of benevolent compassion. 'Lor' bless 'ee, sir,' said he, ''t ain't no manner o' good to go ahead too fast! Noo methods?—well, I ain't agin' tryin' of 'em; on'y when I tries 'em I don't say nowt about it. For why? 'Cause I don't want to pass for a born fool. Same with your own perfession, sir. "Drugs," says you to a sick person, "ain't a-goin' to make you well, and drugs you sha'n't have." What follers? Why, that sick person sends for hold Jennings, who gives him pills and draughts to his 'eart's content. "Now, I've got summat for my money," thinks he. Your way might be the right way, sir; but you didn't owt to have said so—no, that you didn't! Bread pills and 'armless mixtures o' many colours you should have give him, sir—and kep' your patient. You'll excuse the liberty o' me mentionin' it, sir, but it do reelly grieve me to 'ear what people says and to see you losin' fine opportoonities through sheer foolishness—if I may make bold for to call it so.'

The young doctor seemed to be more amused than affronted by this plain language. 'Why should you wish me to be a humbug, Bush?' he asked.

''Cause 'tis the way o' the world, sir,' replied Bush, resuming his occupation. ''Cause human natur' is human natur'—ah! and will be long after you and me has no further call for physic.'

Well, it was likely enough that this old fellow had acquired some knowledge of human nature, and perhaps—as Matthew reflected while he sauntered away—the said knowledge had been turned to account in his dexterous elusion of the subject more immediately under discussion. Nevertheless, Mr. Austin was not greatly alarmed by the note of warning which had been sounded for his benefit. He had not yet been a year at Wilverton, and, all things considered, he had done pretty well. Of course Dr. Jennings, the established medical authority of the place and the chief advertiser of its mineral springs, which, fashionable in the last century, had since fallen into disrepute, had retained the great majority of the rich winter visitants; still a few rather interesting cases had come in his own way, and he had had the satisfaction of treating them successfully. For the rest, he did not hesitate to advise a course of baths and water-drinking to gouty and rheumatic sufferers, the springs being really efficacious against their maladies, and although it was true that he had little faith in drugs, that scepticism was hardly so much of a drawback to him in a place where such a number of glasses of water had to be swallowed daily as it might have been elsewhere. He had no doubt that he would get on—if indeed 'getting on' in a pecuniary sense were the chief aim and object of a man's existence.

Personally, he did not hold that view. He had, as has been mentioned, a little money of his own; he had secured a charming old house and a garden in the progress of which he was profoundly interested; he had no thought of marrying, and he loved his profession. Had he not every reason to describe himself as happy and comfortable?—whether disgracefully so or not. His earlier years had been by no means exempt from unhappiness and discomfort; for his family had strenuously opposed his choice of an occupation, and indeed there had been a time when his parents had almost gone the length of disowning him. Probably they would have gone that length, but for the invincible sweetness of his disposition and the impossibility of quarrelling with a man who refuses to be quarrelled with. But this was now an old story. His father and mother were both lying silent in the family vault down in Essex, and his brother, the present Sir Godfrey Austin, who had succeeded to the family honours, the not very extensive family acres and the seat in Parliament which might also be regarded as almost a family appanage, had not inherited all the family prejudices. The present Sir Godfrey, a dull, worthy, middle-aged personage, saw no particular reason why Matthew should not be a doctor, though the taste struck him as an eccentric one.

The late Sir Godfrey would have seen every reason why his son should at least not be a provincial doctor; and indeed Matthew himself would have preferred to develop into the celebrated London physician that he might, and perhaps would, have become, had not a long and dangerous illness played havoc with his prospects. But it had not been for the sake of social standing that he had coveted such advancement, nor was he personally ambitious. He was glad enough and thankful enough to have recovered—as he had now almost completely done—from the blood-poisoning which, through a mishap at one of the hospitals, had all but cost him his life, and he did not regret having yielded to the kindly solicitations of his metropolitan colleagues, who had urged him to seek lighter work and a fresher air. Well, the air of Wilverton was as fresh as could be desired; as for the work, it was perhaps just a trifle too light during the summer months for an active man. This was what he was thinking when he returned to the house, and, picking up a treatise upon chrysanthemum culture, ensconced himself in an easy-chair. Easy-chairs and the culture of chrysanthemums were all very well; but at his time of life he ought to have had rather less leisure for making acquaintance with either; possibly Bush had not been altogether in the wrong; possibly he had made a mistake in neglecting opportunities for extending his regular practice. Certain it was that neither the town residents nor the neighbouring gentry had as yet shown much inclination to transfer their favours to him from pompous old Dr. Jennings, though some of them had coyly nibbled. Doubtless these would have bitten, had he seen fit to bait his hook with the innocuous specifics which human nature demands as aids to faith, and not a few of them would have done wisely to bite—'For the truth is,' reflected Matthew, with an amused smile, as he recalled certain consultations, 'that poor, dear old Jennings knows nothing at all.'

As chance would have it, an influential and irascible patient of Dr. Jennings's was at that same moment saying in more forcible language the very same thing; and so it came to pass that the student of horticulture had not dawdled through very many pages of complicated instructions when his servant entered the room, bearing a large square envelope upon a salver.

'A groom has just brought this from Hayes Park, and he was to wait for an answer, if you please, sir,' the man said.

Matthew tore open the note, glanced hastily at its contents and nodded. 'All right,' said he; 'I will be there as soon as possible. Just tell James to put the mare into the trap, will you?'

Then, while he was waiting, he reopened the missive addressed to him, which was written in a dashing Italian hand and in a style more original than lucid.

'Mrs. Frere presents her compliments to Mr. Austin and would be *very* much obliged if he would come *at once* and see her little daughter, who, she fears, is suffering from incipient diphtheria or something dreadful of that kind. At least, it *looks* like it, and Mr. Frere quite thinks so too, and of course this makes us terribly anxious. So will Mr. Austin please come *without delay*, and the dog-cart should have been sent, only it seems that the boys have taken it out without ever saying a word—of course before they knew that their sister was so ill. But perhaps Mr. Austin has a dog-cart of his own. Or, if not, he might take a fly.'

Mr. Austin had a dog-cart of his own. As, moreover, he was the lucky possessor of a roan mare considerably fleeter than anything in Mr. Frere's stables, he felt pretty confident of reaching Hayes Park in advance of his verbal response. Presently he was bowling at a rapid pace along the highways and byways, his reins hanging loose in his hand—for a more careless driver never lived —while his eyes wandered to right and left over the ripening corn-fields and the woods, where patches of russet and yellow were already discernible.

'She sounds like a dear old lady,' he thought, smiling retrospectively; 'I wonder whether she talks as she writes. Mr. Frere of course one has seen—and listened to—at the club; but I don't remember to have heard anything about his family. I hope it isn't really a case of diphtheria: when once that gets into a house—— There is no need to anticipate the worst, though. Posterity ought to be much happier than we are, a century or two hence, when miasmatic diseases will have been exterminated. Only then, I suppose, other problems will have to be faced, which look uncommonly awkward at this distance.'

He went on, as his habit was, with these and similar disconnected musings until his groom, who had been murmuring directions in his ear from time to time, said suddenly: 'Off side, please, sir, through the iron gates. *Oh*, Lord!'

'It's all right, James,' laughed Mr. Austin, glancing over his shoulder at his agitated henchman; 'I have never yet turned you out at a corner, and the chances are that I never shall. Dear me! what a beautiful old place!'

It certainly was a very beautiful old Tudor edifice that came within the field of his vision as he drove up the gentle ascent which led towards it between two parallel rows of magnificent limes, and in days of yore the Freres of Hayes Park had been county magnates of the first water; but now, like many other county magnates, they had to keep up a large establishment upon a lamentably reduced rent-roll, and, this being impossible, the large establishment was no longer maintained. Half the house was permanently closed, the gardens were neglected, while the vast stables had seldom more than three occupants at a time. When it is added that Mr. Frere was the father of six children, some of whom had cost, and were costing, him a good deal of money, allowance will doubtless be made for the irritability which was a prominent feature in an otherwise amiable character. Moreover, he had, on an average, at least two sharp fits of gout every year, which is more than any man's temper can be expected to stand.

And indeed it was of his gout, not of his daughter's illness, that the fussy little, white-haired man began to speak as soon as the sound of wheels upon the gravel brought him out to the doorstep.

'Come in—come in—very glad to see you!' said he. 'I shall hope to consult you in future, when I have occasion for it. That fellow Jennings is past all bearing! I told him so plainly the last time he was here. "What's the use of you?" I said. "That's what I want to know. What's the use of you? Here am I, getting worse instead of better, and you can't even suggest anything!" Because, hang it all! I don't call it a suggestion to prescribe a course of Wilverton waters. No, no; I've lived here, man and boy, for a matter of sixty-five years, and you don't take me in with nonsense of that sort. So I made no bones about it; I said, "Look here, Jennings, I've had a lot of patience with you, and it's very evident to me that you're no good. Now I'm going to try younger blood; I'm going to send for Mr. Austin." He told me I could do as I pleased. Do as I pleased!—I should rather think I could! The deuce is in it if a man mayn't choose his own doctor.'

'But I understood that it was to see your daughter that I was sent for to-day,' Matthew ventured to observe.

'Oh, poor little Maggie—yes, to be sure! Only a feverish cold, I hope; but Mrs. Frere worked herself up into a state of mind. You know what women are. Come along and look at your patient; I'm sure you'll say it's nothing serious. Jennings would have pulled a long face and set about drawing up a long bill at once. That's his little way—confound him!'

CHAPTER II.

THE FRERE FAMILY.

MR. FRERE led the way up a broad, shallow staircase, lighted by a great stained-glass window, upon which coats of arms and heraldic devices were emblazoned. Then there was a long, oak-panelled corridor to be traversed before the old gentleman paused, with his hand upon a swing-door covered with red baize.

'These are the children's quarters,' he explained. 'In days gone by, when there was always a certain number of visitors, it was thought desirable to exclude the youngsters; but I don't know why we shouldn't economise labour by stowing 'em away in some of the empty spare rooms now. We're more than half shut up as it is, and the furniture dropping to pieces, they tell me. Can't afford a lot of housemaids, you see. What the deuce is going to become of us poor landowners is more than I can guess! It's all very fine for farmers to talk about being ruined, but—— well, what price are you paying for hay now?'

'I can't quite say,' answered Matthew, who in truth could seldom quite say what price he was paying for anything. 'Something like 8*l*. a ton, I think.'

'The devil you are! Ah, well! the farmer and the consumer are swindled, I've no doubt; but that's a poor consolation for the landlord, who can't get his rents. Now, it just comes to this, you know: are we to be exterminated or are we not? I take it that, as a class, we are the most patient and the most ill-used body of men in the entire community. We make no outcry; we go on paying our rates and taxes—and pretty heavy they are too!—without a murmur; we submit to be treated as though we were rich, when most of us don't know where to turn for a spare five-pound note, by George! But we have our rights, mind you, even though we aren't Socialists or Fenians or agricultural labourers. Yes, we have our rights, and a time may come when we shall be driven to fight for them.'

Matthew began to wonder whether the time would ever come for him to be conducted to his patient; but just as he was about to offer a gentle reminder that he was a physician, not a politician, the swing-door was opened from the other side, giving passage to a tall, fair-haired girl, who may have been drawn to the spot by the stentorian voice of the aggrieved landowner.

'Oh, there you are, Anne!' Mr. Frere said, in a slightly reproachful tone, as though he had been searching in vain for this young lady. 'Well, I have brought Mr. Austin, you see—my daughter Anne, Mr. Austin. How is Maggie now?—and what has become of your mother?'

'Mamma has gone downstairs to write some letters before the post leaves; Maggie seems to be a little more feverish, and her head aches a good deal,' replied Miss Frere, after bowing to the doctor.

She had a low-pitched, musical voice, Matthew noticed. For the rest, being anxious to get over preliminaries and proceed to business, he did not notice much about her, except that she was remarkably tall and remarkably fair.

'Oh, well, a headache—of course she has a headache,' Mr. Frere returned rather testily; 'that doesn't prove anything. Now, Mr. Austin, if you will be so kind as to follow Anne, she will show you the child's bedroom. I'll take myself off out of your way for the present; but Mrs. Frere will like to see you by-and-by. You will find us both in the drawing-room after you have made your examination.'

Matthew Austin, like most doctors, had two manners, and the professional manner which he assumed, as soon as Miss Frere had led him into the sick-room, was a very quiet and somewhat distant one. He was not fond of being spoken to or interfered with while at work, nor were bystanders encouraged to loquacity by his impassive reticence. However, neither Miss Frere nor the old nurse, who was seated by the bedside of the sufferer, a bright-eyed little maiden of fourteen, ventured to interrogate him, save with their eyes, and they answered the few questions that he put to them briefly and intelligently enough. The sight of the stethoscope which he presently produced seemed to alarm them both; but they heroically held their peace when, after using it, he replaced it in his pocket, and it was Maggie who broke the silence by asking in a small, awestruck voice:

'Oh, please, am I going to die?'

'Yes,' answered the doctor, his features relaxing into a smile, 'we are all going to die; but we all mean to live as long as we can, and you are rather more likely to keep your ninetieth birthday than most of us. To-night you will have some medicine which will do your head good and won't be at all nasty, and to-morrow, I hope, you will be feeling much better. Only you must make up your mind to stay in bed for the present.'

Miss Frere followed him out into the passage, and he replied at once to her unspoken query. 'Oh, no, I don't think so; unfavourable symptoms would have been almost certain to show themselves by this time, if there had been anything of the sort. I must not speak quite positively until to-morrow; but in all probability there is nothing the matter, beyond a rather severe chill.'

'Oh, thank you!' exclaimed the girl, with a look of such heartfelt gratitude that he laughed outright.

'Do you know,' said he, 'that you pay us a very poor compliment when you thank us—as most of you do—for telling you that there is no reason to be alarmed? You treat us as the savages treat their medicine-men; you seem to think that diseases and cures are at our beck and call.'

'I suppose we do,' she answered, smiling; 'but perhaps, after all, that is just as well. Isn't faith half the battle?'

'Oh it goes a long way, no doubt. Faith helps to make the world go round, and even misdirected faiths are better than none. Considering how ignorant we all are, that faculty of firm, illogical belief which I can see by your face that you possess is an immense blessing.'

The girl drew herself up slightly. Perhaps she did not particularly care about being told what conclusions this stranger had drawn from a scrutiny of her features; perhaps also she failed to see why she should be called stupid by implication. But Matthew Austin had not meant to bring any accusation of that kind against her, nor was he in the least conscious of having given offence. He was something of a physiognomist, he had an absent-minded trick of saying what he thought, and, as Miss Frere stood beside him, with the light of the sinking sun upon her face, he had taken rapid note of certain indications connected with her eyes and the set of her lips. To tell the truth, the interest which she had aroused in him was but momentary, and he at once recollected that the anxious parents were waiting for him below.

'I must go down and reassure your father and mother,' he said. 'I will look in again to-morrow morning, when I shall fully expect to find my patient convalescent.'

She did not offer to show him where the drawing-room was—which omission on her part may possibly have caused his thoughts to recur to her while he descended the staircase; for the fact was that such young ladies as he had hitherto met in Wilverton and its vicinity had shown no sort of inclination to leave him to himself. Of the young lady who was thus exceptional his mind's eye retained a clear impression, and his inward remark was that she was doubtless one of the reigning local beauties. It was little that he knew about beauties or prevailing fashions in beauty, local or otherwise. Had he been better posted, he would have recognised that Miss Frere's comeliness belonged to a type which, for the time being, has ceased to command universal admiration. The low, broad forehead, the straight nose and the arched eyebrows were well enough; but the general effect, enhanced by an almost total absence of colouring, was somewhat too cold and severely classical for modern taste. Anne Frere's hair was of so light a flaxen as to be within a few shades of white, her cheeks were always pale and her eyes could only be called blue because they were not grey. Her mouth, too, though there was no fault to be found with its shape, was scarcely the sort of mouth which the young man of the present day honours with his approbation, while her expression did not vary much or frequently. Nevertheless, she was admitted to be handsome; and the fact that she was so was merely an unimportant detail in Matthew Austin's concise summing up of her.

'Strong constitution, but slow circulation,' was what he said to himself, as he made his way downstairs. 'Evidently a good girl, and probably the mainstay of the household; for one can guess that her father and mother are not very efficient people. I wonder why she isn't happy, and what that quiet, resigned look means. Pecuniary difficulties?—or an unfortunate attachment, perhaps? Well, she'll pull through her trouble, whatever it may be; for she has too much pride and too much courage to be peevish—not to mention the faith. One doesn't like to see that look upon the face of such a young girl, though.'

In the hall he was met by Mr. Frere, whose long sigh of satisfaction, on hearing his favourable report, gave evidence of an anxiety which had not been confessed.

'I was sure of it!' the old gentleman exclaimed triumphantly; 'I was sure you would take a common-sense view. Now Jennings, as I told Mrs. Frere, would have kept us on tenter-hooks for a week and then pretended that he had saved the child's life. Come in and see my wife. It wouldn't be the slightest use for *me* to try and convince her that she had made all this fuss about nothing.'

Matthew was conducted into a room of immense length, which, as he noticed during his rapid progress towards the farther end of it, was filled with beautiful things. Poverty, after all, is a relative term, and if the Chippendale furniture, the inlaid tables and cabinets, the rare old china and the countless silver knick-nacks were heirlooms, certain screens and bits of embroidery and other products of Egypt and Japan looked like purchases of recent date. The owner of that drawing-room, Matthew reflected, must be a woman possessed of refined tastes, as well as the means of gratifying them; and indeed the owner of the drawing-room, when she rose from her writing-table to greet him, struck him as being in admirable harmony with her surroundings.

Mrs. Frere was a charming old lady, who might almost have passed for a young lady, if her hair had not been as white as her husband's; for neither time nor trouble had furrowed her smooth cheeks. Her small, slim figure was that of a girl; her pretty face was that of a baby; her manner, too, had retained the childish simplicity which, during fifty odd years, had made her at once the pet and the laughing-stock of her friends and relatives. She was, as Matthew presently discovered, a little deaf; but even that provoking infirmity, which is so apt to destroy the popularity of less favoured mortals, was in her case an additional charm, lending a certain piquancy to her inconsequent remarks.

'I am so very glad George persuaded me to send for you,' said she, with amusing candour, after the young doctor had allayed her fears. 'I was rather against it, you know—do sit down—I was rather against it, because of poor old Dr. Jennings, who will naturally feel hurt; still, if he only knew it, it is really much better for him not to come here any more. Latterly I have been kept in a constant state of terror lest one of his visits should end in his being kicked down the steps by George, who is quite dangerous when he has a fit of gout coming on. Yes, George dear, I see you making faces at me, but I am not saying anything imprudent; I am sure you have told Mr. Austin all about your grievances by this time. And so you really think my poor little Maggie is all right?'

'Oh, no,' answered Matthew, laughing, 'I haven't pronounced her all right yet; but I hope there will be an improvement within a few hours after she has taken her medicine, which I am going to send to her from the chemist's as I go back. I shall see her again to-morrow morning, and unless she becomes more feverish during the night——'

'Oh, but why should you hurry back?' interrupted Mrs. Frere. 'Why shouldn't we send for the medicine? Then you might stay and dine with us and watch the effect of it, which would be *so* much nicer! George, couldn't you persuade Mr. Austin to stay and dine?'

Mr. Frere threw up his hands deprecatingly. 'Just listen to her!' he ejaculated; 'that's my wife all over! As if a busy man had nothing better to do than to take pot-luck with his patients in order to suit their convenience! Not that I shouldn't be only too delighted to offer you our humble hospitality; but I really haven't the impudence to suggest such a thing.'

'But I am not at all busy,' Matthew answered, 'and, as a matter of fact, I should rather like, if I could, to watch the effect of the medicine. May I send my man to Wilverton for it, and tell him to bring me my dress-clothes at the same time?'

If Dr. Jennings had been unceremoniously invited to dine at Hayes Park (only he never would have been so invited), his acknowledgment of the honour conferred upon him would have been very ceremonious indeed. He would have bowed down to the ground, his round, rubicund face would have assumed a richer tint; probably he would have consulted his note-book and murmured that he might just be able to manage it; certainly he would not have said, as Matthew presently did:

'Then I'll leave you to finish your letters. I shall go and try to amuse Miss Maggie until it is time to dress. Don't bother about me; I can always get on with children.'

Mr. Austin was allowed, after some perfunctory protests, to employ himself as he pleased, and when, about two hours later, he again met his hostess, she ingenuously told him what a pleasing contrast he presented to his predecessor.

'One can't expect provincial doctors to be gentlemen, you know,' said she, 'and of course it is a great piece of good luck to chance upon one who is. Especially if he is a good doctor into the bargain—as I am sure you are. It is such a bore to have to deal with people who think they oughtn't to mention one's inside without apologising, isn't it?'

'If I had anything wrong with my inside, I should prefer a good doctor to a gentleman,' remarked Matthew; but Mrs. Frere did not hear him.

'I remember your father quite well,' she went on; 'I used often to meet him at parties in the days of our prosperity, when we had a London house. Now we are so dreadfully short of money that even a month of the season in an hotel or lodgings can't be thought of—which is unfortunate on poor, dear Anne's account. Personally, I can't say that I so very much mind being poor. I am quite contented to stay at home and look after the garden; though I do wish George could spare me a little more to spend upon bulbs. Didn't somebody tell me that you were a great gardener? That is delightful; because it provides one with a subject, and really in these parts there is nothing, as a rule, to talk about, except one's neighbours.'

If Mrs. Frere was given to talking about her neighbours, she certainly was not given to speaking ill of them, nor had she ever been known to be at a loss for subjects of conversation. She prattled on after Matthew had led her into the spacious, dimly-lighted dining-room, wandering from one topic to another and paying little heed to his replies, while he amused himself with mental notes upon the remaining members of the small party. The tall, handsome young fellow who had been introduced to him as 'our boy Harry' and who was about to join his regiment in India; Dick, a curly-headed lad of sixteen or thereabouts, who would shortly be returning to Eton; Anne, whose flawless complexion and white shoulders were set off to advantage, he noticed, by the low-cut black dress that she wore—all these kept up a ceaseless flow of chatter which neither interrupted nor was interrupted by their mother's placid monologue.

'Nice, simple, happy sort of people,' Matthew thought; 'all except the girl, who seems more complicated and less happy. I must try to have a talk with her afterwards and find out more about her.'

The bachelors who dwelt within reach of Hayes Park could have told him that it was not so easy to arrive at a comprehension of Miss Frere, most of them having tried their hands at her, and having ended by pronouncing her too stiff and 'stand-off' to merit continued exertions. There was very little stiffness, however, in her manner towards Mr. Austin, whom she addressed several times across the table and whose previous unintentional familiarity she seemed to have forgotten or forgiven.

'What did you do to Maggie after you turned nurse and me out of the room?' she asked. 'I went to see her just before dinner and she said you had only been playing dominoes with her; but I can hardly believe that a game of dominoes will cure a sore throat.'

'It won't do that,' answered Matthew, 'but it will sometimes act as a febrifuge. Besides, we were talking, as well as playing.'

'I should rather think you were!' remarked Dick, with a chuckle. 'If ever there lived a girl who could talk the hind leg off a donkey, that girl is Maggie.'

'Ah, but she won't talk to everybody, and she has been quiet enough all day, poor child,' Miss Frere said. 'Yet Mr. Austin rebuked me just now for treating him, as he said, like a medicine-man. Why, that is exactly what he is! Aren't medicine-men supposed to work cures without much help from medicine, and don't they work upon the minds rather than the bodies of their patients?'

'And no fools they!' cried Mr. Frere. 'Give me a doctor who will cheer me up and tell me I shall be all right in a day or two. How the dickens can I be expected to get well when a fellow shakes his head over me and says a mild attack of gout generally lasts for a month or six weeks? The very next time that I feel a premonitory twinge, I shall send off post-haste for the medicine-man, I can tell you!'

Thus it was that Matthew Austin obtained a nickname which clung to him and was eventually used by many persons who knew nothing of the time and place of its origin. At the moment he scarcely noticed it, but remarked, laughing: 'Now, doesn't this show how impossible it is to please everybody? You seem inclined to praise me for adopting the very system which my gardener solemnly warned me, this afternoon, would be my ruin if I persisted in it. His notion is that drugs may not be of much use, but that human nature is so constituted that no sick person will consent to be cured without them—and I am by no means sure that he is wrong.'

'Then,' observed Miss Frere, 'your gardener means just what you mean. All the same, I am glad you took his advice and wrote a prescription for Maggie. Credulous as I am, I do feel more comfortable with a few outward and visible aids to faith.'

Well, at any rate, Mr. Austin's method of treatment proved effectual, whether he was indebted to his prescription or not, and when he drove home by moonlight, he had the double satisfaction of reflecting that he had left his patient sound asleep and had added to the list of his friends. Both Mr. and Mrs. Frere had expressed in warm terms their gratitude, as well as the pleasure that it had given them to make his acquaintance at last; the boys had made him promise to go out rabbit-shooting with them some day, and he had undertaken to fulfil the dearest wish of Maggie's heart by procuring a dormouse for her. However, he had not succeeded in making any fresh discoveries about Anne, who had retired to her sister's room immediately after dinner, and had only reappeared to say good-night. The curiosity that he felt respecting her might in the case of any other man have been the prelude to tenderer emotions; but Matthew was not of an amorous temperament.

'Perhaps,' said he to himself, as he grazed the gate-post on turning out into the high road, 'it is only a tendency towards anæmia after all.'

CHAPTER III.

IN MRS. FRERE'S GARDEN.

As had been anticipated, Maggie's illness proved to be a comparatively trifling affair; still it was necessary to keep watch over her for a few days, lest more serious developments should arise out of it, and for a few days, therefore, Matthew was able with a clear conscience to pay that morning visit to Hayes Park which his patient implored him on no account to omit. She had fallen in love with him, as his patients invariably did, and insisted upon his remaining with her for a good hour on each occasion, during which time she monopolised nearly the whole of the conversation, only pausing, every now and again, to listen to his instructions as to the care of the dormouse which he had not forgotten to purchase for her.

Sometimes these interviews were interrupted by the entrance of other members of the family, whose loquacity was at least equal to that of its youngest scion; sometimes also Miss Frere, the sole exception in that respect to the general rule, would look in to protest against such ruthless frittering away of a professional man's precious moments; but Matthew always declared that he had nothing particular to do, while Maggie averred that he was there by his own free will and pleasure. 'He likes it, Anne. He says he likes it, and he wouldn't say he did if he didn't, because that would be a fib, you know.' Which seemed unanswerable.

But a day came when common honesty compelled Miss Maggie's medical attendant to announce that he must take leave of her in his professional capacity. Her governess, who had been absent on a holiday, had returned, and he felt bound to certify that she was in a fit state to resume her studies. This communication, which was very ill-received upstairs, was not welcomed even in the drawing-room.

'Oh, *how* tiresome of you!' Mrs. Frere exclaimed. 'And all this time you have been so taken up with Maggie that I have never managed to show you my garden. You haven't been out rabbiting with the boys either; but I suppose we mustn't be too exacting. Does this mean that we are to see no more of you until one of us contrives to fall ill?'

'Oh, I hope not,' answered Matthew, laughing. 'I am such a wretched shot that I think I had better leave the rabbits to your sons; but I should like very much to see the garden some afternoon, if you will let me.'

'Then—let me see—could you come over and lunch on Saturday? Poor Harry has to sail from Portsmouth on Thursday, and Dick goes back to school the next day; so we shall all be feeling very lonely and miserable, and it would be kind of you to look in upon us and cheer us up. Mr. Frere will be very cross, I am afraid; but you mustn't mind him. As for Anne, she will be weeping into her plate and drying her eyes with her napkin, poor thing, as she always does when her brothers have to leave her. At my time of life,' added Mrs. Frere, with a comfortable sort of sigh, 'one learns to look out for consolations. The garden is one, and you, if you are good-natured, will be another.'

So Matthew was good-natured, and when he reached Hayes Park on the appointed day, he found the reduced party somewhat less dismal than he had been led to expect. The head of the house, to be sure, was a trifle choleric and fell foul of the servants upon small provocation; but Anne shed no tears in public, nor did she fail to put in an occasional remark as often as her mother allowed her a chance of so doing. However, she retired immediately on the conclusion of the meal, after which Mrs. Frere, taking up an old straw hat and a sunshade, said:

'Now light your cigar and prepare yourself to make any amiable speeches that you can about a semi-wilderness. Once upon a time we used to pride ourselves upon our lawns and shrubs, not to speak of our flowers; but what can one do with only four men to attend to everything? George dear, I don't think we will take you; you are so depressing with your lamentations. Besides,' she added, turning to her guest, without lowering her voice, 'I never like him to see the conservatories, if I can help it, because he at once begins to talk about cutting down expenses, and, even as it is, I have had to abandon orchids altogether.'

'Stuff and nonsense!' cried Mr. Frere; 'you gave up orchids because your fool of a gardener couldn't grow 'em; don't make me responsible for things that I've nothing to do with. I couldn't have induced you to relinquish a single exotic—or a double one either, for the matter of that—if I had tried.'

'Yes, dear, do go out for a ride,' returned his wife placidly; 'I am sure Mr. Austin will excuse you. You can have the cob, now that the boys are gone, and a good shaking-up will put you into better spirits.'

It was true enough that four men did not suffice to keep the lawns and alleys and borders round about Hayes Park in trim; still Matthew's cry of surprise and admiration, after he had followed his hostess to the broad terrace on the south side of the house, was perfectly sincere. Beyond the lichen-grown stone parapet upon which he dropped his elbows stretched long expanses and vistas of the smoothest turf, bordered by old-fashioned clipped yews; advanced as the season was, the beds were still gay with begonias, asters, zinnias and dahlias; arches covered with climbing roses displayed plenty of late blooms, and in the far distance, through an opening in the trees, could be discerned the faint blue cloud of smoke which hung over Wilverton.

'Upon my word,' he exclaimed, 'I don't think you have much to complain of!'

'It *is* pretty, isn't it?' said Mrs. Frere, in a tone of quiet satisfaction. 'Nothing can quite spoil the dear old place, though there are a hundred and fifty things which want doing to it, and which perhaps you don't notice, seeing it for the first time. Didn't I hear you accuse me of complaining just now? That was rather hard upon me; because, in spite of everything, I don't think I am very much given that way. Of course one does feel the difference between present times and old times; but, as I always tell George, "what can't be cured must be endured," and it is worse for the young people than it is for us.'

In her leisurely, unceasing way, she continued to dilate upon the discomforts of a falling income while she conducted her hearer through the conservatories and stovehouses, which seemed to be tolerably well furnished, notwithstanding hard times. Harry, who, in the natural course of things, would have held a commission in the Guards until he married, was compelled to go off on foreign service in a line regiment, and must not dream of marrying, unless perchance he should fall in with some wandering heiress; what was to become of Dick Mrs. Frere could not imagine; but he would certainly have to earn his own living some day, and in the meantime, there would be the heavy cost of his school and college education to defray. 'Besides which, one must expect him to run up a few bills, poor boy, like other people.'

She talked about her domestic affairs as frankly and naturally as a child talks about its toys, and with an equal confidence that what interested her would interest her companion.

'Well, then there is Anne, you know,' she went on. 'Anne is very good about it and says she doesn't care; but one really feels that it is rather too bad to deny her the amusements and opportunities that other girls have. Of course she has been presented and has gone through a scrap of a season; but there, unfortunately, it has had to end. My married daughter, Lady Arvagh, would be willing to take her out; only they themselves have no London house, and as poor Lord Arvagh is an Irish landlord and Kate is a good deal occupied, what with having continual babies and one thing and another, they aren't much use. Well, one can but hope that somebody may eventually turn up. People do sometimes turn up in the country, and, now that I come to think of it, it was at a country house that I first met George.'

Matthew was upon the point of inquiring whether there was no young man in the neighbourhood whom Miss Anne might possibly be induced to regard with favour when he was preserved from putting what, as he subsequently reflected, would have been an indiscreet question by the advent of Mr. Frere, who came bustling out of the house to say:

'My dear, Mrs. Jennings has called, and they have let her in. I can't face the woman alone; but I must see her, or she'll think I'm frightened of her. Come along, and let us get the interview over. What idiots these servants are! Not but what they do it on purpose, I believe!'

'Oh, it can't be helped,' Mrs. Frere responded tranquilly. 'Mrs. Jennings is a sensible sort of woman, and if I tell her that we found it necessary to make a change, she will understand. After all, she must know what a stupid old thing her husband is.'

'And in case she shouldn't, you will tell her, I suppose? Oh, you are capable of it, my dear; I have heard you say worse things than that before now. And then you can't make out why people are so ready to take offence!'

'Now, George, was it you or I who vowed that Dr. Jennings should never write another prescription under your roof?'

The couple moved away towards the house, wrangling amicably as they went, and entirely oblivious of the circumstance that they had left Dr. Jennings's supplanter to take care of himself. It was their habit to dispute together in this way, each deeming the other to be nothing but a grown-up child, and neither being very far wrong in that estimate; but their mutual affection had increased rather than diminished during some thirty years of married life, and if Mrs. Frere believed in her heart that 'George' could do no wrong, it is certain that her wishes had far more weight with the testy old gentleman than those of all the rest of the family put together. Perhaps that was one reason why scarcely as much had been done for the rest of the family as might have been done.

Matthew gazed after them, laughing softly and mentally thanking his stars that he had not been invited to take part in the forthcoming encounter with Mrs. Jennings, an ill-tempered, gossiping old woman, with whom he had hitherto only managed to maintain relations of amity by dint of sedulously keeping out of her way. 'She will assuredly hate me now,' he mused, 'for these are the first patients whom I have actually filched from her husband. I don't suppose she can do me very much harm, though.'

He did not in the least mind being left to his own devices, and soon became so absorbed in the scrutiny of sundry carefully shielded shrubs which were seldom to be met with in that part of England that he did not hear a light footfall upon the grass behind him. He turned round, with a start, when Anne's voice said, close to his ear:

'I came out to apologise for my unceremonious parents. I fled upstairs as soon as I was told that Mrs. Jennings was in the drawing-room, and from an upper window I saw them coolly turn their backs upon you. If you want to go away, please don't think it your duty to wait and say good-bye to them. I will make your excuses.'

Most men, on being thus addressed, would have felt bound to say or hint that Mr. and Mrs. Frere had been admirably replaced; but Matthew Austin thought it quite enough to reply simply and honestly: 'Oh, I'm in no hurry, thanks; I could amuse myself for hours in a garden like this. I wonder how your gardener manages to grow such fine escallonias out in the open: surely that is very unusual in these parts, isn't it?'

'I'm afraid I can't tell you,' Miss Frere answered. 'I am very fond of flowers; but I know hardly anything about them and still less about trees and shrubs. You are a learned botanist, aren't you?'

'No; only a learner. Gardening is one of the hobbies that one takes up as one gets on in life and when other things fail. At your age one naturally prefers the other things.'

'What other things?' the girl inquired.

'Your mother says you are very unselfish about it; still it *is* hard lines—of course it must be. Personally, I have never seen anything of fashionable life, nor ever wished for it; but I can quite understand that to be cut off from that sort of thing may be as great a deprivation to some people as it would be to me to be deprived of—well, of flowers or tobacco.'

'I shouldn't have thought that I looked very much like one of those people. Anyhow, I am not one of them. If I had no worse trouble than being obliged to stay at home from year's end to year's end, I should have little enough to complain of!'

Unconventional though he was apt to be, Matthew did not like to ask her point-blank what her troubles were; but after they had strolled silently across the sward for a few yards, he remarked: 'There is a sovereign remedy for every trouble under the sun.'

'And that is?'

'To forget it. Of course I don't dare to offer this as a prescription; my patients would set me down as a most unfeeling brute if I were to do that. But sometimes I manage to force it upon them without their knowledge, and often Nature forces it upon them. If it were not so, the average duration of life would be shortened to an extent which would quite bewilder the compilers of statistics.'

'Ah, you are talking of troubles that can't be mended. I dare say it is possible to forget for a few hours that one has a mortal disease, and the loss of someone whom one has loved is evidently a sorrow which can be forgotten in time. But while there is life there is hope, and while there is hope there is sure to be unhappiness. You may induce your patients to forget that they are dying, but you don't very often induce their husbands or wives to forget it, do you?'

'Not very often, perhaps; still the thing is to be done. It is a question of having plenty of necessary work to do. The poor are better off than the rich in that respect.' He added, after a pause, 'I should think you would be fairly well provided with occupations?'

'Oh, yes; I do all the housekeeping now, and during the holidays there is Maggie to be looked after, besides which, I have the usual routine of parish visiting and so on. All that doesn't prevent——' But here she checked herself and laughed. 'One would think that I was seriously consulting you!' she exclaimed. 'I only wanted to point out that your remedy won't suit every case; I didn't mean to imply that I myself was suffering from some dire affliction.'

'Nevertheless, that was what you did imply,' Matthew observed, smiling.

'Did I really? Well then, if you will promise not to tell anybody, I will confess what is the matter. I can't afford to employ a London dressmaker; I can't get a Wilverton dressmaker to fit me; and not for one moment can I forget that I carry about with me creases and wrinkles where there ought to be none. Good gracious! here comes that dreadful old Mrs. Jennings. Heaven be praised! she is short-sighted, and she hasn't seen me yet. I must fly before she does. Good-bye.'

Thereupon Miss Frere promptly vanished behind one of the tall yew hedges, leaving Matthew with a slight sense of having been unjustly snubbed. Surely the girl might have understood that he had not been intentionally impertinent!

However, he had to postpone further reflections upon that subject; for now Mrs. Frere joined him, accompanied by her unwelcome visitor, of whom she was obviously longing to get rid, and—'Oh, Mr. Austin,' said she, 'Mrs. Jennings very kindly offers to give you a lift home. I heard that you had sent your dog-cart away, and I am sure you will be glad to be saved that long walk.'

'Not at all, I assure you! I enjoy a walk,' Matthew was beginning eagerly; but Mrs. Frere made a grimace of such piteous entreaty at him that he perceived what was required of him and ended his sentence with a murmur of thanks to the other lady, adding that they ought to start at once, as the evening dews were now so heavy.

Shortly afterwards he was being driven swiftly across the park in the smart victoria which was a symbol of Dr. Jennings's lucrative practice, while the whispered speech with which Mrs. Frere had taken leave of him still rang in his ears.

'*So* good of you to take her away! And it's just as well that you should be seen with her, you know—shows there is no ill feeling.'

There was plenty of ill-feeling on the part of Mrs. Jennings, a stout, elderly woman, with a face and figure much resembling those which frequently adorn the bows of coasting brigs; but she endeavoured to conceal it and, instead of vilifying the Freres, spoke warmly, if a trifle patronisingly, in their praise.

'Such thoroughly good, worthy people! I am really very fond of Mrs. Frere and always make a point of going to see her as often as I can. But of course I have so many visits to pay! However, as I was saying to her just now, I am determined not to let her drop.'

Mrs. Jennings had said no such thing, and would never have been so foolish as to say it. In the neighbourhood of watering-places like Wilverton 'county people' stand in much the same relation to town residents as royal personages do to the dwellers in Mayfair and Belgravia; so that, although spiteful things may be said of them behind their backs, it would be a sad mistake to be guilty of an impertinence to their faces. The backs of the Frere family being now safely turned to Mrs. Jennings, she proceeded to descant compassionately upon their fallen grandeur.

'I should be very sorry to lose them; still I can't help feeling that it would be almost better if they were to let the place and go away. You see, it isn't only the mortification of having to live as they do now, but there is that shocking scandal about the eldest son, which they must be perpetually reminded of while they remain at home.'

Matthew being resolved to die rather than make any inquiry as to the alleged scandal, she was obliged to tell him what it was, without having been asked. Spencer Frere, it seemed, had done something quite awful. It might have been forgery or it might have been embezzlement—Mrs. Jennings could not say for certain—but, at any rate, he had cost his father immense sums of money, and at last the old man, in a violent fit of passion, had turned him adrift. 'What has become of him nobody knows. He may be in the workhouse, and I should think very likely he is. Isn't it dreadful?'

'If he had been guilty of forgery or embezzlement he would be in prison, would he not?' Matthew asked.

'Well, if he had been *proved* guilty, I suppose he would; but no doubt such things can be hushed up. Of course one makes every allowance for the poor old man; still I can't help rejoicing for my husband's sake—though I am sorry for yours—that he has chosen you as his future medical adviser. Often and often Dr. Jennings has come home and said to me, "Really, Jane, I don't think I ought to put up any longer with Mr. Frere's insulting language;" but I have always begged him to go on and take no notice. Who wouldn't be soured by such experiences! Not that I should like the feeling of having turned a son of mine away to starve, whatever his offence might have been; but, as I say, one *must* make allowances. I do trust that poor Anne may yet marry well, and they have certainly done their very best for her; only she has such an unfortunate manner that it all seems to be no use.'

Mrs. Jennings had some equally amiable things to say about each remaining member of the family; but she spoke to a somewhat inattentive auditor. There are certain things which certain people are always sure to say, and Matthew, the physiognomist, having already formed a diagnosis of his companion's nature, was not much affected, one way or the other, by symptoms which only pointed to the existence of a mental condition neither novel nor interesting.

CHAPTER IV.

AT WILVERTON HORSE SHOW.

It so happened that for three or four weeks in succession Matthew Austin saw nothing more of the Freres. He did, it is true, during that interval, receive several friendly notes from Hayes Park, one of which contained a request from Mrs. Frere that she might be allowed to see his flowers; but he was unable to be at home on the afternoon that she named, and Bush was deputed to do the honours in his absence. This was a task willingly undertaken by Mr. Bush, who obtained the consequent gratuity that he had anticipated, and who took an early opportunity of telling his master what a nice lady Mrs. Frere was.

'What I call one o' the hold sort, sir, and very glad I am as you should have a few patients among the real gentry. 'Ard work I don't say nothin' against, and I can do as 'ard a day's work myself as here and there a one, though I say it. But the labourer is worthy of his 'ire, whether 'tis a pore thirty shillin' a week or more like thirty pound—same as that there old Jennings makes during the winter time, they tell me—and 'twon't do you no manner of 'arm to be known as Mr. Frere's medical man, sir, you may depend.'

'Well, I hope it won't,' answered Matthew. 'Did Mrs. Frere come alone?'

'She did, sir, and stop a long time, haskin' about this and that. Not that I begrudged it to her; for 'tis reelly a pleasure to talk to a lady as knows enough to set a proper value upon good gardenin'.'

Well, there was no occasion to feel disappointed because Miss Frere had not seen fit to accompany her mother; nor in truth was Matthew's disappointment more than momentary. He had other matters to occupy his thoughts than the study of a young woman who was something of a mystery to him, and an outbreak of low fever in the overcrowded slums of the town had latterly furnished him with as much as he could manage of that hard work upon which his gardener had bestowed a conditional approval. Nevertheless, it was not without some half-acknowledged hope of encountering Anne that he betook himself, one afternoon, to the Wilverton Autumn Horse Show, where, as he had learnt from the handbills, George Frere, Esq., D.L. and J.P., was to act as one of the judges. He had, to be sure, a more plausible excuse, inasmuch as he thought it might be necessary for him to purchase a second horse, and it was just as well to see what class of animal was likely to come into the market.

He saw various classes of animals unsuited to his purpose; he also saw a vast concourse of people, witnessed a pretty display of jumping, and recognised, in the ring beneath him, the broad back and the leather leggings of Mr. Frere; but he did not recognise anybody else, and he was already thinking about going home when he was accosted by a tall, fair-haired lady in a mackintosh (for the weather was showery and chilly), who said:

'Please don't cut me, Mr. Austin. If it is too much trouble to come and see us when you are asked, you might at least be equal to the effort of taking off your hat after you have been persistently bowed to at intervals for the last ten minutes.'

'I beg your pardon most humbly,' answered Matthew, with his hat in his hand; 'I suppose it was because I was looking out for you so anxiously that I looked everywhere except in the right direction. It hasn't been any fault of mine, I can assure you, that I have been obliged to decline your mother's kind invitations. I have had my hands full ever since the day when I lunched with you, and this is the very first holiday I have allowed myself. Indeed, I am here more or less on business; for I rather want to buy another horse. Do you, by any chance, know a sound horse when you see one?—because I don't.'

Miss Frere shook her head. 'I am afraid I can't be of much assistance to you; still I am acquainted with a good many of the horses here by reputation. Shall I walk round with you and point out the notoriously unsound ones?'

Matthew at once closed with this obliging offer, wondering a little why it had been made; but upon that point Miss Frere hastened to enlighten him, in a manner more truthful than flattering.

'It was one word for you and two for myself,' she interrupted his expressions of gratitude by saying. 'I drove over with my father, who has left me to be taken care of by a number of horsey ladies. Hereabouts everybody becomes overpoweringly horsey in the autumn, and as I am not, I can't talk to them, nor they to me. I will tell Maggie that you have been too busy to remember where Hayes Park is; but I am not sure that she will accept the excuse. At present she sets you down as a fair-weather—or rather a foul-weather—friend, and she talks of falling ill again, since that seems to be the only means of attracting you.'

'I am glad to be spoken of as a friend of any description,' Matthew declared. 'You didn't treat me very much like a friend the last time that I saw you.'

To this leading remark Miss Frere made no immediate reply. They had reached the sheds beneath which some of the horses were standing, and she was able to give him certain information respecting a few of them which rendered negotiations with their owners superfluous. Moreover, while thus employed, she was accosted by various gentlemen of various ages who evidently represented the squirearchy of the neighbourhood and to whom, as it seemed to Matthew, she was barely civil. But when they moved once more towards the ring, where a competition was just then going on, she reverted abruptly to the previous subject.

'I am sorry if I was rude,' said she; 'I didn't mean to be; but I can't help it when I am shy, and I almost always do feel shy.'

Anybody else would have protested that Miss Frere showed no symptoms of suffering from that foolish malady; but Matthew only remarked consideringly: 'Yes, I suppose so; yours would be the sort of temperament that is permanently and constitutionally shy. Was it shyness that made you snub all those men who spoke to you just now, or do you dislike them?'

'I didn't know I had snubbed them. I don't dislike them in the least; but I have nothing to say to them, and I know they only speak to me out of politeness. You, and one or two others, are quite different; when you talk to people you make them feel as if you were really rather interested in them; and then you never attempt to suit your conversation to your company—which is an immense encouragement.'

'An encouragement to whom or to what?' Matthew inquired.

'Oh, I was only trying to explain. But, after all, one can't very well explain, and it doesn't signify. Please don't imagine again that I intend to be rude to you, though.'

'All I imagined was that I had been rather rude—or at all events inquisitive—and that you thought it advisable to give me a gentle hint to that effect. I wasn't much mistaken, was I?'

There is a time and a place for everything, and the place to put embarrassing questions is assuredly not the narrow entrance to a ring, while a passage is being with difficulty forced through the crowd for a string of high-spirited hunters. Miss Frere, meditating upon her companion's query and the terms in which she should answer it, did not use her eyes as she ought to have done, and was consequently within an inch or two of being then and there put to eternal silence. Matthew was only just in time to throw his arms round her and pull her violently back. She saw the flash of the iron shoe that whizzed close past her head; she heard that curious gasping groan from the bystanders which is always heard when a horse lashes out in a crowd; she was conscious of a general and precipitate movement of retreat which nearly swept her off her feet; but she was not frightened, and as soon as Matthew had relaxed his grasp of her she merely observed, smiling:

'That was a rather near thing, wasn't it?'

Matthew, for his part, had turned white to the lips. 'It was indeed!' he exclaimed. And then: 'What nerve you have!'

'Well, the danger was over before I knew anything about it, you see. There wasn't time to indulge in hysterics.'

'Oh, of course not; but what I mean is that you are as calm and cool as possible now; most women would have been shaking all over. Because I presume you realise that, if that brute had caught you on the head, you would never have moved again.'

'Yes; and I don't exactly want to die,' answered the girl musingly. 'Though I often think that I don't particularly care about living either. It doesn't seem as if there was much use in it.'

'Oh, this won't do at all!' said Matthew; 'you are altogether out of sorts, or you wouldn't talk such nonsense. Now, look here, Miss Frere; you have virtually told me already that something is the matter; will you be kind enough to treat me as a physician and tell me what it is? You will understand that I don't ask out of mere curiosity. I think I can see that you want to tell somebody, and I think it is more than likely that you will feel the better for having done so.'

The girl smiled. 'Well, you are quite right; I did want to tell you,' she answered. 'It is no secret either; for I am sure you cannot have driven all the way into Wilverton with Mrs. Jennings and remained in ignorance of it. Not that she knows everything.'

It soon appeared that Mrs. Jennings, so far from knowing everything, had been quite mistaken as to the main facts. Spencer Frere had been guilty of no offence so heinous or so unpardonable as that of forgery; but, on the other hand, there was little likelihood, his sister feared, that he would ever be pardoned. What he had done had been to incur heavy debts, the defrayal of which had seriously crippled his father's resources; and, in addition to that, he had behaved rather badly to various friends of his, from whom he had at different times borrowed large sums of money. It was this latter delinquency which had brought about a final breach between him and his choleric parent. He had not confessed to it; the truth had only leaked out by degrees; there had been great difficulty in ascertaining the actual amount of his obligations and still greater difficulty in inducing his creditors to accept their due. Moreover, Spencer, when upbraided for his dishonourable conduct, had neither expressed nor, apparently, felt the slightest remorse. He had made light of the whole matter, declaring that other fellows had only done for him what he would have done for them, had their positions been reversed.

'And so,' concluded Anne, 'it ended, as I always foresaw that it would end, in his being turned adrift and told never to show his face at Hayes Park again. It sounds cruel; but without knowing Spencer you can hardly understand what provocation my father had. I don't think it was saying too much to say that he had disgraced himself and disgraced us all.'

'Still some door of repentance may have been left open for him; and I suppose he wasn't sent out to fight his way through the world absolutely penniless?'

'No; not absolutely. But Spencer is one of those people who literally can't help spending any money that they may have in their pockets, and as for doors of repentance—well, I don't know; but I am afraid that he will never try very hard to squeeze through a narrow door so long as he can keep body and soul together in liberty outside.'

'And what has become of him?'

Anne glanced at her interlocutor and hesitated. 'I ought to have mentioned,' said she, 'that we were all strictly forbidden to hold any communication with him.'

Matthew drew his own conclusions, but was discreet enough to refrain from giving utterance to them. He merely remarked: 'I see now what you meant by incurable troubles, and I must admit that my panacea does not apply quite as well to this one as to most. I suppose you are very fond of your brother?'

'Yes; he is the one nearest to me in age, and we were always together as children. Besides he isn't really as bad as they think. It was always his way to make himself out worse than he really was—I don't know why.'

'Well,' said Matthew, 'I see no reason in the world why everything shouldn't come right with time and patience. From what you tell me, I should say that your brother stood somewhat in need of a sharp lesson, and I doubt whether your father is anything like as stern and inexorable as mine was.'

He narrated the story of his own family quarrel, to which Anne listened with a melancholy smile.

'The only difference between the two cases,' she remarked, 'is that you are you and that Spencer is Spencer. Of course there is the further detail of your having been in the right, while Spencer was in the wrong; but that doesn't affect the question of pardon much. It isn't that my father is inexorable, but that he can't afford to be ruined, and he is justified in saying that he can't trust Spencer. If a reconciliation could be arranged to-morrow, it would be the same old story over again. That is why I have only just enough of hope left to make me thoroughly miserable.'

'Would you be less miserable if you had none?'

'Perhaps. My mother, I am sure, has none, and she is resigned. As you were saying the other day, a time comes when one ceases to mourn for one's dead.'

'Don't be bitter about it,' said Matthew, answering her thought rather than her words. 'You have one kind of temperament, your mother has another and your father has a third. We are what we are—all of us—and we didn't make ourselves.'

'I am not bitter,' the girl declared; 'I don't blame them. Only it is rather hard never to be allowed even to mention Spencer's name to anybody.'

'You can mention him to me as often as you like. I haven't much comfort to offer you, beyond the customary commonplaces, but I know what a relief it is to be able to talk about one's troubles and anxieties.'

It might have struck him as somewhat strange that she should select a comparative stranger for her confidant, had he been less habituated to receiving confidences; but from the days of his boyhood people had let him into their secrets, knowing instinctively that he was both safe and sympathetic.

'What do you mean by the customary commonplaces?' Anne asked. 'Do you mean that there is nothing to be done but to trust to time and the chapter of accidents?'

'Is there anything else to be done? You haven't told me where your brother is or what he is doing.'

She looked down, drilling holes in the moist earth with the point of her umbrella. Perhaps she would have given him the information that he required if their interview had been protracted for a few more minutes; but before she could make up her mind to speak, Mr. Frere bustled up, saying:

'Now, Anne, if you're ready, we may as well be off. They tell me I shan't be wanted after this, and I don't want to get a chill, driving home, and be laid up for six weeks. Well, Austin, what have you been doing with yourself all this long time? I can't say I've been anxious to see you professionally—though I expect I shall have to say so before I'm much older—but you might have looked us up in a non-professional way. I hope my daughter has been scolding you.'

He hurried away, without waiting for a reply, and took his daughter with him, while Matthew bent his steps homewards, forgetful of the harness-horses that he had intended to inspect. Matthew, as has already been mentioned, was not susceptible, nor did it occur to him to draw inferences which many a man would have drawn from the compliment just paid to him by Miss Frere. Nevertheless, it is probable that he was at that moment not very far from falling in love for the first time in his active, dreamy, speculative life, and the probability is not lessened by the circumstance that all he said to himself was: 'I must try and find time to see that girl again soon. She has got into a morbid condition which paves the way for all manner of diseases.'

(*To be continued.*)

IN A COUNTRY OMNIBUS.

One day last summer, during a brief sojourn by the banks of the Manifold river, I made an excursion to a neighbouring market town in the omnibus that carries the country folk weekly thither.

Railways have not penetrated into this interesting and beautiful corner of Staffordshire, and the only public means of communication with the outside world is still, as of old, this market omnibus. Every Wednesday morning about twenty of the village folk assemble, and, taking no account of the twelve rough miles of moorland road, or, if it be winter-time, of the fiercely inhospitable climate of this hilly region, repair with their dairy produce, to stand with it in the market square in a fashion that reminds a traveller of like scenes in some of the smaller towns of Brittany.

Although the behaviour of these rural folk towards strangers is not flattering, all distrust vanishes as soon as one enters the rough and roomy omnibus. There you are cordially welcomed as one of themselves, one who has not the means of travelling more expeditiously, and there also you are afforded an excellent opportunity—there are few places more favourable for the purpose—of studying the every-day life and distinctive characteristics of the dwellers among these bare limestone hills, wooded dales, and grey tracts of moorland.

The vehicle is one of those structures that are more useful than beautiful. Two small panes of glass, high up on either side, let what little light there is into what is more like a huge packing-case on wheels than any known form of conveyance, and the stern simplicity of the whole is enhanced by a thick coating of very ordinary-looking mud.

At 8.30 a.m. a great bustle begins in the carrier's yard, attended with much shouting, expressed in every variety of vocal key, from intending passengers and those hangers-on who are always to be found in the vicinity of stables The business of stowing away parcels of every size, shape, and description in the interior proceeds briskly under the able superintendence of the carrier's wife. The carrier himself goes aloft, dragging after him a great coil of rope, to set about fastening the numerous baskets of live-stock which are piled upon the roof. This he does with as much ado as if he were upon a vessel's deck, making all taut for the night because the glass is going down and it looks dirty to windward. At length, all being secured, he stands up upon the heap, exactly like a cock about to crow, and bawling out 'Oi shanna be long first,' immediately climbs down into his seat, seizes the reins, gives them several violent tugs, which nearly saw the horses' heads in two, drops the whip smartly over their backs, and we slowly move away to a noisy accompaniment from the throats of lamenting sucking-pigs, geese, ducks, cocks, and hens which seem to know quite well that they are starting off on a journey that promises to have anything but a pleasant termination for them.

The road is heavy, and the horses toil along, dragging the creaking old conveyance after them, in an irksome, jog-trot sort of way. Frequently we stop to pick up passengers. Invariably these are laden with a basket of eggs upon one arm, and of butter upon the other. As each one enters, he or she says, 'What's it for?' meaning what sort of weather may be expected. No one, however, being venturesome enough to hazard an opinion on this point—and I have lived long enough in the country to understand their prudence in this respect—no good comes of the remark and the questioner subsides into silence. Nothing could exceed the regularity with which these stoppages are made, unless it were the extraordinary manner in which the cumbersome old vehicle is able to distend its groaning interior so as to accommodate each new-comer.

The carrier's wife, a human pillar-box, sits next the door, and has all sorts of messages thrust into her. It is truly astonishing the number and variety of commissions this woman undertakes—and, it is evident from the confidence that is placed in her, which she faithfully executes—without making other than mental notes of the same. For example: We pull up and a little girl approaches. Climbing the steps, she peers in, and, holding up a tiny piece of cretonne, says all in a breath, 'Please, mother says will ye get two yards o' stuff o' that sort, on'y yallerer, like a marigowd; and please, fayther says will ye tell Mester Biggins that he canna keep th' tit any longer for t' farm is bare as a goose-green; an' please, mother says will ye tell t' doctor that t' child's tooken what he sent an' he's been skriking all t' night?' No words can describe the gravity with which the woman received this message, nor the solemnity with which these communications are noted by the company generally.

Haymaking is in progress, and, as we journey forward, I discover that all the fields by which we pass are known to the passengers by name, and that they speak of their productive qualities in much the same way as we would discuss the abilities of our friends. Suddenly we come to a stand-still, and the carrier calls out in tones of infinite surprise, 'By gommy! if Cow Close ain't being laid afore Hogs' Meadow!' The effect of these words is magical. Instantly the inside of the vehicle becomes like a disturbed ant-hill. Some crick their necks in endeavouring to peer sideways out of the little windows, while others scramble to the ground and run hither and thither in a confused way. Heretofore, it appears, it has been the unswerving custom to mow Hogs' Meadow before Cow Close, and now this time-honoured order is being reversed. The farmer is hailed to the side of the omnibus and sharply interrogated upon the subject. But he cannot—or, at all events, he does not—satisfy the common curiosity. He seems very proud, though, of the notice he has drawn upon himself, and stands there, with a smug smile of satisfaction on his stupid face, as if he had achieved great things; and from the look there is in his eye one infers that he is contemplating, in the year to come, adding still further to his newly acquired renown, possibly by mowing both fields together, or doing something equally novel and daring.

There is a woman among us who is the fussiest creature that one can possibly imagine, so full is she of her own, or rather her daughter's, concerns. She is so artless, this bright little body, in confiding the joyous news which is stirring in her maternal bosom—first to each of us separately, and afterwards to the company collectively—that it is next to impossible not to enter into the spirit of it all with a zest little inferior to her own. It seems that her daughter, who is in service with some lady at Buxton, has for years been keeping company with one 'Tom.' At length the lovers have decided to face the cares of the world as man and wife. The anxiety the mother evinces for all that has to do with their future welfare is very pretty to see. This is all the more apparent when someone, who evidently knows how slender their means are, questions the possibility of their being able to furnish a home. For a moment the little woman's joy fades before this practical view of the case. But a second later, almost before we have had time to notice her temporary depression, she is her own bright self again.

'Nay!' she cries, with such a lightness of heart, and such unquestioning faith in the inherent goodness of everything, that we feel it would be a shame to laugh at her foolishness, 't' missis ha' gie 'em a kitchen-cheer; an' Tom, he ha' stuffed a squirrel!'

The next time we stop it is to take up a fat, jovial man of about fifty, who is evidently the pet of the district, and who also seems to have a thoroughly good opinion of himself. As soon as his full rubicund countenance appears at the door, a broad grin lightens up every face.

'Can ye make room for a big un?' he asks, looking in.

'Ay, coom forward,' replies one of the women; 'but ye mun be nursed.'

'Nay! Ye munna nurse me,' he stammers with a tremendous assumption of concern, 'or thy owd man'll be jealous.'

'He's no cause to be jealous o' thee,' retorts the woman, convulsed with merriment, 'for thou'rt nowt but a greet ignorant fool, and it'll be a good job when thou'rt dead.'

This is considered a prodigiously good bit of fun, and it gives immense delight to everybody. As soon as the fat rogue is seated, he proceeds to cut sly jokes at the expense of everybody, chuckling away to himself all the time from pure exuberance of good humour.

Before long we stop again; but a very different order of being from the bulky humourist is she who now enters—a sour, melancholy woman, completely enveloped in the deepest mourning, and looking as if her blood had turned to gall.

''Tis a lot cowlder this mornin' than it wur,' she says, or rather croaks, as she climbs into the van; after which she groans heavily and then collapses in a corner—a living monument of grief.

She remains, her eyes fixed upon vacancy, sullenly quiet, except when she heaves a great sigh, as if she had some dreadful secret on her mind, of which she could not, for some dread reason, disburden herself.

We jolt and creak along for a space and then stop again. This time a withered old crone, dressed in rags, stumbles up the steps and pushes in a dead rabbit—a creature as draggled and dirty as herself, which is saying a great deal.

'Will ye gi'e that to t' Methody preacher,' she mumbles in a whining voice, 'an' tell un that Oi'm agate wi' touth-ache, an' reduced with nervous ability? An' Oi dare say,' she adds, addressing the company generally, 'some o' ye's heerd tell o' that.'

While the head of tousled wiry grey hair is still at the window our funny man says, 'Ye're none married again, Betty, are ye?'

'Not yet.'

'Ye're ower long. Happen your husband tied ye off marryin' afore he died?'

'Nay!' comes the answer, in all seriousness, as the squalid old dame hobbles away, 'God bless 'im! he didna!'

After all, there was something about the woman's action in giving away what, apparently, she sorely needed that led me, instead of joining in the general burst of laughter which followed, to express some pity for the poor old soul.

'Ugh!' cries a buxom dame near her, 't' Methody preacher 'll be sure to mak' her a present o' summut better back again. Her don't give nothing away for nowt, t' owd creep-'edge! Her don't live on lumpy-tums! her has a place to walk into well furnished—bacon an' cheese an' all; her don't want no sympathy! It's her way, that's all. But Oi canna do wi' it; some road, it disgusses me.'

After an hour of this sort of progress the holding capacity of the omnibus is at length taxed to the uttermost. There are passengers sitting upon one another's knees inside; passengers squatting upon the splash-board outside, with their legs dangling down among the horses' heels; passengers standing on the step at the back; passengers clinging to the iron ladder which mounts to the roof; and passengers upon the roof itself, lying down tightly packed between the boxes. Men, women, sucking-pigs, geese, ducks, cocks, hens, baskets, butter, and eggs, objects animate and inanimate alike, all are indiscriminately huddled together in a space where there is little room for half the number. Never was there such a heap of bewildering confusion. When we jolt into a rut, or go helter-skelter down a rough incline, everybody begins to talk at the top of his or her voice in the hope of being heard above the general hubbub; while the lamentations of the live-stock overhead momentarily increase in vigour, as if they knew full well that they were drawing nearer the fatal market-place. If the scene reminds me of anything in the world, it reminds me of the childish idea I once entertained of what Noah's Ark was like.

Despite this regular jumble there is one passenger who, because of the paleness of his face, which is in such striking contrast to the flushed countenances around him, stands out prominently from them all. He is a tall, even stately, but cruelly emaciated old man. From time to time his steely blue eyes flash with more than a natural light, as if from some bodily pain; though, for the most part, his expression is simply one of deep melancholy.

I am strangely uneasy, without knowing why, in the presence of this grave being, although this feeling evidently is not shared by the rest of the passengers. The spirits of the fat man, in particular, are prodigious, and he sustains an uninterrupted conversation with everybody with the greatest good humour. A deeper sigh than usual, however, coming from the forlorn lady in solemn black, even he, for the nonce, assumes a serious demeanour and respectfully murmurs some words of condolence about the death of her father.

To the unspeakable amazement of everybody, this sympathising address is received by the sorrowing woman with a perfect yell of derision.

'After all t' bother wi' 'im, nursin' on 'im, an' all such like, for him to gi'e me nowt more than t' others,' she cries indignantly. 'Ay! an' Oi 'tended t' 'im despretly. Oi'll gi'e all t' wenches advice t' let t' own folks go, an' they'll get as much as t'others when there's a yed-stone o'er 'em! Ye'll get nowt more by 'tendin' to 'em! They winna pay ye for't when they dee. Ay,' she concludes with a depth of remorseful regret which no language could express, 'but Oi 'tended t' 'im despretly!'

Before we have well recovered from this surprise, another, but one of a very different description, is in store for us. A hen, that was being nursed by a woman sitting near the door, effects its escape from the basket and flutters out into the road. The wildest excitement at once possesses everybody. A halt is called and the youngest and fleetest of the party are despatched in hot pursuit. The woman to whom the bird belongs watches the varying fortunes of the chase with a look of torturing suspense which adds immeasurably to the comic effect of the scene. The muscles of her face tie themselves into all sorts of knots, while her fingers nervously twitch at the folds of her gown. At one time it seems as if the hen will elude pursuit. Thereupon the owner's fortitude gives way. The gathering tears bubble over, and, trickling down her nose, drop, one by one, upon her quivering lips. A situation of greater absurdity, or indeed anything more unspeakably ludicrous, I never witnessed. In the end fortune favours the hunters, and they return breathless, but triumphant. Instantly the woman seizes upon the 'squawking' hen, shakes it in very much the same way as she would a naughty child, and, thrusting it back into the basket, ties the string with as fierce an air as if she had caught the devil, and was fastening him down for ever!

Peace, or as much of it as we could naturally expect under the circumstances, being restored, the wag of the company proceeds to tell an appropriate story about a hen in a hayloft. Just when most interested in the anecdote, a great jolt of the van robs me of its point. However, from the wicked roll there is in the narrator's eye, from the manner in which the elderly ladies dissolve into quaking masses of jelly with silent laughter, and from the way in which a demure young damsel looks down her nose, I am sure that, like the immortal story of the 'Grouse in the Gun-room,' it was a 'good one.' Even the severe party in mourning weeds for the moment forgets her wrongs, and permits the stern lines of her visage to relax into an acid smile of appreciation.

The fat fellow sees this and says in a hoarse whisper, which is distinctly heard by the lady herself—as indeed he intended it should be—'Oi got a grin outen her at last; but it wur a long time afore Oi could draw one.'

At this stage of the proceedings the demure young damsel begins to sniff vigorously and to cast reproachful glances towards a withered, fiery-eyed little man who is smoking tobacco quite unlike that used by Charles Cotton when dwelling in this neighbourhood, which Viator 'perceived by the smell to be good.' By way of showing his regard for these protesting snorts—which he is well aware are directed towards himself—he sucks in a great breath, which makes his thin cheeks meet together inside, and then belches forth an immense cloud of smoke that obliterates everything from our sight, and sets the whole company coughing violently. All join in chorus in denouncing this common enemy; but the only notice he takes of the storm which is raging round his head is to mutter sullenly, 'It'll do ye good!'

This leads to a general discussion on the use and abuse of the weed.

One dame declares that if 't' mester is tied off smokin' he's despret darksom, an' goes about wi' 's hands clussomed, an' 's eyes glitterin' like a bull when's mad.'

Very different is the opinion of the demure young damsel on the same subject. To hear her speak one would suppose that she considers the habit of smoking as great a moral offence as a breach of the whole of the Ten Commandments.

She even goes so far as to roundly assert—to the overwhelming discomfiture of an enamoured youth sitting by her, who has already reached the enormity of a pipe—that she will never marry a man who smokes.

'I cannot quite see the wisdom of such a resolve,' I mildly suggest. 'Supposing you were to pass over a man of sterling worth because he smoked, and to choose one of lesser merit because he did not smoke, and that after marriage the favoured one contracted the obnoxious habit, you would have good cause to regret your determination, would you not?'

The young damsel looks at me for a moment as though it were impossible that she could have heard aright.

Then she says sternly, and the look in her eye is really terrible to see, 'Ay! if he didna smoke afore, he'd *never* smoke after! I'd see to that.'

I believe the little old man feels this look, for presently he stealthily removes the pipe from his mouth and deftly changes the conversation.

'Oi canna get a rabbit for a pie, no road, wi' them young mushroomin' beggars,' he growls. 'They're allus afore me i' th' mornin', an' the rabbits is gettin' thin wi' bein' disturbed by 'em. Ay! but they're bad to meddle wi'! T'other day Oi met one on 'em in th' aftermath. Oi ordered him out o' th' field, an' he offs wi' his coat an' wanted to fight! Oi were that wild Oi welly cust him. Ay,' he concludes, in a tone as momentous as if he were speaking of some great international war, 'there's lots o' mushroom rows goin' on these times!'

At this point, having arrived at the foot of a steep incline, we all bundle out and take our several ways afoot towards the top of the rise.

Before starting in the morning I had thoughtfully provided myself with a packet of sweets as a means of ingratiating myself with the ladies. I step to the side of the demure young damsel and offer her one. But I find her cautious and distrustful to a degree. She refuses the proffered gift coldly, and we walk on for a time in silence. I am quite at a loss for something to say. It is useless to talk of art or the theatres, and, as it is threatening to rain, the weather as a topic of conversation is best left alone. The silence is getting awkward. I must say something, so I ask the price of butter.

'We don't make none,' she answers curtly.

'Oh, you don't keep hens then!' I stammer confusedly, for I am fearful of the young woman.

She darts a searching glance at me out of the corner of her eye to see whether I am dangerous, or simply harmless. The latter evidently, she supposes, for instead of seeking safety in flight she vouchsafes the information, 'All t' milk goes to t' cheese factory.'

'Oh! is that a good plan?'

'Don't know till th' end o' t' year. It entirely depends upon the price o' cheese. We mun get,' she rattles on, suddenly developing a faculty for conversation of which the most extravagant imagination could have never supposed her capable—'we mun get seventy shillin' th' underweight for t' cheese to produce sixpence t' gallon for t' milk. Last year 'twas on'y fourpence three farthin's t' gallon. This year we hope to get fivepence farthin'.'

Having met with such complete and encouraging success with butter, I am emboldened to try eggs.

'I suppose eggs are cheap now?' I ask airily.

'Sevenpence t' pound.'

'Come! you don't sell eggs by the pound! You mean sevenpence a dozen, don't you?'

'They're a shillin' t' dozen,' she says snappishly.

'Oh! I thought it couldn't be sevenpence the pound.'

''*Tis* sevenpence t' pound,' she retorts, almost savagely. 'Our hens never lays less nor seven to th' pound. Happen i' th' springtime they might lay eight, but from that on to t' back end they lays seven to t' pound, Oi reckon.'

I assure her that I have no desire to impugn the very excellent character which I feel sure her hens have won for themselves by their laying feats, and I hold out to her a peace-offering in the form of a sweet. On the previous occasion she had refused my proffered gift quietly, if coldly; but this time, in framing the word 'No,' she shut her mouth with the crashing rapidity of a rat-trap going off—never more to open it to me.

I am extricated from this trying position by the tall pale man, who opportunely pauses at my side and asks permission to rest his hand on my shoulder until he catches his breath. A glance at the poor careworn face shows me that the exertion of climbing the hill has accentuated its most noticeable features with startling distinctness. The hollow cheeks and twitching lips are livid, the eyes are unnaturally bright and roving, and the whole face is ghastly to look upon. In a little while he tells me that he is on his way to see the doctor about his heart. Will I put my hand upon it and see how fast it beats? For the first few moments I am frightened at what I feel there. His heart is dashing itself against the thin ribs of the aged body in a manner which I can liken to nothing but the frantic attempts of a newly snared bird endeavouring to burst its way through the bars of its prison-cage.

'Oi've seen my time, about, Oi reckon,' he says very quietly. 'The young *may* go, but t' owd *must* go.'

Taking to the van again, we begin rapidly to descend, and passing through a bleak country sparsely dotted with stunted, hungry-looking trees, and cut into patchwork-like fields by dark stone walls, in due course we rattle over some stony streets and pull up in the midst of the noisy throng which crowds the market-place.

. . . . . .

At four o'clock in the afternoon we again assemble in the omnibus and set forth upon the return journey.

The tall, emaciated man, who has been patiently sitting upon a box hard by, is the last to take his place. As he drops wearily into his seat he is at once besieged with questions about the doctor's report. For answer he fixes his mournful eyes upon us, and for a time speaks only with a look; but in that look we read —resignation.

At length, with an exhausted sigh, he says, and there is an unearthly calmness in his voice, 'Oi mun keep to the roadway. Oi munna go through t' fields.'

'But why?'

'Because the roadway is more frequented, an' Oi'll be foun'; but if Oi tumble i' th' fields, happen the dogs 'll gnaw me!'

'By gommy!' cried someone in just indignation, 't' doctor didna tell ye them very words?'

'Nowt else!'

As we proceed, stopping regularly at every wayside public-house, many of the passengers betray symptoms of becoming 'brisky,' and in consequence their characteristic peculiarities, and their most amusing eccentricities, come out more broadly than ever. Before half the return journey is accomplished the majority of them are lost to all sense of reserve, and the general condition of affairs becomes more hilarious than is quite desirable.

The fat rascal, who was already 'market fresh' when we started back, is in great feather, and pours forth volumes of lively stories, with the flattering result that the merry wives are continually kept in the jelly state, while the demure young damsel persistently looks down her nose.

I begin to have grave fears that the carrier's frequent potations may have some injurious bearing upon his skill as a driver, but I am relieved to find that they influence him for our good. He drives faster, and once actually races past an inn without stopping, yelling with laughter to himself all the while, as if he was doing the very funniest thing in the wide world.

On the last occasion of being turned out to toil up a long ascent we were caught in a warm drizzling rain, a circumstance which did not add to the general comfort. Everybody is perspiring at every pore, and the moist vapour arising from the steaming garments floats about the interior of the van and becomes more sickly and oppressive every minute. Strange odours, too, are getting more aggressive than is desirable, so I take advantage of the next stoppage to leave my companions and walk forward alone. The sense of freedom in the liberty my limbs now enjoy, after having been cramped up in the overcrowded conveyance, is a sensation most delightful to experience. With the pure moorland air fanning my hot face I step lightly onward, absorbed in mute worship of the splendour of a ruddy sunset which is flooding the wide expanse of heather with roseate light. As I press on, lost in admiration of the picture spread before me, in which the softest beauty and the wildest sterility are mingled in tenderest harmony, a smothered cry is wafted to me upon the evening air. Instantly I turn and look back upon the steep roadway I have just climbed.

The passengers who are afoot are all hastening with one accord towards some common object of attraction.

There, by the wayside, among the purple heather and green bilberry leaves, at the foot of a rude stone which in bygone days had served as a guide to lonely wanderers over this dreary waste, the aged man has fallen.

When we start again upon our journey the sun has gone down behind dark Morridge, twilight has descended from the sky and blended in a grey pall with the mists that are rising from the moorland swamps, the damp airs of night are creeping up from the dark vales beneath, and the stillness of Death broods over all.

INSECT GODS.

THE domestic cat is well known to be a most sacred and reverend animal. Its mummied remains are offered for sale to the intelligent traveller by ninety-nine per cent. of the available small boys in Upper Egypt. The common cow is also a particularly divine beast; it was Hathor on the Nile, and Herè in Hellas, while everybody knows how the Hindoo who has lost caste has to recover his position by being 'born again' of a golden heifer. The streets of Benares, said Macaulay, in his vivid way, are crowded 'with holy Brahmans and no less holy bulls.' Certain Indian monkeys, once more, are almost as sacred as the Egyptian cynocephali, the calf Apis, or the crocodiles of the Nile. But of all the divine beasts on earth the strangest and most paradoxical as an object of human adoration is surely the scarab, or sacred beetle, of Egypt. I have caught one to-day, here *in propria persona*, in a garden near Cannes, and got his godship well under observation, and, since it isn't every morning that one can watch divinity at work with a platyscopic lens, I propose to record in fitting numbers what impression the coleopterous and shard-borne god produces upon the profane modern observer.

In outer show the scarab is quite an ordinary-looking dusky beetle, no more superficially holy to an untrained eye than the British cockroach or any other miscellaneous insect. It is recorded that the envious stranger saw 'no p'ints' about the celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County 'more nor about any other frog,' and it is the same with the scarab; he bears no peculiar outward and visible marks of his inner sanctity. You wouldn't guess he was a god, to look at him. He isn't peculiar to Egypt either; on the contrary, he exists abundantly in many other countries where his divine nature was never so much as for a moment suspected. He pervades Provence, and is a familiar beast to man both in the neighbourhood of Marseilles and along the Riviera. In fact, like Cook's tourist, he goes all round the Mediterranean. Yet so local and variable is fashion in matters of religion that the Provençal peasant kills with one blow of his spade the great god of immortality; and even the Coptic Christian or the Moslem fellah crushes under his heel without a passing qualm the chief deity of his ancestors for forty centuries.

Most gods, when you trace them to their source, have the humblest origins. Half of them appear to have been savage chiefs, and the other half big stones or dangerous wild animals. Truth must out: the holy scarab is in real life nothing more exalted than a common dung-beetle. It is the habit of the race to lay its eggs in a ball of manure, which it rolls about to gather more, on the principle of the big snowball, and finally buries. Its grubs hatch out underground in the middle of the ball, and live during their larval stage on the unsavoury food-stuff thus provided for them. Poor raw material, this, you would say, for a deity. As a rule, moreover, unscientific man doesn't much concern himself about the ways of insects; he merely kills them. But the sacred scarab is an insect with a difference. He is so very conspicuous an animal in the lands he inhabits that even the unobservant southern cultivator is compelled against his will, as it were, to notice him. On hot and sunny days, when the warmth excites them, the beetles develop a most extraordinary energy, and work in squadrons with superhuman activity. I have seen them as busy as ants or bees at swarming time. They choose, as a rule, some sloping bank of earth to bury their ball in. In Europe they frequent the blown sand-dunes of the coast or dry sea-beaches; in Egypt, where sand is provided wholesale, they have the entire expanse of the desert in the neighbourhood of the inundated soil to choose from. Here they dig the hole in which the eggs are to be buried with their broad fore-feet, which are specialised into ready-made spades or hoes, while their heads are flattened and provided with prongs like a garden fork, so that they may use them as scoops or animated shovels to remove the rubbish loosened by digging.

As soon as the hole is completed, I observe in the sand-dunes close by, the pious and affectionate parent proceeds at her leisure to deposit her ball of eggs and manure in it. But as her front legs and forehead have been necessarily specialised as picks and mattocks, they form very bad pushing instruments; so it is with her hind legs that she has to roll the precious ball into position for burying. Now, she wouldn't be strong enough to drag it bodily after her; for to pull is much more arduous work than to push; so to meet the difficulty she has developed a most singular and odd-looking instinct. She clutches the ball firmly between her two hind legs, which are long and bowed, and provided with spines for that very purpose; then she walks backward on her four other paws, pushing the ball before her as she marches in this retrograde fashion. When she arrives at the open trench she has prepared for its reception, in she tumbles it with a rush. Then she buries it in the earth, and leaves it to its fate with a clear conscience. The young grubs hatch out in due time within the buried balls, eat the manure of which their nursery is composed, and become chrysalids on the same spot in a cocoon of mud and other promiscuous rubbish. Hence they emerge in time as full-grown burying beetles.

It may seem surprising at first sight that any early people—even the mystical Egyptians—should have noticed such small animals sufficiently closely to have been induced to make them into gods for their parental piety. But if you have ever been in Egypt (and who hasn't nowadays?) you will know the reason why. It becomes obvious when you get there. The man who looks at the monuments in the British Museum, away from their point of origin, is tempted to wonder to himself at what seems the singularly arbitrary choice of the objects adopted for hieroglyphics. Why this curious poverty of ideas in the selection of symbols and divine objects? Why these perpetually recurring hands and reeds and lotuses and jackals and papyri and ibises? Why these hawk-headed Horuses and these cat-faced Pashts? Why these few dozen bare pictures? But when once you know the country the answer is plain enough. The number of creatures the Egyptian could choose for pictorial representation or sacred use was strictly limited. There are the desert, the river, some few beasts or birds, and that's all, in Egypt. Indeed, so much is this the case that almost everything in the land was more or less sacred. Gods abounded everywhere. The country has a surprisingly small fauna and flora of its own, and the objects so familiar to us in the hieroglyphics and in the Pantheon well-nigh exhaust them. When once you have represented the human body and its component members, the ox, the papyrus, the lotus, the jackal, the goose, the hawk, the ibis, the cat, and half a dozen more, you have pretty nearly got to the end of the picturable objects of the Nile valley. The Egyptian, in short, pictured and deified the things he knew—he couldn't very well picture or deify the things he knew not.

Among so small a collection of beasts, birds, and fishes, the sacred beetle was sure to attract attention. For, indeed, in Egypt he is everywhere in evidence. He and his works are sufficiently obtrusive and conspicuous. For one thing, the mere numbers of the dung-beetles are immense. They can't help being noticed. Then their habit of walking backward as they roll their ball between their paws was certain to catch the eye of a humorous and laughter-loving people. Furthermore, being unable to see their way as they march backward, they are always getting ugly tumbles *en route*, from which they recover with much awkward difficulty; for it is the habit of beetles, when knocked over on their backs, to lie there sprawling, like Mr. Gilbert's fat sugar-broker, and kick their legs in the air in the most undignified attitudes till they can recover equilibrium. But these little difficulties don't damp the zeal of the industrious insects. If one beetle gets knocked over on a rough bit of ground the next scarab who comes along piously takes charge of the motherless ball and continues to roll it on, regardless of the sacred rights of property, to the nearest burying-hole. The original owner, meanwhile, picks herself up after much sprawling, and proceeds in like manner to possess herself calmly of the first unclaimed ball that rolls her way from a similar accident; or, should none turn up, begins at once to pile up a new one. It really almost seems as if the beetles were aware that the whole object of the process is merely to keep up the numbers of the species from generation to generation, and were ready, like good communists, to attain that end quite apart from any petty personal considerations of *meum* and *tuum*. Every beetle appears to act as a common orphan asylum.

Now the pious Egyptian who saw all this could hardly fail to be impressed by the actions of the insects. For your ancient Egyptian was, in his way, a deeply religious being: he worshipped almost everything. His creed, indeed, reposed upon two great bases, and the scarab appealed to him almost equally in virtue of both of them. The first was the belief in the resurrection of the body, which led him to mummify the remains of his dead lest any part should be wanting at the final moment. The second was totemism—the belief in the sanctity of certain plants and animals, which led him to deify the bull, the hawk, the cat, the ibis, and the jackal. But if any animal was worthy of deification (he might think to himself) surely it was this pious and industrious beetle, which buried its balls of dung—pure corruption and foulness—in the graves it dug for itself, in the sure and certain hope of a speedy resurrection. Of course primitive observers never suspected anything so commonplace as the presence of eggs in the middle of the ball; that sort of explanation belongs only to the age of science. The Egyptians saw the beetle bury the pellet, and they saw a new beetle emerge from it in due time; and they leapt straight to the not unnatural conclusion that here was a case of spontaneous generation. The pious scarab, they imagined, buried the balls of dirt as they themselves buried their mummied dead; and new scarabs sprang from it under the vivifying rays of the supreme Sun-god, as the glorified body would spring in the end from the dried and withered dust of the human mummy.

It was as an emblem of the resurrection, then, that the scarab attained such immense vogue in the Nile valley. Nothing could be more natural than that a mummy-making race should see in its proceedings an undoubted argument for the immortality of the soul, and a proof of the continued existence of the spirit after death. Everything conspired to produce this impression. The earnest way in which the good beetles devoted their lives to the pious task of rolling their balls of manure to the chosen burying-place was a lesson, as it were, to careless humanity to look to the end, a perpetual coleopterous *memento mori*. All sorts of strange fables rose up accordingly about the sacred insect. It seems that for twenty-eight days the balls remained under ground, through a whole lunar revolution. During that mystic time, the beetles grew within by spontaneous generation. On the twenty-ninth day, which the insect knew as the moment of the conjunction of the sun with the moon, the ball opened of itself, and forth sallied in full divinity a new-born scarab. Later on, when the cult of Ra, the Sun-god, became the chief element in the worship of Egypt, eclipsing and absorbing into itself the earlier ancestral worship of Osiris, yet another point of sanctity was discovered in the scarab. The balls he rolled behind him so assiduously, being round and re-vivified, were considered as emblematical of the sun's disc; and the beetle himself was almost regarded as an avatar of the solar deity. To such a pitch of dignity may honest industry and sterling earnestness of purpose lead in the end even a despised carrion-beetle!

As a natural consequence, the scarab very early found his way into the hieroglyphic system. His figure appears over and over again on all the monuments, and his name forms part of the titles of some of the mightest Pharaohs. You may see him chiselled in gigantic proportions on the side of granite obelisks, like Cleopatra's Needle. You may remark him, as large as life, or a great deal larger, on the mouldering walls of sandstone temples. You may note him engraved on precious stones, or forming a letter in the names on seals, or entering into the cartouches of royal conquerors. With his wings full-spread, he generally stands over the propyla of Karnak and Luxor. As the symbol of eternity, immortality, and resurrection, in one form or the other he pervades all Egypt.

But that is not all. In a country where everything was sacred, and where religion entered into every moment of life, a still further use for the holy scarab soon sprang up—the one which has made him most familiar of all to modern tourists and antiquity collectors. For buttons were made in the image of the divine beetle; and these buttons were held to be very fitting objects to bury with the mummy. They were placed in the tomb as charms or tutelary gods. Sometimes, indeed, the actual beetle himself was so buried with the dead; and though few of these perishable creatures have remained to our own day, yet instances of them survive; and we may conjecture that their rarity is due rather to the decay of animal tissues than to original infrequency. But more often it was usual to lay in the sarcophagus little images of scarabs in precious stones or earthenware, engraved with suitable hieroglyphic inscriptions; and it is these that are so well known at the present day, and so much sought after by collectors. They occur in a great variety of materials, from the coarsest and commonest pottery to the rarest and most expensive jade or jasper. Blue porcelain is, however, the most frequent material. They are sometimes hung like necklets round the necks of mummies, sometimes wound about them in long rows or strings, and sometimes sewn in profusion on to the wrappings or grave-clothes. At times they are clasped in the closed hands of the dead. The inscriptions they bear are always full of some sacred meaning, and have contributed not a little to our knowledge of Egyptian history and religion. 'As many as three thousand scarabs,' says Mr. Loftie, 'have been found in one tomb;' so that the number in existence in museums and in private collections is past all counting.

In order to understand their importance as historical documents we must remember, as Mr. Loftie has well pointed out, that there are no early Egyptian coins. Money did not exist in the days of the Pharaohs. But, then, the Pharaoh was himself a god; and to put his name upon an onyx or agate scarab was therefore to bestow upon an object already sacred a still higher and deeper sanctity. In this way most of the scarabs found in tombs bear the name of a Pharaoh; and thus a collection of these curious emblems holds somewhat the same relation to Egyptian history that a collection of coins would hold to the history of any other country. Thousands of scarabs exist in the Louvre, the British Museum, and private cabinets; and from them an immense amount of information may be derived about Egyptian history, of the same indirect and confirmatory sort as that derived from the evidence of coins in later civilisations. 'The Giver of Life,' 'The Living Divinity,' 'The Gracious Lord,' 'The King's Son'—these, with the names of Rameses, or Sethi, or Amenhotep, are the sort of inscriptions one reads on the lower surface. The earliest scarabs of whose date Mr. Loftie—the great authority on the subject—feels certain, belong to a king who rejoiced in the melodious name of Neb-ka, and who seems to have been an ornament of the Third Dynasty. Heaven forbid that I should dogmatise on the shifting quicksands of early Egyptian chronology; but if I ventured to have an opinion on the subject at all (which I certainly don't) it would be that Neb-ka most probably lived somewhere about the year before Christ 4000. The latest scarabs, on the other hand, appear to be some time subsequent to the Christian era. A scarab in the Louvre has the cartouche or name-oval of Antoninus Pius engraved on its wings; and others seem even to belong, as I shall hereafter point out, to the purely Christian period.

In order to understand the sanctity of the Pharaoh names thus engraved on the scarabs, we must further recollect that the early kings of Egypt were descendants of the great god Horus, or Hor; and that Horus himself was in all probability a deified king of immemorial antiquity. At any rate, every legitimate ruler of Egypt traced his descent from Osiris and Horus; and Mr. Loftie acutely notes that it is only such divinely-descended native kings for the most part whose names occur on scarabs. Now, 'the great Persian conqueror, Cambyses,' and the Greek Ptolemies could not really claim to be of the stock of Osiris. The Ptolemies, indeed, pretended to claim it; but nobody believed them, a point which is shown by the curious fact that their names are never found inscribed on the holy beetles. Egyptian orthodoxy declined to hold that a Cleopatra or a Euergetes was a fitting object of divine worship. The Roman emperor, on the other hand, was at least a

Divus Cæsar, and most of his subjects did really accept his divinity as genuine, and offer sacrifice in the most serious spirit at his altar. Hence it is not surprising that the names of Cæsars should sometimes, though very rarely, be engraved on scarabs; it marks the prevailing sense of the reality of the emperor's godhead. Still, the vastly greater number of scarabs bear the names of the native kings; during the earlier period, very often that of the reigning Pharaoh; in later times, and especially after the Macedonian conquest, those of early historical native princes. Thus one of Mr. Loftie's scarabs, probably executed under the Twenty-sixth Dynasty (say B.C. 600), bears the figure of Horus, crowned as king of Upper and Lower Egypt; while in another case, on a specimen which must have been produced under the rule of the Ptolemies, a winged sphinx of the most advanced Greek type is represented bearing up the cartouche of a pyramid-building king of the Fourth Dynasty. For even down to the latest period before the introduction of Christianity, the religious Egyptians, most conservative of mankind, went on worshipping the Pharaohs of three or four thousand years earlier. It was exactly as if we at the present time in Britain were to keep up the cult of ancient British kings as old again as Caractacus and Cunobelin.

One of the most interesting exhibits in the museum at Ghizeh is the jewellery of Queen Ahotpou, of the Seventeenth Dynasty (say about B.C. 1750), taken from her majesty's person when her mummy-case was opened by Mariette Bey. Among the most beautiful objects in this very ancient collection is a gold chain or necklet, with a scarab pendent as its central ornament.

On the other hand, if the kings had their names engraved on sacred beetles, the sacred beetles in return gave their names to mighty kings. The very word for beetle was so holy that it enters into the composition of many royal titles. Just as elsewhere great princes described themselves as lions, or wolves, or bulls, or deer-hounds, so in Egypt they described themselves as beetles of the Sun-god.

Strange to say, some of the latest scarabs bear Christian emblems. Several of them are inscribed with the cross, and one, in Mr. Loftie's collection, is adorned with a well-marked crucifix. This queer jumbling up of Christian and heathen symbolism may seem incredible to those who do not know Egypt or early Christian art; but to students of the first few centuries of Christendom it is no isolated example. In the Ghizeh museum there are many other works of the transitional period quite as strangely mixed as these—paintings with the *ankh* or *crux ansata*, the symbol of immortality, combined with the veritable Christian cross; emblems of which it is hard to tell at first sight which are heathen and which Christian; Madonnas that can hardly be discriminated from Isis with the infant Horus; and Isises that fade off by imperceptible stages into Madonnas and Bambinos. The fact is, scarabs had been buried with corpses in Egypt for centuries till they had become, as it were, part of the recognised ceremonial of burial; people no more liked to dispense with them as marks of respect to the dead than our own people would like to dispense with plumes and mutes and all the other wonted accompaniments of Christian burial. So, when the Egyptians felt they must adopt the new creed in place of the old, they endeavoured to Christianise and convert the scarab by inscribing him with a figure of the crucifixion, just as the priests in Brittany have Christianised and converted the old heathen standing stones by putting a cross on top, to which the modern worshipper now nominally at least directs his prayers. There is more of this substitution everywhere in Europe than most people suspect; a large part of what passes as modern Christianity is nothing more than very slightly veneered antique paganism.

A few comparatively big scarabs are found in mummies in the place of the heart. A portion of the Egyptian Bible or 'Book of the Dead' is written upon them in very tiny hieroglyphs. These extremely big amulets usually bear parts of certain chapters relating to the human heart; so that the place they occupy in the mummy is by no means accidental. They all belong to a particular period.

It is strange, however, to notice how hard all superstitions die. For example, the stone axes and arrowheads of primitive peoples were regarded from a very early time as lucky, because they gave you a certain hold over the ghosts of the people who originally formed them, and who might be summoned to your aid by rubbing or anointing them. Among modern Europeans, stone arrowheads are looked upon as fairy darts or elf bolts, and are similarly valued as charms or amulets. They usually formed for this reason the central object in the beautiful antique Etruscan necklets; and in a degraded imitation, commonly known as 'cornelian hearts,' they are still worn by our nominally Christian English young ladies as charms on their watch-chains. Well, it is just the same with scarabs. These old Egyptian insect gods are now being worn once more by English ladies, who have picked them up for a few piastres in Egypt, 'to bring them good luck;' and I know one matron of mature years, who has long ago discarded most orthodox religious beliefs, but who solemnly assures me she would feel very uncomfortable indeed if she were accidentally to lose her sacred beetle, which she wears as a brooch and regards with no little superstitious veneration. The custom has spread so much that scarabs will perhaps soon become the fashion; and as genuine ones are common enough, while imitations are offered by the thousand to every traveller at all the stations on the Nile, the supply will probably create a demand for lucky talismans among the travelling public. Already there are several large scarab factories at Luxor, and the trade has become one of the staple industries of the Thebaid.

How odd that people in the nineteenth century should still be influenced by conceptions as to the godhead of a particular dúng-beetle originally formed by the half-savage Africans of ten thousand years ago!

One point more before I close my sermon. On many monuments the scarab, when he appears as a hieroglyph or an ornament, seems once to have been gilded. He is also occasionally represented dispersing rays on every side like a star or a firefly. Now it is true that in these cases the gilding and the rays may have been merely intended to show his identification with Ra, the Sun-god. But another ingenious explanation of these points has been offered which is worthy of mention before we relegate the scarab to his native obscurity. The common Egyptian burying-beetle with whom we have dealt all along is black and inconspicuous; but up country in Nubia another allied species occurs, in lesser numbers, which is conspicuous in that peculiar sort of bronze-like or half-golden metallic sheen not unfrequently seen in tropical beetles. Now, it has been suggested that the Egyptian people may have been originally a more southern race, who entered the Nile valley from the Abyssinian highlands, and who had been accustomed in their old home to worship this gilded beetle both on account of its pious habits, which resemble those of the common scarab, and because its colour seemed to mark it out at once as a representative of the Sun-god. And in this connection we may recollect that even to the present day in France the little red-and-black ladybird is commonly known as the *bête du bon*

Dieu. In that case it is possible that the original scarab of religion was the brilliant Nubian and far southern species; and that the Egyptians, when they moved north beyond the range of the gilded scarab, took to worshipping instead its dingier and less beautiful northern representative. But in art they may have continued to represent him as golden. In all this, however, I must honestly admit, the proportion of solid fact to pure conjecture somewhat resembles the proportion of bread to Sherris sack in Sir John Falstaff's famous tavern bill.

And now I think I have almost finished with my scarab; so I will take him out gingerly between finger and thumb—for he is an unsavoury god—and restore him to the calm of his original sand-pit, by the side of the two carefully-clipped garden date-palms.

'A PRESENT FROM MARGATE.'

Mr. Dimick was awakened from his afternoon nap by a fit of coughing. He was subject to bronchitis. He took the red and yellow handkerchief from his face and laid it across his knees. Then he fumbled in his pocket, and produced a small piece of tissue paper containing a few sticky glycerine tablets. He carried one to his mouth with his trembling fingers, and began to suck it contentedly. This indulgence in sweets was his one extravagance; but then, as he said to Mr. Peters, 'a ha'p'orth went a long way, and seemed to loosen the throat.' Mr. Dimick lived in the two-pair front and Mr. Peters in the two-pair back; and they were both on the parish. The proximity of their homes and the similarity of their circumstances had induced a strong friendship. They usually took their tea together, and always their evening pipes, and they had the same friends. When they went to church, which they usually did on fine Sunday mornings, they accompanied each other and sat side by side, and when either manifested a tendency to slumber the other took upon himself to touch him sharply in the ribs. Perhaps what bound them together more than anything else was their mutual suspicion of the designs of the parish. They felt that it grudged them their half-a-crown a week, and would gladly have seen them settled in 'the house,' and each did his best to keep the other in health, because, said Mr. Peters, 'if you or me, Dimick, was to be took with a stroke, or a fit, or any sich a thing, off to the house they'ld bundle us, sure as my eye.'

Mr. Dimick was in slightly better circumstances than Mr. Peters, owing to the fact that he had a daughter in the country who had married a chimney-sweep, and who was in tolerable circumstances. A disinclination on Mr. Dimick's part to quit the capital, and the demands her numerous offspring made upon her time and powers, prevented his living with her, but she made him a small allowance, which the little old man accepted gratefully. He was grateful for most things, and was very guileless and confiding; so much so that his enemies had been wont to consider him 'touched.' In appearance he was not unattractive. He was clean, and his wrinkled skin was pink and white. He had small blue eyes, to which the tears came very readily. On either cheek he had a tuft of white whisker; and his hair, what remained of it, was also white. He stooped from the shoulder, and habitually carried his head slightly to one side.

When the sweet was reduced to minute proportions, and his cough and the irritation which induced it had subsided, Mr. Dimick took his stick and tottered in to see Mr. Peters.

Mr. Peters had also been napping, but, roused by Mr. Dimick's entrance, he sat up and cleared his throat noisily. Then he pointed with his bony forefinger to the seat opposite his own, which Mr. Dimick took in silence. There was a small fire burning in the grate. Mr. Peters wore all his wardrobe at once, but even then he felt the cold; and he and rheumatism were intimate acquaintances.

In appearance Mr. Peters did not at all resemble his friend and neighbour. There was more of him, and in his younger days he had been very tall. He had keen old eyes, with bushy grey eyebrows above them, a large aquiline nose, and the fact that he had only two teeth remaining in his mouth made the width of that feature more striking: there was, he was wont to remark in his jocular moods, space to let for advertisements—there was likely to be more, for the tenure of the remaining molars was very insecure, and they had to be treated with great respect.

'Well, Dimick,' said he at length, 'and how might you be feelin'? I don't seem to have heerd you a coughin' since I've been settin' here.'

Mr. Peters had a loud voice, and he always adopted a somewhat patronising tone towards Mr. Dimick. The latter thought he expected to be looked up to and looked up to him accordingly. He had a large bump of veneration.

'Oh,' answered he, in his shrill tones, 'I ain't lookin' for my bronchitis steady for another month to come. Just a touch occasional—ain't worth talkin' on. And how might you be?'

'Why for a gentleman of my years I'm fairish. I'm gettin' a big boy now, Dimick. Eighty-three next birthday, Dimick. Ha, ha!'

This conversation took place daily. Mr. Peters made the most of his small joke. Mr. Dimick, who was a little deaf, did not always hear it, but a special shake of the head which accompanied it invariably enlightened him as to the point at which he ought to laugh.

'Ha, ha!' he said. 'You're a jovial chap, Peters. Ha, ha, ha!

So you're getting a big boy now, are you, Peters? Wal, I might say as I'm a growin' boy myself, but I'm a growin' downwards, Peters.'

Mr. Dimick had evolved this joke in the watches of the night many months ago. It had done duty steadily since then.

'Ha, ha! And so you are. You don't measure what you did, Dimick. You ain't so upright. You'll have to go in for drillin'!'

Mr. Dimick shook his head.

'I'ld have to swallow a poker afore I'ld come straight,' he said.

'Well, how 'ld it be to swallow a cup of tea instead? I'll just put on the kittle to boil. But it won't do ter make it like I did this mornin'. Why, it was riling at the time. But really now it strikes me as rayther funny too. I b'iled up the kittle, yer see, for breakfast, and I put it in the tea-pot. And then I thought I'ld be a good boy and make the room a bit tidy first and have my breakfus in comfort. So I set the pot on the 'ob to draw, and I was a lookin' forward to a nice strong cup. And when I set down to pour it out it hadn't so much colour as a drop of whisky, it was just water, and that was all. I'd clean forgot the tea. And there was the kittle off the boil. Now, you know that's one of them occasions when swear words come handy. But, lor, now, it do seem rather funny, me expecting it to be so nice and brown, and out it comes—water.'

'Dear, dear, dear!' said Mr. Dimick, 'and you with such a good memory, too.'

'Yes, I've got a good memory, that's true; but it serves me better for things a good way off than for things near by. I've heerd it's that way with eyes, too, sometimes. You might say my memory's long-sighted. It ain't quite so convenient to me, p'r'aps, as t'other way, but it makes me more entertaining—don't yer see? —better company, so to speak. Why, if I was in serciety I often think I could make 'em set up. I've done a good few things in my life. I took to errinds at ten year old, and I give up sweepin' crossings at eighty, and there's been other sitivations sandwiched in. Ten from eighty's seventy, and that's a fairish time to be on the job.'

'And so it is, so it is; considering most of us don't live that long. Why, notwithstanding I'm seventy-eight myself, I haven't worked more'n fifty. I was in service, you know, and then I kep' a little cobbler's shop; but when Sairey died, I didn't seem to keep up heart, and I got along less good than formerly, and then it was just odd jobs; and after my gal married I lived on my bits of savin's until they got low, and after that I looked to the parish. It weren't what I'ld have wished, nor what Sairey would have wished neither'—he passed his hand across his eyes—'but it ain't the house, and after all, as I've said to myself many's the time, what's the good of people purviding these here conveniences if no one don't avail themselves?'

'That's so,' said Mr. Peters.

Each of the old men knew the details in the life of the other to which allusion had been made, but the want of originality in their conversation did not depress them. They preferred the old familiar topics to any novelty.

Mr. Peters poured the tea into the large cups, one of which had a magenta rim touched up with gold, and the other a picture of some sea sands, with crinolined ladies and short-frocked children disporting themselves upon them, and on which was written in fancy letters, 'For a Good Boy.' These, and the brown tea-pot, and a plate or two comprised Mr. Peters' supply of crockery. Mr. Dimick was better off in this respect. He had quite an array on the shelf in his room and on the mantelpiece. 'Sairey' had had a mania for china, and he had not liked to part with her possessions. She had been wont to purchase her marmalade in glass sugar-basins and milk-jugs, and her tea at stores where a handsome vase was given away with half a pound. There were also two highly coloured ornaments which had belonged to her brother, who was a 'Forester,' and of which she was justly proud. They were opposite each other on the mantelpiece next to the blue and white lustres which Dimick had given her on the twentieth anniversary of their wedding. One represented a gentleman in a green tunic with a leg and a half, the other half-leg, from the knee downwards, being superseded by a shiny brown dog; the other represented the same gentleman with complete legs and no dog. In his hand he held a red hare, which was hanging head downwards. Perhaps there was nothing in all the world which Mr. Dimick prized so highly as these 'Foresters,' not only because they had been Sairey's brother's, and then Sairey's, but because as works of art he regarded them as beyond reproach.

Mr. Dimick, being a visitor, was presented with the Margate cup. Its contents were very dark and very much sweetened. Milk was a luxury usually reserved for Sundays. Mr. Peters did not think it was an improvement to the taste of tea. He said so now. 'It sort of softens it down, don't you know?' he remarked. 'Now and then for a change a drop of milk ain't to be despised, but for settin' you up I don't believe that tea should be diluted.'

They drank their tea very slowly and contentedly. Their days were so long that the little pleasures had to be protracted. Mr. Peters, by reason of his toothlessness, soaked his bread so as to make it softer; Mr. Dimick, who had a small appetite, nibbled a crust very cheerfully. He always ate crust on principle when he partook of Mr. Peters' hospitality; also on principle he insisted on Mr. Peters' eating crumb when the latter had tea in his room.

Presently, whether it was that a piece of bread went the wrong way, or from other causes, Mr. Dimick was attacked by a violent fit of coughing. It came upon him so suddenly that he was quite unprepared, and the tea-cup fell off his weak old knees on to the fender. Had it fallen on to the floor it would perhaps, not being remarkably delicate, have escaped injury, but its sharp contact first with the edge of the fender and then with the tongs had the effect of breaking it into several pieces. The handle rolled under the grate, and the tea ran into the ashes. Mr. Peters sprang up with such energy that he nearly let his own cup fall. Then he deposited the latter on the table and went down on his stiff knees to inspect the injury. It hurt him to move quickly for one thing, he was very much annoyed at the accident for another, and he was a man of an impulsive temperament, so that when he saw the irremediableness of the breakage he grew crimson in the face and said furiously, 'You've smashed it to atoms. And there ain't nothing I valued like just that bit of chiney!'

Poor Mr. Dimick tried to apologise, but he was at the moment physically incapable of doing so. He was very red in the face and the tears were streaming from his eyes. He shook his head deprecatingly. But whenever he tried to speak the cough began again.

'You'ld ought to have put it down when you see the cough comin' on,' continued Mr. Peters, mercilessly; 'tea-cups of that kind don't grow in gutters that you should treat 'em so cheap. If it had been yours I make no doubt you'ld have taken better care of it. Not as you could help coughin'—that's your infirmity—but you might have set the cup out of mischief first. If there's a thing I can't abide it's to have my furniture destroyed, and that cup I valued special. It weren't like any other cup to me.'

Mr. Dimick looked at him piteously. 'I'm that—sorry, Peters,' he said indistinctly; 'I wouldn't have let it go—if the coughin' hadn't come—suddint like; but the ticklin' began and then—the cup sort of leapt off my lap—and I couldn't have stopped it—not if it had been ever so.'

'Ah, well, well,' said Mr. Peters, whose temper had well-nigh spent itself, and who was already beginning to be mollified; 'there's a proverb that "it ain't no use cryin' over spilt milk," and I suppose it 'll hold good for tea too. I spoke hasty. Of course you didn't do it for the purpose. Don't name it any more, Dimick; don't name it.'

But this softening on his part affected Mr. Dimick more than his anger had done. By now, too, he had regained command over his voice.

'But I must name it,' he said; 'it's only nat'ral you should be vexed.'

Mr. Peters had now resumed his seat, one or two of the broken pieces in his hands. He surveyed them ruefully, then laid them on the table.

'No,' he said, 'I'm not vexed. Of course I couldn't purtend as I'm not sorry, for sorry I am, but accidents happin in the best regilated fam'lies; and I'm sure none couldn't be better regilated than yours and mine. Ha, ha, ha! Don't you look so downcast, Dimick. It ain't nothink after all. I'ld have had to part with that cup sooner or later, you know; it couldn't have gone along to Heaven with me. Ha, ha! Cheer up, Dimick; there's plenty more tea in the pot. And if you'll jest let me step in and fetch one of your cups, you can have it all comfortable.'

'I'm sure you're very generous, Peters,' said Dimick, holding out his little thin hand to his friend, who grasped it in his horny one, 'very generous. And you a valuin' of it, and all. But I can't help feelin' you mind it more than you own.'

'Mind it, I do, Dimick,' assented the old man. 'I am but human, and a cup's a cup. And when I come back I'll just tell yer what I ain't never mentioned to you afore, why I sort of held to that one. It was a souveneer, you see.'

He rose to go into Dimick's room. The latter did not offer to go himself. He was a good deal upset by the little accident, and his fit of coughing had exhausted him. So he sat over the fire shaking his head mournfully, and regarding the broken pieces on the table. Peters took life very cheerfully, but Dimick was more inclined to grizzle, and to worry about things that could not be helped.

Mr. Peters returned before long. He had taken the first cup and saucer that came handy, and it happened to be of a very similar kind to the one which had been broken. It was white and gold, and it had a little picture of a pier in black upon it, above which, in gold letters, was written 'A Present from Margate.'

Mr. Dimick started slightly when he saw which cup Mr. Peters had chosen. It was one from the shelf which he was not in the habit of using, regarding it in the light of an article of vertu; still he said nothing, but suffered Mr. Peters to wipe the rim with his coat-sleeve, and then fill it with tea from the pot, browner than the last and nearly as hot.

'There,' said Peters, 'now we are all comfortable again. Help yerself to sugar, Dimick. Where's your spoon? Oh, there it is! If it ain't rolled under the table! Well, don't worrit to stoop. Use mine.'

Mr. Dimick stirred his tea and began to sip it in silence. However, as the warm fluid comforted and cheered him, he gradually regained his former composure.

'You was a-going to tell me about that cup,' he said.

'And so I was. Well, I don't know why I ain't named it to you sooner. But you see a thing sort of resembles a person; there's points you name when they're dead you don't breathe while they're livin'. I ain't much of a one for sentiment, as *you* know, Dimick. You're more that way than me; but even them as has hard cases often has a soft part inside—like a crab, so to speak.'

He settled himself more firmly in his chair and put his hands inside his sleeves, a habit he had when preparing for a narrative.

'Well, anyways, I had a soft part in me for her as gave me that. She weren't a woman, though you might think it. I've had weaknesses for a various few o' *them* in my time; but, bless you, I've forgot most of them now, names and all, though I remembers occasional the colours of their hair. But this one was a bit of a girl, not more than eight years old, and a cripple to the bargain. But if ever I loved a human soul that was her. My wife and me wasn't well matched, which, though it don't do to speak ill of the dead, Dimick, I may say that, if ever there was a bad-tempered one, her it was. Still, she've gone to her account, and I won't say but at times I aggrewated of her. A man is but a man. 'Liza and me we married each other out of spite, I think. I don't know why else, for we quarrelled when we kep' company, and I believe we thought there wasn't sich a good way of payin' out one another as gitting married. So, you see, there weren't much love lost that way.'

'Me and Sairey never had a word pass between us,' said Dimick thoughtfully.

'Ah,' said Peters, rather sharply, 'I daresay it 'ld take a clever woman to quarrel with *you*. Well, anyways, some has luck and some don't. But I may say that for cookin' a pertater 'Liza hadn't a equal. But to resoom. Well, this kid—Alice her name was—she and her mother, who was a widder lady that took in trousers to machine, they lived in the same house, down below. Alice, she was like a doll in a toyship to the face of her, fair she was, and blue eyes, and hair all yellow, pretty—well, I don't believe I ever see a face to beat it 'cept once—a lady somewhat similar featured what walked on a tight rope in a circus when I was hopping in Kent. But from birth this kid had had somethink wrong with one side—paralysed it was—and she had to wear a special sort of leg thing got out of a hospital. But get about she did, wonderful. Well, that child were as full of mischief as a egg is of meat; but loving she were—she'd cling around yer neck and kiss you so pretty, and if anyone give her somethink she weren't happy but you'ld have half. And she'd come to my room—we hadn't no youngsters, you see—and say "Hullo, Mr. Peters," and I'ld say "I ain't at home, Alice," and she'ld laugh that hearty and say "Oh, but I see yer, Mr. Peters. And p'r'aps you've got some sweeties for me; have you, Mr. Peters?" I generally kep' a bit of somethink by me. And in she'ld come and perch on my knee, and tell me her bits of news, and what her teacher at the Sunday school had taught her—there was a kind young woman as taught some of them cripples around our way—and how her mother was gettin' along for work, and what tricks she had been up to. We was sich friends as never was. Well——'

Mr. Peters hesitated for a moment before continuing, while he regarded Mr. Dimick with a dubious eye. He was aware that Mr. Dimick had a high opinion of him, and he did not wish to fall in his estimation.

'Well,' he said then, 'we ain't none of us saints. I suppose I'm in the right way now. But there was a time when I were wilder, Dimick. I don't mind owning up that there was occasions when I didn't see the benefits of teatolism, no, nor yet temperance. I don't say as I was a drunkard, Dimick, but p'r'aps I come anigh so bein'—p'r'aps I might have been one outright but for that slip of a thing what the Almighty sent to me. Some folks might say as her life were useless. She come for a bit, and she were crippled, and then she were took; but, mark ye, Dimick, there's a lot done by that sort of folk as we feels called on to pity by reason of their afflictions.'

'I don't make no doubt of it,' said Mr. Dimick, and he nodded two or three times very emphatically. 'I don't make no manner of doubt of it.'

'Anyways, one evening I'd had a bust up, and I came home a bit upset and I rounded on 'Liza, and I will add, Dimick, though it weren't a usual thing with me like with some, that I up and hit her. And we was a makin' sich a row that we didn't hear the little un knock. But she had just come in, and she says in her shrill pipin' voice, she says, "Are you a playin'? Let me play too. Let me play too, Mr. Peters." And I said, rough like, "Git away, Alice," and 'Liza she was a cryin'. And Alice, she says, "Why, it ain't a game! You're a-hitting of her, Mr. Peters!" And then she set to and cried like as if she'd been the one hurted. And she ran away down to her mother. And not a blessed glimpse of her did I have for three days. You see she were disappointed in me; that were it, Dimick, and her little feelin's suffered. Well, I couldn't stand not seein' her, and at last I went along to her mother and I said, "Send Alice up. I'ld like a game with her." And Alice's mother she said, "Well, to tell you the truth, Mr. Peters," she said, "men's men, and I know the world; but Alice, she's but a baby, and I've kep' her innercent, and if she's a bit naughty at times, yet she don't know no real wickedness. And she've been taught at the school, and I wouldn't wonder but the Lord have learned her Himself a lot of pretty thoughts. And quarrellin' and all upsets her. And she don't seem to feel for you what she did, Mr. Peters," she said. And then she went in and shut the door.

'I didn't say nothink; maybe even I was a bit riled at her airs, but I felt it notwithstanding! And one day soonish after I catched Alice in the passage, and I says, "I've got some sweeties, Alice;" and she says, "Have yer, Mr. Peters?" And she looked at me sort of wistful, and I says, "Don't you want 'em, Alice; ain't you going to see me?" And she puts her little head to one side like a bird and she says, "I don't love you, Mr. Peters, when you speak so loud and make Mrs. Peters cry. I'm frightened." And I says, "I won't do it no more, Alice;" and she jumped up and clung around me and says, "I love yer again, Mr. Peters I do love yer, and I want them sweeties."

'Lor, it seems I can feel them little hands on my neck now, and hear her little voice, "I do love yer, Mr. Peters," she said.'

There was a short pause. Mr. Peters cleared his throat, and made surreptitious use of his shiny coat-sleeve to wipe his eyes. Mr. Dimick sympathetically produced the red and yellow handkerchief and wiped his.

'You might not believe it,' went on Mr. Peters at length, 'but the fear of offending that little un kep' me straight. I don't say as I didn't have my glass, but I knew when to stop, you see. I couldn't go to upset her confidence in me. . . . Some time after when the summer come some club or something paid a bit, and her mother she scrubbed together a bit more, and Alice she went for two weeks to Southend along with some others. She'd been ailin' a piece and they thought it 'ld set her up. We missed her you bet, but still we was glad for her to have that there change. But she wasn't looked after quite proper—there was a lot of them youngsters together you see—and she come back brown and that, but a sight weaker. She didn't have no tricks left in her. But now I tell yer what—she'd had a bit of money give her. I don't know as I didn't give her a copper or two myself to spend on sweeties. She'd saved it all, and when she was away she bought two things: one was a little box with shells to it for her mother, and the other that there——' he pointed to the table, and then, suddenly remembering the accident which had befallen his treasure, left the sentence unfinished. He only heaved a great sigh which went to Mr. Dimick's heart. 'She says to me, "Here, Mr. Peters, I've brought yer this, and there's 'For a good boy' on it, 'cause you are good, ain't yer, Mr. Peters? There wasn't one 'For a good man,'" she says, "but I thought you wouldn't mind bein' called a boy for once, Mr. Peters," she said. Lor, I did laugh.

'The next winter . . . she died.

'I've got rid of a many things, but I've had a superstition about that there cup,' he ended huskily.

'Dear, dear,' said Mr. Dimick, applying the red handkerchief again, 'and I've abroke it.'

He looked at the one he was holding and then deposited it carefully on the table. A thought had come to him. It was in answer to it that he said mournfully:

'That was Sairey's.'

'Yes,' said Mr. Peters, 'it's a pretty bit of chiney, too.'

'She was took to Margate once with a treat,' continued Mr. Dimick, still dolefully contemplating the cup and saucer; 'it was only women and I didn't go along. But she brought that with her for me. She always had a thought for me, Sairey had. There was the cup and a bag of shrimps. I remember them shrimps. They weren't like no other shrimps I ever tasted. Not near so much taste to 'em. I mind I said to Sairey, "Shrimps is like everything else. The best's in London. Why I've got tastier ones in the 'Arrow Road many's the time off a barrer." But the cup I hadn't no fault with.'

'No,' said Mr. Peters again, 'it's certainly a pretty bit of chiney.'

Perhaps Mr. Peters guessed what was in Mr. Dimick's mind. He kept his eye fixed upon the 'Present from Margate,' and at length he said, 'It resembles mine, too, don't it?'

'Why, yes,' said poor Mr. Dimick ruefully, 'it ain't altogether different neither.' He put out one finger and touched it: 'P'r'aps,' he said with a break in his poor old voice, 'p'r'aps it'll make a substitoot.'

'Meanin',' said Mr. Peters quickly, 'in the place of t'other?'

'That's so,' assented Mr. Dimick tremulously.

'Why, for that matter it is ill-convenient only to have one, it don't look hospitible, do it? But I'm afraid I'm a robbing of you, Dimick.'

'Don't name it,' said poor Mr. Dimick, 'there's others.'

But he looked as sad as if he were parting with an old and valued friend.

'Well,' said Mr. Peters magnanimously, 'we'll put it in this way, Dimick. Whenever you drop in to tea you shall use it. Thank you kindly. I won't refuse you, Dimick. I know you wouldn't offer if you meant me to refuse you.'

'No,' said Mr. Dimick. But the 'no' was a very undecided one.

Very soon after this little transaction he went back to his own room. He usually retired to bed shortly after dusk, having a pipe by way of supper. This evening he had not the heart to undress and settle down for the night. He lit the evil-smelling oil-lamp, and sat down at his small table, resting his elbows upon it. Then he deliberately contemplated the room and his possessions. There were the 'Foresters' and the lustres, there were the glass sugar-basin and the two glass jugs, there was the green vase with red roses, there were the two chipped pudding-plates that Sairey had picked up cheap, there were the two with the pretty pattern round the brim that they had bought together at Clare Market, there was the cup with the 'Battle of Waterloo' on it, and there ——no, a gap, a gap represented the cup and saucer which had come from Margate.

All that he possessed seemed valueless without it. Look where he would he could see nothing but just that gap.

And surely Sairey would have been deeply grieved to have her collection spoilt in this manner.

He shook his head and moved uneasily on his chair. Perhaps he had been too impulsive.

But then he had destroyed his friend's little treasure, and surely it was only just to make such restitution as lay in his power. Even if he had had the money to buy a cup as good as that which had been broken, he could scarcely have hoped to replace it by one which could recall his own to Peters, especially as the Latimer Road did not offer many facilities for the purchase of varieties in china, and he was not strong enough to go farther afield unaided.

But it did seem a pity, and he could not help wishing that there were any other way of making it up to Peters but just this one.

Once more he surveyed his belongings. Was there anything he valued less? The other cups? Why, he supposed not. Certainly there were two of the flowered pattern, but then it seemed a shame to separate them, they looked so nice on either side of the green vase. The 'Battle of Waterloo'? No, that was so interesting. He liked to take it in his hands and pick out the characters. True, he wasn't quite clear as to which was Boney and which was Wellington—they were dressed so much alike, and the few features they possessed were so very similar; but what did that matter? The value of the cup was undiminished. It was sufficient that both the generals were represented.

He ceased his meditation suddenly. There was only room in his mind for one thought at a time. The question as to what he could spare to Peters was driven out by the reflection that he would have to rearrange his china. The 'Battle of Waterloo' and the 'Present from Margate' had set each other off. The disposition was now one-sided. There was a want of symmetry about the shelf as it appeared at present. The sugar-basin might perhaps be used to supplement the cup; it could be spared from its place, but then it was certainly rather large. It would dwarf the cup. Suppose he took the cup off the shelf altogether and put it on the mantelpiece by the side of one of the lustres. No; even then it would want something to match it. And if it went in the middle? Why, then he would have to move the bunch of wax flowers beneath a (broken) glass shade which so elegantly occupied the central position. It was very worrying. He began to think that the possession of property was not without its drawbacks. Then he gave way to futile wishes and regrets. He lamented his generosity to Peters, and he felt what a pity it was he had gone in to tea that afternoon, or, at any rate, that he had held his cup on his knees. Perhaps, if he had not been sitting near the fender the cup might have fallen without being broken. But he *had* gone to take tea with Peters, he *had* held the cup on his knees, it *had* fallen on the fender, and he *had* offered a substitute. He supposed there was nothing for it but submission.

At last he abandoned the idea of making any rearrangement to-night. He began the lengthy process of undressing, got into bed, and extinguished the light. It was striking ten when he laid his night-capped head on the pillow. That was for him quite a late hour.

But though he might have been expected to feel tired, no sleep visited his eyelids. He lay there hour after hour wide awake, and staring into the darkness. In his mind's eye he still saw that gap, and it worried him past endurance. He tried to think of something else, but, however hard he strove to dwell upon some other topic, he always came back to the cup or made fresh combinations with his china, all of which, as they presented themselves to his imagination, were in some way unsatisfactory. Once he almost determined to go into Peters' room and ask him to give him back the 'Present,' but then he remembered how well Peters had behaved about the breakage, and how, with more justice, he might ask him to give back his cup. No, it would not be right to take his gift away. It had been freely proffered. And, after all, he had gone so far as to assure Peters that it was not a mere compliment, but a *bona fide* offer which he had made. It would be humiliating to draw back now.

At his age and in his health a sleepless night was no trifle.

The next morning he was so weak and tired that he did not get up. He lay dozing on and off, but in the wakeful intervals he was much depressed. He had, even when his mind was not actively dwelling on the subject, a consciousness that something unpleasant had happened. At last he could stay in bed no longer. He got up, and, as on the previous afternoon, went in to have tea with Mr. Peters. He was anxious to see his cup once more.

'Hullo!' said Mr. Peters, who was again disturbed at the fag-end of his post-meridian nap, 'why, what have you been doin' all the mornin'? It's my cleanin' up day and I've been attendin' to my furnitur'. How's yourself? You're lookin' peaky.'

'I don't feel partikler hearty,' said Dimick, accepting as before the unoccupied chair to which Mr. Peters pointed; 'I haven't slep'.'

'Dear, that's a bother. Was it the cough? You must be careful yer know, Dimick. If you gets bad this winter they'll be sendin' you off to the Workus Infirmary as sure as my name's Nathanel Peters.'

'It weren't the cough.'

'What then? Worritin'? You'll never grow fat if you worrit, Dimick, and if you get so thin as that come to you'll have bed sores when you're ill. I suppose worritin's like measles, some's liable and some ain't. What is it now?'

'Nothink partikler,' said Mr. Dimick feebly.

Mr. Peters looked at him sharply.

'There is,' he said.

'No, there ain't.'

'Well, look a bit perkier then. Bless my soul, who ought to be happy if we didn't, with all our cares behind us, so to speak, except a matter of stiff joints? That ain't worth considerin'. Now, let's have a cup of tea.'

Mr. Dimick held his cup closely in his two hands, partly because the heat of the tea warmed them, but chiefly because the contact with the cup itself cheered him. It was like the touch of a loved being, and diffused comfort through his system. For the time the 'Present from Margate' was his own again, and he was almost happy. Peters noted the expression of his face. He was a shrewd old fellow. Perhaps he had some suspicion that Dimick had been making a sacrifice beyond his feeble strength. But he said nothing.

The two old men talked little. Dimick was somewhat deafer than usual, owing to his general weariness, and he was also not a particularly lively companion. But he sat on quite a long time. The cup was to him what a strayed sheep is to a loving shepherd; for it, it was worth leaving all the others which were safe. When at length he did retire it was with a backward loving glance at the piece of china, which was not lost upon Peters.

'There ain't no doubt,' said the latter to himself, 'that Dimick is a-drawin' back. He don't want to part with that cup. He's a-worritin' about it. But if he want it let him speak up and say it. I don't count hints as nothink. Besides, I didn't ought to encourage him in covetousness, and he've got all them other bits.'

That night, as on the previous one, poor Mr. Dimick slept but little. He was really too tired and overstrained. When he awoke from an uneasy slumber the moon was shining into his room, and it was as light as day. The gap on his shelf was painfully apparent to him. He lay and watched it for some time. Presently he sat up in bed, fired with a sudden resolve.

'I don't think I'ld mind it the same in the day-time,' he said, 'but at night it do seem to worrit me. It's use, I daresay, but when you come to my age use is second natur'. To-morrow I'll do 'em different. But to-night I feel I must have it. Peters sleeps deep. If I creep in quiet I can soon feel it and bring it in, and I can put it back in the mornin'.'

He got out of bed, put on his old coat, and slipped his feet into his 'carpets.' Then he stole to the door, opened it, and stood in the dark passage. It was only a step from his door to that of Peters'. His hands were trembling so that he could scarcely turn the handle, and he was, above all things, anxious to avoid making a noise. He did not want to alarm or disturb his friend.

Deaf as he was, he could hear Mr. Peters' loud and prolonged snores. They comforted him as a voucher for the soundness of that gentleman's slumber. He crept stealthily along the floor. He knew every inch of that room as well as he knew his own, and he was aware that Mr. Peters kept his crockery in the little cupboard near the window, the door of which always stood open. Before very long his fingers were carefully feeling along the shelf. They wandered first into the sugar-basin; he knew that by the feel of the sugar. He removed them, and presently they touched the twisted handle of the 'Present from Margate.' A thrill passed through him—a thrill of joy and triumph. He would know that handle among a thousand, even in the darkness. He felt along the cup. It was standing in the saucer. He took the parts up very carefully, one in either hand, to prevent their rattling against each other.

Now he had got them, a sudden eagerness to be gone possessed him. He went almost hurriedly across the room, making for the door, dragging his slippered feet along with less caution, and consequently with more noise than before.

Whether his footsteps were audible to Peters or whether the latter was merely awakened by a bad dream is not certain, but, whatever the cause, he suddenly sprang up in bed with an oath. It broke with startling force upon the silence, and gave Dimick such a fright that he jumped nearly out of his skin, cup and saucer fell from his loosened grasp with a clatter, and in a minute he was lying on the floor in a heap, groping for them and crying like a child.

If Mr. Peters had been asleep before, he was now effectually awakened. He struck a light and looked about him. Then he deliberately got out of bed, walked up to the intruder and shook him, as one would shake a naughty child with whom one was more grieved than angry.

'So that's it,' he said; 'you're sleep-walking after that bit of chiney. Take it along with you and don't be a fool. Why, you're all of a shiver. You'll take a chill and be sent to the infirmary, that'll be *your* end, for I sha'n't be able to attend to yer if you git me out of bed and keeps me in the cold, all in dishabily as the furreners say. There—don't go blubbering.' The shaking had changed to a gentle patting on the shoulder. 'You ain't in your second childhood yet awhile. Leastways I thought you weren't, but I aren't so sure any longer.'

'I felt that longin' for it,' said Mr. Dimick pitifully. 'But I didn't mean to keep it.'

'You're welcome,' said Mr. Peters.

He picked up the pieces of china; the saucer was cracked, but the cup was uninjured. He placed them in Mr. Dimick's hands and then led him to the door, and closed it upon him.

As for Mr. Dimick, shaken, exhausted, and shivering as he was, he was happy. He put the cup and the saucer back on the bare place on the shelf, then with a sigh of relief, like a tired child, he got back into bed and drew the clothes around him.

He never left the bed again. The cold which was the result of his nocturnal wandering turned to an attack of bronchitis, more severe than he had ever known. When the little parish doctor paid one of his somewhat begrudged visits he told himself that he would have one patient less this winter. Indeed, it soon became apparent both to Mr. Peters and to Mr. Dimick himself that the end was approaching. Neither of the friends had made any allusion to the immediate cause of the illness, and as Mr. Dimick could not take his tea in Mr. Peters' room there was no need to mention the fact that the latter only possessed one cup.

One afternoon, however, about a week after his attack Mr. Dimick invited Mr. Peters to take tea with him.

'It's about the last time, I think, Peters,' he said in his weak old voice, now scarcely raised above a whisper, 'but I'd like it special.'

'I'm very willin', Dimick,' Mr. Peters said; 'but don't you git low, now. There's no knowing but you'll be up and about yet. P'r'aps you'll see me out.'

Dimick's deafness had increased. He did not hear what Peters said, but he grasped his meaning. He shook his head. Then he pointed with his lean finger to the shelf.

'Take down the "Margate,"' he said; 'I want you to drink yer tea out of it. . . . It ain't'—he paused to cough and his eyes filled with tears—'it ain't as I grudged it yer—Peters. It was just use—yer know. And somehow I fancied Sairey wouldn't be pleased. . . . I'ld ought to have been content, seein' as . . . I smashed the souveneer.'

'Now don't name it, Dimick,' Peters said, 'don't, I beg of yer. Bless me,' he added huskily, 'I'ld rather you be happy than have a cup with twenty Margate piers to it.'

'When I'm gone,' Dimick said still more feebly, 'it's yours, Peters. It's yours now, but if you'll just put it back on the shelf *till* I'm gone I'ld be very grateful. It's use, you see. I don't mind you a-drinkin' from it, but I would like it put on the shelf opposite the "Battle."'

'All serene,' said Mr. Peters.

'There's other things,' went on Mr. Dimick presently, 'I'ld be glad as you should have. The "Foresters"—they mustn't go out o' the family. My daughter must have the "Foresters," and maybe she'd fancy the lustres, but the rest of the chiney I'ld be glad as you should take it. You can set 'em against the souveneer. . . . But I'd like the "Margate" to be kep' on the shelf, Peters, till I'm underground. . . . It were Sairey's, you see, and it's use, Peters, it's use.'

MILITARY BALLOONING.

NATURALLY the first object of the leader of an army is to discover the whereabouts of the enemy, and hitherto he has not had any particular means of doing so beyond the method, which has probably prevailed ever since men unfortunately began to make war on one another, of sending out scouts in advance of his troops. Of course, if he can get on to a high hill near to where the enemy are he can command a sight of them; but then the enemy would, in the first place, probably not allow him to get up such a hill, or, if they allowed him to do so, would take care to keep out of sight themselves. But how will it be if he can carry a lofty watching-place about with him from which either he or his deputies can overlook the enemy's country? The commander who has such an advantage on his side will certainly profit greatly.

Now, it is precisely with the object of gaining such an advantage that military science has within the last few years made use of balloons. It must be understood that military balloons are used for surveying purposes only. It is true that during the Franco-German War balloons were used by the French during the siege of Paris, but they were only employed for carrying letters, passengers, and pigeons, the latter being intended to carry back letters to the besieged city. Nor, again, are balloons used as a means of attack, although some enthusiasts in ballooning have suggested the idea of an aërial battery which should fire down on the enemy from above. Such an operation would, however, be quite impossible, for the reason that a balloon is never intended to hover right over the enemy's position.

And now let us look at some of the requirements of such a moving watch-tower as we may consider a military balloon to be. In the first place, it must be easy of transport, not only along roads but also across country, and capable of being moved into all places to which troops can be sent. Then it must be always ready for action. A balloon which required a long time for preparation before it could be sent up, after removal from one place to another, would be of little use in operations where, above all things, speed is an absolute necessity.

Military balloons as at present constructed and worked seem exactly to fulfil these conditions. To begin with, they are small—small, that is, in comparison with some of the monster balloons which carry cars full of people—for they are only about twenty feet in diameter, and, like hansom cabs, are constructed to carry two only. In construction they do not differ from ordinary balloons, but there is, of course, a great difference in the way in which they are worked as compared with the unfettered flight of what we may call their civilian brethren. A war-balloon is always 'captive'—that is, secured to mother-earth by a cable. In the next place, they are not often emptied of their gas, and folded up, like a civilian balloon. They are always kept ready for action, properly filled, and can be in this condition transported to any place at a moment's notice.

Let us describe such a balloon as that which was employed during the military manœuvres held last summer on the Berkshire downs. The balloon attached to the division which operated during the manœuvres from the Wiltshire side was kept, when at rest, in a deep ravine close to the camp, where it was screened from wind and dust. To keep off mischievous boys or other sources of danger a guard-tent was erected close by, and there was always an attendant sapper on the watch. The balloon was kept down by means of sand-bags piled into the car, and was also steadied by guy-ropes; so that it was perfectly safe even if a gust of wind should chance to blow up the gully.

Let us suppose that we have taken up our position near the balloon when the hour for starting has arrived, and that we are prepared to follow its fortunes during the day. The balloons were, we may mention, out every day of the manœuvres, starting with the columns and remaining on duty during the whole of the day's proceedings. The first business is, of course, to get the balloon out of the ravine or valley in which it has been stationed for the night. The moorings are cast off, and the little wicker car is almost emptied of the sand-bags. The balloon, being thus free to move, is partly led and partly dragged along by a body of sappers until it is out of the valley and on the high ground above, where its attendant waggon awaits it. And here let us mention briefly the composition of the balloon party or section, and describe the waggons and other gear. We find that the balloon section consists of two mounted Engineer officers, two or three sergeants, and about a dozen sappers, in addition to five drivers, who are required for the waggons. All employed, whether officers or men, have been through a course of balloon instruction at a ballooning school established at Lydd. There are also two other commissioned officers attached to the party, whose duties we shall describe later on.

And now a few words about the waggons. One is a large vehicle, looking something like a timber-truck, and provided with large reels, round which are wound nearly two thousand yards of twisted wire-rope. There are also boxes for tools and other appliances, and the machine is drawn by six horses. There is a second waggon, a good deal smaller than the first and drawn by four horses only. The horses are all of them driven in the usual military fashion—that is to say, there is a driver on the near horse of each pair. As the Engineers boast that their waggons can go wherever guns go, it is necessary they should be horsed in this manner. It would be impossible otherwise to arrange for the proper regulation of pace for each pair of horses when ascending or descending steep and roadless hills. The intention of the larger balloon-waggon is obvious: it forms the base to which the balloon is attached when allowed to rise. The smaller waggon is loaded with iron pipes, which contain a supply of gas, and it is technically called the tube-waggon. As the balloon is always to be moved about ready charged with gas, it does not seem at first sight that this attendant waggon is necessary. But the rule of military operations is always to be prepared for any emergency, and were the balloon to be injured and lose its gas in the field it would be useless unless there were at hand a fresh supply of gas. We might conceive, for instance, of a balloon being wounded and crippled by a hostile shot or by some other accident, and yet being repaired and refilled on the battle-field itself.

And now let us suppose that balloon and waggon have formed a junction, and are ready to start with the troops. Away goes the waggon, with the balloon hanging on to its tail, while the attendant sappers on each side keep it steady. The train moves along at a good round pace, easily keeping up with or even passing the infantry, and makes for the particular spot at which it has been determined to commence ballooning operations, which is usually on the top of a good high hill. An ascent is an easy enough matter, and soon accomplished. The balloon is securely fixed to the end of the wire-rope, and the two men who are to ascend take their places. At the word of command the men who have been holding down the car let go, and up shoots the balloon, unwinding the rope as it rises, and allowed sometimes to ascend to a height of a thousand feet. And suppose the officer receives instructions to move the position of the balloon, is it necessary to haul it down? Not a bit of it. A man is placed at the end of the waggon, who carefully guides the connecting-rope so that it cannot get entangled or run risk of being cut, and away goes the waggon, sometimes at a trot across fields, and up and down hill, until the balloon itself is a long distance away from its original station. Next, suppose that it is necessary to lower the balloon. Is it needful to wind in all the wire-rope that has been paid out from the reels? No such thing. The balloon is brought to earth in a much more expeditious manner. A long stout pole, in the middle of which is a pulley-wheel, is laid across the rope. Half a dozen men seize the pole and run it along the rope, and their weight soon brings the balloon down to the ground. Passengers can then be exchanged, or any other operation can be carried on, and then the men run the pole back, and up shoots the balloon again many hundreds of feet into the air, without having been away from its exalted position more than a few minutes. But it is not necessary to lower the balloon in this or any other way whenever it is required that messages should be exchanged between those below and those above. There are various contrivances for doing this. Sometimes, for instance, a wire is attached, through which messages can be sent to a telephone. Another plan is to send communications down the wire-cable. A little wire-hook is fastened round the cable, and the letter or paper, weighted with a small sand-bag, is sent fluttering down. The human voice, it may also be added, can be heard both from a considerable height and depth, so that verbal communication is not difficult if there is no wind.

And now let us consider in what way the balloon is utilised when it is up aloft. It is, as we have already said, used for purposes of observation only; but the observations to be of any value must be of a recorded character, so that they can be made use of by the general in command. The observations are recorded in permanent form, partly by hand and partly mechanically. We have said that officers belonging to other corps than that of the Royal Engineers are from time to time attached to the balloon section. The duties of these officers are to make sketches or maps of the country which they see below them, and especially to note the position of troops. Where the country is already known the officer takes a map and a pair of field-glasses, and proceeds to mark on the former as quickly as he can all the bodies of troops which he sees. He is provided with two pencils of different coloured chalk, with which he is able to indicate the position of his friends and that of the enemy. These sketches can be sent down in rapid succession in the manner already described, and handed to orderlies who are waiting below ready to gallop off with them; and the general can thus be informed of any change made in the disposition even of the enemy's troops in a very few minutes.

Of course, sketching a bird's-eye view requires some little practice; and it is not everyone who can sit comfortably in the car of a balloon, for to some the sensation is that of being in a boat on a rough sea. Accordingly a supply of officers is sent from various branches of the service in order that there may be a body of qualified men ready at any time to make observations. These officers have, however, nothing to do with the working and management of the balloons, for the Engineer officers alone see to these matters.

The mechanical method of observing is by means of photography, and this process of photographing bird's-eye views is at the present time undergoing development.

Lastly, let us consider how it would fare with balloons in real warfare. The chances of balloons suffering real injury are remote. They would probably be always outside the direct line of fire, and if it were otherwise they could, as we have seen, be quickly removed to a safer position. Even if the worst came and a balloon were crippled by a chance shot, it could, as we have explained, be repaired and made fit for service again at once. The military balloonist of the future will, we may certainly say, be an important factor in the decision of a battle; but he will himself be tolerably secure from any personal danger.

CHARACTER NOTE.

'THE PRACTICAL WOMAN.'

Il n'y a guère de femme assez habile pour connaître tout le mal qu'elle fait.

At an early age Nora fixes her calm and discerning eye on a wholly eligible young man. The fact that he is comfortably off and has excellent prospects has, of course, nothing to do with her regard for him. Love is, we know, superior to these things.

But, as Nora often remarks, Love is not superior to the tradespeople, who must always be taken into consideration when one is deciding where to place one's young affections.

There is no silly sentimentality about Nora. She is pre-eminently a girl who will make an excellent wife. On the very first evening she is engaged she produces a large note-book and a foot-rule. In the note-book she makes a list of the utensils which will be required for her new kitchen, and asks Arthur if he really thinks a cook can possibly require more than six saucepans.

Arthur says, 'Don't bother about saucepans yet awhile,' and begins to be immensely sentimental. Arthur is sentimental. There is no doubt about it. Nora raises a face wholly pretty and good-tempered, and gives Arthur a little peck on the cheek, shakes her head at his foolishness with an engaging smile, and returns to the saucepans. Afterwards she measures carpets with a foot-rule, and is just a trifle vexed with Arthur that he cannot remember if his drawing-room is 10 feet by 7 or 10 feet by 6.

It is delightful to see a girl so thoroughly practical and sensible, especially when one remembers what fools most people make of themselves when they are engaged to be married. Nor can it possibly be supposed that Nora is not rather fond of Arthur. It is one's duty to care for the man one is going to marry, and Nora's sense of duty is immense. Her feelings are always regulated by principle; and they never run away with her, as Arthur's do, for instance.

'I cannot say,' says Nora to a girl-friend, with that delightful candour which is a part of her attraction, 'that I am devotedly in love with Arthur. In fact, I should say that if Mr. Morton had proposed to me, as I expected he would have done, I should have married him in preference. But Arthur is very good and right-minded, and is always at church on Sunday, which is more than one can say of Mr. Morton. Therefore I am sure everything is ordered for the best.'

The engagement is not a long one, but long enough for Nora in company with the note-book and Arthur to choose the furniture in a particularly competent, shrewd, and business-like manner. They meet other couples doing the same thing. These, perhaps, blinded with love, may take painted deal for oak, and the latest imitation for the genuine antique. But not so Nora.

Arthur trots behind her, and when he has a chance—and he very seldom has—murmurs soft nothings in her ear. Nora receives them with admirable good temper.

'But because we are in love,' she says, with a very pretty smile, 'there is no reason why we should be cheated.'

Which, indeed, is perfectly true.

Nora is a very pretty bride. Other girls have been seen on the auspicious day flushed with excitement or pale with nervousness, or even with noses reddened from weeping. But Nora is charmingly calm and collected.

They have a delightful wedding-trip, of course. Where is the person who has not had a delightful wedding-trip? Then they settle down, and the cook is comfortably established with her six saucepans. Nora is a wife for whom any man ought to be thankful. She feeds Arthur with great judiciousness. She institutes a daily reading of the Scriptures aloud for his benefit.

'By Jove!' says Arthur weakly—he is a weak person—'can't I be trusted to read them to myself?'

Nora replies, with her usual clear good sense and a highly principled face, that it is a great deal better he should read them with her, because then she has certainty to go upon, and not trust. Which is eminently more satisfactory.

She manages him very well. She is fond of him, of course, but does not allow him to be maudlinly sentimental.

'Dear Arthur,' she says, with her prettiest smile, 'of course I like you. It is my duty. But I don't mean to say that if you were to die I should not most likely marry again—that is, of course, after a decent interval.'

'Thank you for the interval,' says Arthur. Perhaps he thinks he is sarcastic. But Nora very properly takes him quite seriously, and says that if there were no interval people would talk.

She is full of kindnesses and deeds of mercy. She discovers a little Mrs. Smith, with an income of one hundred pounds per annum and a great number of children. Nora decides, in her competent and business-like way, that the colonies are the place for Mrs. Smith. Therefore she proceeds to arrange for the emigration, and makes outfits for the emigrants. During this time Arthur hardly ever sees her. He would be a selfish beast if he complained. But he is a selfish beast, and he does complain.

On which Nora says, 'Now, dear, how would *you* like to have one hundred a year, ten children, and no prospects? You should consider other people a little.'

And Arthur is duly crushed.

Mrs. Smith is so overcome with all the kindnesses she receives from Nora that, one day, being an overwrought and emotional person, she throws her arms round her benefactress's neck and kisses her, with deplorably weak tears.

Nora dries the tears carefully from her dress, which is a new one—and Nora is always economical—and looks at Mrs. Smith with an amused little smile—the best thing for Mrs. Smith undoubtedly, for it has the effect of chilling her emotions a little and making her recover herself quickly.

'John,' says Mrs. Smith to a worn and harassed husband that evening, 'if Nora were not without a heart at all she would be the kindest-hearted person in the world.'

A ridiculous remark. But Mrs. Smith is a ridiculous little person.

Nora, it is very true, has a better foundation for her good deeds than mere feeling and impulse. She is a mass of Principle. Some weak persons are loving and sympathetic because they feel so. A poor reason indeed. They remove suffering because it hurts them to see it; which is plainly pure selfishness. But Nora has never done a good deed—and her good deeds are many—which was not prompted solely by duty.

'Dash your duty!' Arthur has once said. 'Dash your duty! If that's the only reason you care about me, I'd rather you didn't do it at all.'

Nora very properly first reprimands Arthur for his strong language—it is such bad taste—and then says she is sure he would not be so cross and discontented without some reason, and is afraid it must be his liver. She doctors him, therefore, indefatigably for that organ—Eno's fruit salt and Beecham's pills.

But his liver never seems to be completely cured.

One day an infant appears upon the scene. It is an interruption. Any one who has work—charitable work, too—upon their hands, as Nora has, would feel the same thing. The secretaryship of the Amalgamated Servant Girls, a district of costermongers, a cutting-out class, and a golf club, all have to go to the wall for it.

It is not even a pretty infant. It is purple in colour; and its nose, instead of being patrician, like its mamma's, as one had a right to expect, turns up in the air and is red at the tip. It is a chilly and disconsolate-looking baby, in fact. And yet, though Nora cannot pretend to find it interesting, as some weak-minded mammas have been known to find equally dull specimens, it is beautifully brought up—on Principle, and on a System.

The System involves bracing and much open air; fogs and east winds useful for their hardening properties. Crying not allowed by the Principle. The house not turned topsy-turvy because of the infant's presence therein. From the first moment of its existence it is brought up on a prearranged plan—a plan absolutely infallible, and not admitting of modification.

Nora may not—indeed, does not—crow and make a fool of herself over the baby, as many mothers do. But it has the best of everything—hygienic clothing, and a nurse who does not dare to rebel (openly at least) against the System.

When Nora returns to her good works she by no means, as so many might, neglects the baby for them. The baby has been Sent. It is her duty. She visits the nursery, therefore, several times a day between other engagements, and sees that the System is carried out. She moves the cradle with the toe of her boot, and looks at the infant proudly, of course, but perhaps a trifle critically. She feels a slight and very natural annoyance that it is plainer than other persons' babies, and then hastens off, full of duty, to the cutting-out class.

Arthur is weak over that infant; for a man, deplorably weak. Once, indeed, Nora finds him kneeling by the cradle with one of the baby's ridiculous hands grasping his finger. He really looks most idiotic. When Nora sees him she looks in his face and laughs; not maliciously, or as if she were displeased—only a laugh of amusement. But it causes him to drop the ridiculous hand, and feel as if he had made a fool of himself; which shows how a little good-humoured ridicule may cure a man of his worst failings.

One night the infant is taken suddenly ill. It has, indeed, been systematised the day before in a north-east gale, and, being a misconstructed infant, instead of benefiting by a *régime,* is dying of it.

Nora is admirably calm and collected. While another mother—Mrs. Smith, for instance—would be agitated into putting the baby into an ipecacuanha bath and pouring hot water down its throat, with a delightful composure and common sense Nora is reading a medical book to see what ought to be done under the circumstances.

'Dash that book!' says Arthur, who has come very interferingly into the nursery in an exceedingly impromptu costume. 'It is too late to begin learning *now* what you ought to do. I should have thought instinct would have taught you something of the way to manage it.'

'I have never heard,' says Nora, with a perfectly good-tempered smile, 'that instinct instructs any one in the science of medicine; but it is certainly to be wished that it did.'

The baby lies on her lap, and they wait thus for the doctor. The nurse stands by sobbing. Sobs are so useful. But the nurse is plebeian and emotional. Arthur watches the child with a face suddenly grown haggard. He is not plebeian; but he is emotional, too.

Before morning the frail life goes out with a sigh, and the plebeian nurse is carried away in hysterics.

The parents leave the nursery with the doctor.

'What was the cause of death?' asks Arthur in an odd voice.

'The System,' answers the doctor. He looks at Nora. He does not spare her. He need not. If there is a shadow on her pretty face it is a very faint one.

'It answers with most babies,' she replies.

And the doctor says, 'If you have another child, madam, try a little more love and a little less System. Believe me, that will answer better.'

Then he leaves them alone.

For a while they stand in silence.

'We must try,' says Nora, laying a hand on Arthur's shoulder, 'to be resigned. Of course, it is very sad, but it is Sent.'

Arthur is usually a weak man, Heaven knows. But he turns upon her now with his eyes burning with some strong passion.

'Confound you!' he says; 'confound your systems, and your resignation, and your religion—confound them all!'

The quarrel, if quarrel it can be called, is made up, of course. Quarrels are so wrong. And Arthur apologises for swearing. Swearing is so dreadful. And soon there is another baby, who really does just as well as the first. And Nora is as bright and good-tempered and sensible as ever; and Arthur is perfectly satisfied, of course, except when his liver is wrong; and that, as every one knows, makes any one take a discontented view of life and think things are not as satisfactory as they might be.

THE CALDERA OF PALMA.

Of the hundreds of able-bodied visitors who annually find their way to Orotava very few cross to the island of Palma, whose jagged mountain-tops they see at sunset from fifty to sixty miles distant. There is every excuse for them, if they love comfort first of all and gorgeous and amazing scenery only secondarily. Yet if they did but realise what they were foregoing! To my mind not the Peak of Teneriffe itself is so enthralling as Palma's Caldera. According to an old legend these two are complements of each other. The Peak is the nut taken from the shell of the Caldera. How it crossed the Atlantic history does not tell us. But if the legend does nothing else, it hints at the huge size of the cavity known as the Caldera or Cauldron of Palma. The Peak is savage and rude, and utter silence reigns around its cone. The Caldera is the most bewildering imaginable combination of verdure and precipices, of deathly stillness one moment and of stunning echoes the next, as the voices of its hollows are aroused by the crashing from its heights into its terraced depths of yet another of the avalanches, the constant procession of which gives eternal change to the place. It is really hard to keep the pen within bounds when writing about the Caldera.

The island of Palma is interesting enough in itself. The hotels of its capital, however, do not pass muster. They are Spanish down to the foundations. You must dine in them at the discomforting hour of ten A.M. and sup at five; and Heaven knows what the fastidious guest would do if he could get a peep at their kitchens and culinary arrangements. It is not easy, moreover, for the ordinary Englishman to associate comfortably with the Spanish persons who share with him the *mesa redonda*, the round table, or *table d'hôte*. How on earth is a plain Briton to know the line which divides the familiarity that breeds contempt from that excess of reserve which offends the pride of the Southerner—and especially the Spaniard—almost as much as a buffet? The fleas, too, must be mentioned, as well as the bad smells and the somewhat undue publicity to which you are exposed as you lie abed in a room opening by unblinded windows upon the inner gallery of the house.

From the prospectus of one of these hotels (in which we were boarded for 3*s.* 4*d.* a day) the following lure for tourists may be excerpted: 'This hotel is highly recommendable for being exceptionally clean and for its splendid cooking. There is a stationary interpreter.' Then God help visitors to the other Palma hotels! we may exclaim with truthful fervour. Indeed, as a matter of fact, in the villages hotels are not. You may get a bed in the drawing-room of the mayor or in the outhouse of a miller, according to your introductions. The drawing-room fleas will probably prove the more virulent of the two classes. As for the food in the rural districts, hard-boiled eggs and *puchero* may be relied upon. No matter what the basis of the *puchero*, as an achieved dish the mess is nearly always palatable, though warmish with pimento. A tough hen is also not difficult to procure. These viands, with good bread, wine, sometimes too strong for anything, and native cigars as strong as the wine, complete the *menu* of Palma's furnishing.

Before climbing the mountains, which rise as such a picturesque barrier between Santa Cruz (Palma's capital) and the interior, we made many excursions in the neighbourhood. There is as much lava in Palma as in Teneriffe, though no volcanoes that can be described as active. The volcanic hills near the Caldera are worth seeing, the auburn boulders of scoriæ on their primrose-hued slopes contrasting well with the bright yellow and green of the pines that have already got a firm footing in their sands. The last eruption here was in 1677. We were favoured with the sight of a manuscript account of this occurrence, which might have done more damage than it did. The lava flow towards the city was, however, 'so pestilential that one man was suffocated while looking for his goats, and twenty-seven of his goats also perished.' This lava now forms a rugged black coast-line south of the capital—as unpleasant a material for pedestrians as can be imagined.

We also attended a cock-fight. There was a good deal more excitement over these duels between bantams than even at one of our British League football matches. I never saw persons of Spanish blood so beside themselves. One bird misbehaved itself—declined wholly to accept its antagonist's challenge or respond to its owner's earnest promptings. It had entered the arena with a fine blue silk ribbon round its game leg. But when the populace expressed their disgust with it, the master of the ceremonies captured it and threw it away by the same leg, the sharp spur of which seemed such a harmless menace. Of course, there was betting about the cocks. There was also a sweepstake, the winning number of which was drawn by a little boy, blindfolded, taken from the gallery. The recipient of the prize made the lad exceedingly happy by pitching him a peseta (10*d.*) ere he returned to his comrades. By-the-by, this scene of pleasure took place on Sunday, after High Mass. Every one nearly was present. The blue-blooded gentlemen who carried us to the amphitheatre thought much more of this sport than of the joys of mountain scrambling in the Caldera.

The Abbé Viera, the ancient historian of the Canaries, describes Palma as 'one of the most craggy countries in the world.' It certainly would be hard to beat. Though only about twenty-five miles long by fifteen broad, its mountains touch a height of 8,500 feet. The loftiest peaks are those which form the sides of the Caldera. From their outer slopes yawning chasms or *barrancos* spread seawards, north, east, and west. The work of travelling round the island is thus an exceedingly toilsome series of ascents and descents. But the pictures left in the mind are enduring. Sweltering in the lowest depth of a *barranco*, it was superb to gaze up the rift at the fir-clad mountain masses of the interior—with spots of snow on the yet higher summits above, and the dazzling blue Canarian sky over all. The spiders among the euphorbia, aloes, and other scrub of these defiles are, however, ugly great brutes; and in places there is a very real danger of slipping a few hundred feet and coming to a sudden end.

The Caldera may be approached circuitously from the north; or directly by climbing the cordillera behind Santa Cruz, and thence breaking into it by a pass in the mountain barrier. Having plenty of time on our hands, we tried both ways. The first route cost us three days of mule-riding. Both ourselves and the mules were glad when it was over. The second route requires but a single long day. We entered the hollow by its neck from the west and from the pass full in its midst. Both approaches are sensational and striking, but that from the west is incomparably the more thrilling. The person who has made it will never forget it. There is nothing in Europe that so worthily exacts the attribute of awesome.

We started from the capital at six o'clock on a May morning for our introduction to the Caldera. Our host exerted himself vigorously to impress upon us that we had a rough time before us.

But we told him that England also is *muy pendiente* (very steep) in parts, and that we were not at all alarmed by the look of the mountains. Indeed, that were impossible—at first. They stood clear against the blue, with the pencilling of their pines and peaks in the strongest relief. Behind us, across the paler blue Atlantic streaked with silver lines, the Peak of Teneriffe showed with its usual grace. The weather could not have seemed more kind. And so we pushed through the herd of goats in the Santa Cruz streets—each bound for the doors of the householders whom it regularly supplied with milk—and zigzagged up the fine 'carretera,' or cart-road, full of hope.

At a thousand feet or more above the capital we had a little plateau to cross ere attacking the cordillera proper. The sun was already hot, and it could have shone on nothing fairer than the deep lanes through which we made our way to the woods. There were palm-trees on each hand and fig and pear trees, with a thick tangle of aloes, prickly pear, and homely bramble draping the sides of the lanes. Over and amid the latter, geraniums and nasturtiums climbed in full flower, and lilies, violets, and a score of different kinds of ferns nestled in the moist greenery. I should have liked to have conveyed a section of one of these lanes bodily into England. They were almost too absorbing in their beauty, however—like a very elaborate mosaic.

Thence, by small barley-fields red with poppies and patches of fragrant beans in flower, we struck the roots of the mountain. Laurels as big as trees at the outset, with forget-me-nots in clusters among the moss about their trunks, gave place anon to the famous Canarian heath and firs and nothing else. It was steep climbing, but at length we stood about five thousand feet over the capital, and tried to peer down upon it. A hopeless task, however, for we were by this time deep in the clouds, with a tearing wind about us that made as much noise against the rocks and bleached tree-trunks as a stormy sea on an iron-bound coast. The wind almost blew us over the watershed and on to the western slopes of the cordillera, where all was suddenly peaceful and bright, and whence the fertile plain of Argual and Los Llanos was precisely mapped out, with the volcanic pimples of Tocade and its neighbours glowing coral colour in the sun to the south. Our guides had hurried furiously up the windward side, and now they required a rest. They had picked up a ragamuffin of a fellow *en route*, who diverted them much with his funny stories. He shared the luncheon with us. And afterwards, without ceremony, when we were lighting our cigars, the chief guide said to us—'Have the kindness to give this *caballero* a cigar.' We laughed, and did so. It is policy in Spanish countries to humour your guide, even though your innate amiability is sorely tested in the task. The request in itself was, of course, trivial enough; for we had stuffed our pockets with the best Palma cigars at tenpence a score.

Our descent afterwards through the pines was extremely rapid, by steep zigzags. We made one more halt in the plain, with the volcanic hills and lava on the left hand and the southern mountains of the Caldera to the right. Our place of sojourn was the locally famous 'Pino del Virgen,' or 'Our Lady's Pine'—a monster tree with a miracle-working shrine annexed, containing the usual votive offerings in wax. In a house adjacent was a pretty group of islanders—the women in black gowns and with exceedingly small straw hats perched on their heads, the men also in black and wearing the native kind of Phrygian cap which hangs over to the ear on one side. In Palma they see so few tourists that we were, as in the capital, objects of considerable interest. One of the ladies wished to examine the texture of our tweed jackets. Of course, we allowed her to do so, though she and her companions were of such stalwart proportions that it might have been useless had we opposed her wishes in the matter. Even before the conquest the Palma women were notorious for their strength and courage.

We reached Los Llanos, the town nearest the Caldera entrance, too late in the day to see aught of the great cavity. The clouds were massed over it, and we were assured they were equally dense in the hollow. It is a way the Caldera has. Almost as regularly as the Peak of Teneriffe in spring girdles itself with huge cumuli an hour or two after sunrise, the Caldera of Palma also quite early in the day brews clouds in its vast pot, and sets them whirling about in the confined area in a way impressive enough, but tantalising to the visitor who wishes to see the configuration of the place.

They made us fairly comfortable in the Los Llanos inn. There was a delightful little patio of orange-trees and flowers which we had to ourselves, and in which, in the golden light of the sunset, we drank wine and smoked while we watched the crimsoning of the sky overhead. The apothecary, the mayor, the priest, and one or two more notables dropped in to see us, and entertained us with civil conversation. Oddly enough, his reverence's talk was chiefly about cock-fighting. He fancied there was as much of it in England as in Palma. I believe he was anxious that we should call and see a bird of his own breeding; but we did not press the affair. On the other hand, the mayor and the merchants signified the hope that the English tourists in Teneriffe would soon come to their senses and realise that Palma, with its Caldera, is a superior resort to the land of the Peak. 'We want some of your dollars, *amigo mio*,' one of them said point-blank, with a laugh.

The next day we were abroad at six o'clock, with our faces set towards the Caldera. A few fields of poppied barley on the slope of mountain to the north were crossed, and then with scant warning the abyss of the seaward approach to the wonder was at our feet, and the prodigious marbled face of the north-western wall of the Caldera was before us, with a league of space between it and ourselves. We had struck the neck of the cauldron some two thousand feet above the river-bed, which trends west in a cañon as clean cut as those of the Far West. In a few minutes we were in a bewilderment of precipices, above and beneath us; and we looked across the great chasm itself at the sheer walls of the Pico de los Muchachos (the 'Boy's Peak'), from four to five thousand feet in height. Five miles of distance separated us from the Muchachos' precipice; but in the brilliant morning light it was as if it were only half a mile away. The purple and orange coloured rock was scored with long white lines like quartz seams, the sun touched the golden Canarian pines on its summit, and the Caldera was declared to us at its base as a pit between the mountains.

But what a pit, to be sure! The farther we went along the edge of our pass (and we hurried in terror of the all-obliterating clouds) the more tremendous it showed. We were on historical ground, but it was no time to remember that. It was by this pass that Lugo, the conqueror of the Canaries, having subjugated the rest of Palma, in 1493 sought to oust Tanausu, the native king of the Caldera. He could not have tackled a more desperate enterprise. The men of the Caldera had but to perch on the precipices above and hurl trees and stones upon the invaders. The sight of the hollow they were bound for must have appalled many even of Lugo's accomplished filibusters. In fact the Spaniards had to retreat. It was only by treachery that this, the last of Palma's principalities, fell to Spain. Lugo pleaded for a conference with Tanausu on the plain outside. The native king, like the Guanches of Teneriffe, believed his assurances of good faith, and, like the Guanches, he paid for his honourable credulity. His retreat was cut off and he was taken prisoner. Rather than live as a captive in Spain, however, the king of the Caldera chose to drown himself on the voyage to Cadiz.

Such is the account of the conquest of the Caldera just four centuries ago. A trio of forts or strong barricades, one in the *barranco* of the river-bed, a second on the mountain-side where our path was scratched, and the third on the Pass of the Cumbrecita, might have kept the Caldera independent to this day. There never was a spot so shut in by Dame Nature, and so well able to mock at the invention of gunpowder.

I have termed the Caldera a pit. So it is. But its mouth is about six miles across, and surrounded with castellated crags and sharp pinnacles of mountains. Its depth is, roughly, six thousand feet. You may form an idea of the cumber of its sides and the enormity of this inverted cone of space when it is added that whereas at its mouth skyward the Caldera has an area of some thirty-six square miles, the bottom of the pit covers but about thirty acres. If the upper half of the Peak of Teneriffe were shorn from its base and pitched cone first into the Caldera the misfit would not be much out of the way.

From the jagged rim of the pit (the rocks seem to be imbedded in the sky) on all sides there are precipices. But they are not everywhere as vast as those of the Muchachos. Elsewhere the mountains fall into long, steep, fir-clad slopes, with retama and laurels deep down, and here and there little oases of meadows made by Nature only. These slopes dive magnificently towards the bottom of the Caldera. But their uniformity is broken by the constant downcrash of the rocks here, there, and everywhere—a dozen tons or a thousand tons at a time, bare cliff, or with a hundred fir-trees growing on the mass. These avalanches have been in process ever since the volcanic mouth here ceased to vomit, and they will continue for many a century to come.

After a time we descended from our aërial track to the river-bed. The word ‘ steep ’ scarcely describes the angle of the descent. We might have broken our necks most excusably in a dozen places, and it was with a sigh of contentment that we came to the water's edge and prepared to cross the river. Here, if evidence were needed, was testimony enough to the ancient activity of the vast volcano of which the Caldera was the crater. The boulders in the stream were all of igneous rocks. An hour later we had clambered to the base of the Pico de los Muchachos, and could peer into the crannies of the great wall and see the work of fusion among the rocks, as if the Caldera's furnace fires had been put out only the other day.

We were now in the heart of the Caldera, though not in its deepest cavity. A noble spring gushing from the precipice offered us an irresistible place of halt for the early Spanish dinner. The fountain was draped with maiden-hair and other ferns, and there were asphodels among the grass hard by. The sun still reigned supreme. We looked across the gap at the mammoth slopes of the Pico de Bejanao, with their serried battalions of yellow pines, and at the bold crags of that mountain itself soaring against the sky.

But even while we revelled in the wonderful scene and the combination of exquisite (yet not oppressive) heat, with the cool gush of the fountain by us, our guide pointed to a thin wisp of white vapour lying midway in the Cauldron, and said the clouds had begun to form. They had, worse luck! And yet at first it seemed hard to believe that so innocent a cloudling could be the progenitor of mist dense enough to blot out even a section of the enormous landscape. We watched it critically while we ate and drank. One by one other shreds of vapour rose around it. They united, and ere we had finished our meal the lower reaches of the pit were expunged, and we gazed at the Pico de Bejanao across as burly a billow of cloud as ever sailed swellingly over the broad Atlantic. We ourselves were absorbed by the cloud—waist-deep only for awhile. Overhead the blue sky was at its bluest, and the pines on the slopes never looked more refreshingly green. Then the cloud eddied upward, and from that time forward we had but glimpses of the Caldera.

In such a mist it would have been useless to prowl into the broken depths of the hollow. We did not attempt it. I should have liked to have explored the place a little, to see if haply we could discover the "Dumb Stone" which served as the divinity of the old inhabitants of the Caldera. This was a pinnacle of rock a hundred fathoms high, situated between two brooks. The people called it Ydafe. They believed that its fall would presage their own ruin. They offered it, as a sacrifice, the entrails of the sheep they themselves consumed. 'Are you going to fall, Ydafe?' one of them would ask; and the conventional rejoinder, 'Give it what you have got for it and it will not fall,' was concurrent with the offering made to it. If old Ydafe did not care for such flesh and blood, doubtless the choughs and crows of the Caldera did.

It may, however, be assumed that this mighty idol fulfilled its destiny by collapsing in 1492 or 1493, when Spain was gradually crushing the native potentates in all the Canarian group. In any case, the avalanches must long ago have knocked it over. We heard the roar of one of these landslips while we tarried with our cigars in the fog. We thought it was a clap of thunder, echoed and re-echoed. But our guide enlightened us. It was not our side of the hollow—a mercy for which we were thankful.

We made three other entries into the Caldera ere leaving Palma. The most memorable was certainly that by the Barranco de las Angustias, at the south-western opening of the pit. Seen from the summit of the perpendicular cliffs of pine, the Caldera is embraced as a whole; and the southern part of the island also, with its volcanic pimples, its mountains by Fuencaliente, the villages and their bright cinctures of fertile fields. The Atlantic gives the finishing touch to this panorama.

The Caldera is not to be described by a common man. I have tried to give an idea of it, and a miserably inadequate idea it is. There are scenes (not many, to be sure; yet some there are) that paralyse the pen. The Caldera of Palma is one of them. It is also one of the few natural wonders that cannot fail to come up to expectation. The man who is not satisfied with it ought to have been born in another planet.

WITH EDGED TOOLS.

CHAPTER XXV.

TO THE RESCUE.

I must mix myself with action lest I wither by despair.'

Jocelyn had not conveyed to her brother by word or hint the accusation brought against him by Victor Durnovo. But when he returned home it almost seemed as if he were conscious of the knowledge that was hers. She thought she detected a subtle difference in his manner towards herself—something apologetic and humble. This was really the result of Victor Durnovo's threat made in the office of the factory long before.

Maurice Gordon was not the sort of man to carry through the burden of a half-discovered secret. It needs a special temperament for this—one that is able to inspire fear in whomsoever it may be necessary to hold in check—a temperament with sufficient self-reliance and strength to play an open game steadily through to the end. Since Durnovo's plain-spoken threat had been uttered Gordon had thought of little else, and it was well known that Jocelyn's influence was all that prevented him from taking hopelessly to drink. When away from her at the sub-factories it is to be feared that he gave way to the temptation. There is nothing so wearing as a constant suspense, a never-resting fear; and if a man knows that both may be relieved by a slight over-indulgence he must be a strong man indeed if he can turn aside.

Gordon betrayed himself to Jocelyn in a thousand little ways. He consulted her wishes, deferred to her opinion, and sought her advice in a way which never had been his hitherto; and while both were conscious of this difference, both were alike afraid of seeking to explain it.

Jocelyn knew that her repulse of Victor Durnovo was only a temporary advantage; the position could not remain long undecided. Victor Durnovo would have to be met sooner or later. Each day increased the strength of her conviction that her brother was in the power of this man. Whether he had really allowed himself to be dragged into the horrors of even a slight connection with the slave-trade she could not tell; but she knew the world well enough to recognise the fact that Durnovo had only to make the accusation for it to be believed by the million sensation-mongers who are always on the alert for some new horror. She knew that should Durnovo breathe a word of this in the right quarter—that is to say, into the eager journalistic ear—there would hardly be a civilised country in the world where Maurice Gordon of Loango could dwell under his own name. She felt that they were all living on a slumbering volcano. It was one of those rare cases where human life seems no longer sacred; and this refined, educated, gentle, English lady found herself face to face with the fact that Victor Durnovo's life would be cheap at the price of her own.

At this moment Providence, with the wisdom of which we sometimes catch a glimpse, laid another trouble upon her shoulders. While she was half distracted with the thought of her brother's danger, the news was put into her hand by the grinning Nâla that Jack Meredith—the man she openly in her own heart loved—was in an even greater strait.

Here, at all events, was a peril that could be met, however heavy might be the odds. Her own danger, the horror of Maurice's crime, the hatred for Victor Durnovo, were all swallowed up in the sudden call to help Jack Meredith. And Jocelyn found at least a saving excitement in working night and day for the rescue of the man who was to be Millicent Chyne's husband.

Maurice aided her loyally. His influence with the natives was great; his knowledge of the country second only to Durnovo's. During the fortnight that elapsed between the despatch of the telegram to Guy Oscard and the arrival of that resourceful individual at Loango, the whole coast was astir with preparation and excitement. Thus it came about that Guy Oscard found a little army awaiting him, and to Maurice Gordon was the credit given. Victor Durnovo simply kept out of the way. The news that an expedition was being got together to go to the relief of Jack Meredith never reached him in his retreat. But after a fortnight spent in idleness in the neighbouring interior he could stand the suspense no longer, and came down into the town, to be pounced upon at once by Guy Oscard.

As he stood on the beach near to Oscard, watching the embarkation of the men, his feelings were decidedly mixed. There was an immense relief from the anxiety of the last few weeks. He had stood on the verge of many crimes, and had been forcibly dragged back therefrom by the strong arm of Guy Oscard. It had been Victor Durnovo's intention not only to abandon Jack Meredith to his certain fate, but to appropriate to his own use the consignment of Simiacine, valued at sixty thousand pounds, which he had brought down to the coast. The end of it all was, of course, the possession of Jocelyn Gordon. The programme was simple; but, racked as he was by anxiety, weakened by incipient disease, and paralysed by chronic fear, the difficulties were too great to be overcome. To be a thorough villain one must possess, first of all, good health; secondly, untiring energy; and thirdly, a certain enthusiasm for wrong-doing for its own sake. Criminals of the first standard have always loved crime. Victor Durnovo was not like that. He only made use of crime, and had no desire to cultivate it for its own sake. To be forcibly dragged back, therefore, into the paths of virtue was in some ways a great relief. The presence of Guy Oscard, also, was in itself a comfort. Durnovo felt that no responsibility attached itself to him; he had entire faith in Oscard and had only to obey.

Durnovo was not a person who suffered from too delicate a susceptibility. The shame of his present position did not affect him deeply. Indeed, he was one of those men who have no sense of shame before certain persons; and Guy Oscard was one of those. The position was not in itself one to be proud of, but the half-breed accepted it with wonderful equanimity, and presently he began to assist in the embarkation.

It was nearly dark when the little coast steamer secured by Maurice Gordon for the service turned her prow northward and steamed away.

'The truth is,' Durnovo took an early opportunity of saying to Oscard, 'that my nerve is no longer up to this work. I should not care to undertake this business alone, despite my reputation on the coast. It is a wonderful thing how closely the nerves are allied to the state of one's health.'

'Wonderful!' acquiesced Guy Oscard with a lack of irony which only made the irony keener.

'I've been too long in this d——d country,' exclaimed Durnovo, 'that's the fact. I'm not the man I was.'

Guy Oscard smoked for some moments in silence; then he took his pipe from his lips.

'The only pity is,' he said judicially, 'that you ever undertook to look for the Simiacine if you were going to funk it when the first difficulty arose.'

Without further comment he walked away, and entered into conversation with the captain of the steamer.

'All right,' muttered Durnovo between his teeth—'all right, my sarcastic grand gentleman. I'll be even with you yet.'

The strange part of it was that Guy Oscard never attempted to degrade Durnovo from his post of joint commander. This puzzled the half-breed sorely. It may have been that Oscard knew men better than his indifferent manner would have led the observer to believe. Durnovo's was just one of those natures which in good hands might have been turned to good account. Too much solitude, too much dealing with negro peoples, and, chiefly, too long a sojourn in the demoralising atmosphere of West Africa, had made a worse man of Victor Durnovo than Nature originally intended. He was not wholly bad. Badness is, after all, a matter of comparison, and, in order to draw correctly such a comparison, every allowance must be made for a difference in standard. Victor Durnovo's standard was not a high one; that was all. And in continuing to treat him as an equal and trust him as such, Guy Oscard only showed that he was a cleverer man than the world took him to be.

In due time Msala was reached. As the canoes suitable for up-river traffic were by no means sufficient to transport the whole of the expeditionary force in one journey, a division was made. Durnovo took charge of the advance column, journeying up to the camp from which the long march through the forest was to begin, and sending back the canoes for Oscard and the remainder of the force. With these canoes he sent back word that the hostile tribes were within a few days' march, and that he was fortifying his camp.

This news seemed to furnish Guy Oscard with food for considerable thought, and after some space of time he called Marie.

She came, and, standing before him with her patient dignity of mien, awaited his communications. She never took her eyes off the letter in his hand. Oscard noticed the persistency of her gaze at the time and remembered it again afterwards.

'Marie,' he said, 'I have had rather serious news from Mr. Durnovo.'

'Yes?' rather breathlessly.

'It will not be safe for you to stay at Msala—you must take the children down to Loango.'

'Does he say that?' she asked, in her rapid, indistinct English.

'Who?'

'Vic—Mr. Durnovo.'

'No,' replied Oscard, wondering at the question.

'He does not say anything about me or the children?' persisted Marie.

'No.'

'And yet he says there is danger?'

There was a strange, angry look in her great dark eyes which Oscard did not understand.

'He says that the tribes are within two days' march of his camp.'

She gave an unpleasant little laugh.

'He does not seem to have thought of us at Msala.'

'I suppose,' said Oscard, folding the letter and putting it in his pocket, 'that he thinks it is my duty to do what is best for Msala. That is why I asked you to speak to me.'

Marie did not seem to be listening. She was looking over his head up the river, in the direction from whence the message had come, and there was a singular hopelessness in her eyes.

'I cannot leave until he tells me to,' she said doggedly.

Guy Oscard took the pipe from his lips and examined the bowl of it attentively for a moment.

'Excuse me,' he said gently, 'but I insist on your leaving with the children to-morrow. I will send two men down with you, and will give you a letter to Miss Gordon, who will see to your wants at Loango.'

She looked at him with a sort of wonder.

'You insist?' she said.

He raised his eyes to meet hers.

'Yes,' he answered.

She bowed her head in grave submission, and made a little movement as if to go.

'It is chiefly on account of the children,' he added.

Quite suddenly she smiled, and seemed to check a sob in her throat.

'Yes,' said she softly, 'I know.' And she went into the house.

The next morning brought further rumours of approaching danger, and it seemed certain that this news must have filtered through Durnovo's fortified camp further up the river. This time the report was more definite. There were Arabs leading the tribes, and rumour further stated that an organised descent on Msala was intended. And yet there was no word from Durnovo—no sign to suggest that he had even thought of securing the safety of his housekeeper and the few aged negroes in charge of Msala. This news only strengthened Oscard's determination to send Marie down to the coast, and he personally superintended their departure before taking his seat in the canoe for the up-river voyage. The men of his division had all preceded him, and no one except his own boatmen knew that Msala was to be abandoned.

There was in Guy Oscard a dogged sense of justice which sometimes amounted to a cruel mercilessness. When he reached the camp he deliberately withheld from Durnovo the news that the Msala household had left the river station. Moreover, he allowed Victor Durnovo to further inculpate himself. He led him on to discuss the position of affairs, and the half-breed displayed an intimate knowledge of the enemy's doings. There was only one inference to be drawn, namely, that Victor Durnovo had abandoned his people at Msala with the same deliberation which had characterised his cowardly faithlessness to Jack Meredith.

Guy Oscard was a slow-thinking man, although quick in action. He pieced all these things together. The pieces did not seem to fit just then—the construction was decidedly chaotic in its architecture. But later on the corner-stone of knowledge propped up the edifice, and everything slipped into its place.

Despite disquieting rumours, the expedition was allowed to depart from the river-camp unmolested. For two days they marched through the gloomy forest with all speed. On the third day one of the men of Durnovo's division captured a native who had been prowling on their heels in the line of march. Victor Durnovo sent captor and prisoner to the front of the column, with a message to Oscard that he would come presently and see what information was to be abstracted from the captive. At the midday halt Durnovo accordingly joined Oscard, and the man was brought before them. He was hardly worthy of the name, so disease-stricken, so miserable and half-starved was he.

At first Durnovo and he did not seem to be able to get to an understanding at all; but presently they hit upon a dialect in which they possessed a small common knowledge.

His news was not reassuring. In dealing with numbers he rarely condescended to the use of less than four figures, and his conception of a distance was very vague.

'Ask him,' said Oscard, 'whether he knows that there is an Englishman with a large force on the top of a mountain far to the east.'

Durnovo translated, and the man answered with a smile. In reply to some further question the negro launched into a detailed narrative, to which Durnovo listened eagerly.

'He says,' said the latter to Oscard, 'that the Plateau is in possession of the Masais. It was taken two months ago. The blacks were sold as slaves; the two Englishmen were tortured to death and their bodies burnt.'

Oscard never moved a muscle.

'Ask him if he is quite sure about it.'

'Quite,' replied Durnovo, after questioning. 'By God! Oscard; what a pity! But I always knew it. I knew it was quite hopeless from the first.'

He passed his brown hand nervously over his face, where the perspiration stood in beads.

'Yes,' said Oscard slowly; 'but I think we will go on all the same.'

'What!' cried Durnovo. 'Go on?'

'Yes,' replied Guy Oscard; 'we will go on, and if I find you trying to desert I'll shoot you down like a rat.'

CHAPTER XXVI.

IN PERIL.

> 'He made no sign; the fires of Hell were round him,
> The Pit of Hell below.'

'About as bad as they can be, sir. That's how things is.' Joseph set down his master's breakfast on the rough table that stood in front of his tent and looked at Jack Meredith.

Meredith had a way of performing most of his toilet outside his tent, and while Joseph made his discouraging report he was engaged in buttoning his waistcoat. He nodded gravely, but his manner was not that of a man who fully realised his position of imminent danger. Some men are like this—they die without getting at all flustered.

'There's not more nor two or three out of the whole lot that I can put any trust in,' continued Joseph.

Jack Meredith was putting on his coat.

'I know what a barrack-room mutiny is. I've felt it in the hatmosphere, so to speak, before now, sir.'

'And what does it feel like?' inquired Jack Meredith, lightly arranging his watch-chain.

But Joseph did not answer. He stepped backwards into the tent and brought two rifles. There was no need of answer; for this came in the sound of many voices, the clang and clatter of varied arms.

'Here they come, sir,' said the soldier-servant—respectful, mindful of his place even at this moment.

Jack Meredith merely sat down, behind the little table where his breakfast stood untouched. He leant his elbow on the table and watched the approach of the disorderly band of blacks. Some ran, some hung back, but all were armed.

In front walked a small, truculent-looking man with broad shoulders and an aggressive head.

He planted himself before Meredith, and turning, with a wave of the hand, to indicate his followers, said in English:

'These men—these friends of me—say they are tired of you. You no good leader. They make me their leader.'

He shrugged his shoulders with a hideous grin of deprecation.

'I not want. They make me. We go to join our friends in the valley.'

He pointed down into the valley where the enemy was encamped.

'We have agreed to take two hundred pounds for you. Price given by our friends in valley——'

The man stopped suddenly. He was looking into the muzzle of a revolver with a fixed fascination. Jack Meredith exhibited no haste. He did not seem *yet* to have realised the gravity of the situation. He took very careful aim and pulled the trigger. A little puff of white smoke floated over their heads. The broad-shouldered man with the aggressive head looked stupidly surprised. He turned towards his supporters with a pained look of inquiry, as if there was something he did not quite understand, and then he fell on his face and lay quite still.

Jack Meredith looked on the blank faces with a glance of urbane inquiry.

'Has anybody else anything to say to me?' he asked.

There was a dead silence. Someone laughed rather feebly in the background.

'Then I think I will go on with my breakfast.'

Which he accordingly proceeded to do.

One or two of the mutineers dropped away and went back to their own quarters.

'Take it away,' said Meredith, indicating the body of the dead man with his teaspoon.

'And look here,' he cried out after them, 'do not let us have any more of this nonsense! It will only lead to unpleasantness.'

Some of the men grinned. They were not particularly respectful in their manner of bearing away the mortal remains of their late leader. The feeling had already turned.

Joseph thought fit to clench matters later on in the day by a few remarks of his own.

'That's the sort o' man,' he said, more in resignation than in anger, 'that the guv'nor is. He's quiet like and smooth-spoken, but when he does 'it he 'its 'ard, and when he shoots he shoots mortal straight. Now, what I says to you Christy Minstrels is this: We're all in the same box and we all want the same thing, although I admit there's a bit of a difference in our complexions. Some o' you jokers have got a fine richness of colour on your physiognimies that I don't pretend to emulate. But no matter. What you wants is to get out of this confounded old Platter, quick time, ain't it now?—to get down to Loango and go out on the bust, eh?'

The Christy Minstrels acquiesced.

'Then,' said Joseph, 'obey orders and be hanged to yer.'

It had been apparent to Meredith for some weeks past that the man Nattoo, whom he had just shot, was bent on making trouble. His prompt action had not, therefore, been the result of panic, but the deliberate execution of a fore-ordained sentence. The only question was how to make the necessary execution most awe-inspiring and exemplary. The moment was well chosen, and served to strengthen, for the time being, the waning authority of these two Englishmen thus thrown upon their own resources in the heart of Africa.

The position was not a pleasant one. For three months the Plateau had been surrounded by hostile tribes, who made desultory raids from time to time. These, the little force on the summit was able to repulse; but a combined attack from, say, two sides at once would certainly have been successful. Meredith had no reason to suppose that his appeal for help had reached Msala, infested as the intervening forests were by cannibal tribes. Provisions were at a low ebb. There seemed to be no hope of outside aid, and disaffection was rife in his small force. Jack Meredith, who was no soldier, found himself called upon to defend a weak position, with unreliable men, for an indefinite period.

Joseph had a rough knowledge of soldiering and a very rudimentary notion of fortification. But he had that which served as well—the unerring eye for covert, of a marksman. He was a dead shot at any range, and knowing what he could hit he also knew how to screen himself from the rifle of an enemy.

Above all, perhaps, was the quiet influence of a man who never flinched from danger nor seemed to be in the least disconcerted by its presence.

'It seems, sir,' said Joseph to his master later in the day, 'that you've kinder stumped them. They don't understand you.'

'They must be kept in check by fear. There is no other way,' replied Meredith rather wearily. Of late he had felt less and less inclined to exert himself.

'Yes, sir. Those sort o' men.'

Meredith made no answer, and after a little pause Joseph repeated the words significantly, if ungrammatically.

'Those sort o' men.'

'What do you mean?'

'Slaves,' replied Joseph sharply, touching his hat without knowing why.

'Slaves! What the devil are you talking about?'

The man came a little nearer.

'Those forty men—leastwise thirty-four men—that we brought from Msala—Mr. Durnovo's men that cultivate this 'ere Simiacine as they call it—they're different from the rest, sir.'

'Yes, of course they are. We do not hire them direct—we hire them from Mr. Durnovo and pay their wages to him. They are of a different tribe from the others—not fighting men but agriculturists.'

'Ah——' Joseph paused. 'Strange thing, sir, but I've not seen 'em handling any of their pay yet.'

'Well, that is their affair.'

'Yessir!'

Having unburthened himself of his suspicion, the servant retired, shaking his head ominously. At any other time the words just recorded would have aroused Jack Meredith's attention, but the singular slothfulness that seemed to be creeping over his intellect was already acting as a clog on his mental energy.

The next morning he was unable to leave his bed, and lay all day in a state of semi-somnolence. Joseph explained to the men that the leader was so disgusted with their ungrateful conduct that he would not leave the tent. In the evening there was a slight attack made from the southern side. This Joseph was able to repulse, chiefly by his own long-range firing, assisted by a few picked rifles. But the situation was extremely critical. The roll of the big war-drum could be heard almost incessantly, rising with weird melancholy from the forest land beneath them.

Despite difficulties, the new crop of Simiacine—the second within twelve months—had been picked, dried, and stored in cases. Without, on the Plateau, stood the bare trees, affording no covert for savage warfare—no screen against the deadly bullet. The camp was placed near one edge of the tableland, and on this exposed side the stockade was wisely constructed of double strength. The attacks had hitherto been made only from this side, but Joseph knew that anything in the nature of a combined assault would carry his defence before it. In his rough-and-ready way he doctored his master, making for him such soups and strength-giving food as he could. Once, very late in the night, when it almost seemed that the shadow of death lay over the little tent, he pounded up some of the magic Simiacine leaves and mixed them in the brandy which he administered from time to time.

Before sunrise the next morning the alarm was given again, and the little garrison was called to arms.

When Joseph left his master's tent he was convinced that neither of them had long to live; but he was of that hard material which is found in its very best form in the ranks and on the forecastle—men who die swearing. It may be very reprehensible—no doubt it is—but it is very difficult for a plain-going man to withhold his admiration for such as these. It shows, at all events, that Thomas Atkins and Jack are alike unafraid of meeting their Maker. It is their duty to fight either a living enemy or a cruel sea, and if a little profanity helps them to do their duty, who are we that we may condemn them?

So Joseph went out with a rifle in each hand and a fine selection of epithets on his tongue.

'Now, you devils,' he said, 'we're just going to fight like hell.'

And what else he said it booteth little.

He took his station on the roof of a hut in the centre of the little stockade, and from there he directed the fire of his men. Crouching beneath him he had a disabled native who loaded each rifle in turn; and just by way of encouraging the others he picked off the prominent men outside the stockade with a deadly steadiness. By way of relieving the tension he indulged in an occasional pleasantry at the expense of the enemy.

'Now,' he would say, 'there's a man lookin' over that bush with a green feather on his nut. It's a mistake to wear green feathers; it makes a body so conspicuous.'

And the wearer of the obnoxious feather would throw up his arms and topple backwards down the hill.

If Joseph detected anything like cowardice or carelessness he pointed his rifle with a threatening frown towards the culprit, with instant effect. Presently, however, things began to get more serious. This was not the sudden assault of a single chief, but an organised attack. Before long Joseph ceased to smile. By sunrise he was off the roof, running from one weak point to another, encouraging, threatening, fighting, and swearing very hard. More than once the enemy reached the stockade, and—ominous sign—one or two of their dead lay inside the defence.

'Fight, yer devils—fight!' he cried in a hoarse whisper, for his voice had given way. 'Hell—give 'em hell!'

He was everywhere at once, urging on his men, kicking them, pushing them, forcing them up to the stockade. But he saw the end. Half-dazed, the blacks fought on in silence. The grim African sun leapt up above the distant line of forest and shone upon one of the finest sights to be seen on earth—a soldier wounded, driven, desperate, and not afraid.

In the midst of it a hand was laid on Joseph's shoulder.

'There,' cried a voice, '*that* corner. See to it.'

Without looking round, Joseph obeyed and the breached corner was saved. He only knew that his master, who was almost dead, had come to life again. There was no time for anything else.

For half an hour it was a question of any moment. Master and man were for the time being nothing better than madmen, and the fighting frenzy is wildly infectious.

At last there was a pause. The enemy fell back, and in the momentary silence the sound of distant firing reached the ears of the little band of defenders.

'What's that?' asked Meredith sharply. He looked like one risen from the dead.

'Fighting among themselves,' replied Joseph, who was wiping blood and grime from his eyes.

'Then one of them is fighting with an Express rifle.'

Joseph listened.

'By God!' he shouted, 'by God, Mer—— sir, we're saved!'

The enemy had apparently heard the firing too. Perhaps they also recognised the peculiar sharp 'smack' of the Express rifle amidst the others. There was a fresh attack—an ugly rush of reckless men. But the news soon spread that there was firing in the valley and the sound of a white man's rifle. The little garrison plucked up heart, and the rifles, almost too hot to hold, dealt death around.

They held back the savages until the sound of the firing behind them was quite audible even amidst the heavy rattle of the musketry.

Then suddenly the firing ceased—the enemy had divided and fled. For a few moments there was a strange, tense silence. Then a voice—an English voice—cried:

'Come on!'

The next moment Guy Oscard stood on the edge of the Plateau. He held up both arms as a signal to those within the stockade to cease firing, and then he came forward, followed by a number of blacks and Durnovo.

The gate was rapidly disencumbered of its rough supports and thrown open.

Jack Meredith stood in the aperture, holding out his hand.

'It's all right; it's—all right,' he said.

Oscard did not seem to take so cheerful a view of matters. He scrutinised Meredith's face with visible anxiety.

Then suddenly Jack lurched up against his rescuer, grabbing at him vaguely.

In a minute Oscard was supporting him back towards his tent.

'It's all right, you know,' explained Jack Meredith very gravely; 'I am a bit weak—that is all. I am hungry—haven't had anything to eat for some time, you know.'

'Oh yes,' said Oscard shortly; 'I know all about it.'

CHAPTER XXVII.

OFF DUTY.

> 'Chacun de vous peut-être en son cœur solitaire
> Sous des ris passagers étouffe un long regret.'

'GOOD-BYE to that damned old Platter—may it be for ever!' With this valedictory remark Joseph shook his fist once more at the unmoved mountain and resumed his march.

'William,' he continued gravely to a native porter who walked at his side and knew no word of English, 'there is some money that is not worth the making.'

The man grinned from ear to ear and nodded with a vast appreciation of what experience taught him to take as a joke.

'Remember that, my black diamond, and just mind the corner of your mouth don't get hitched over yer ear,' said Joseph, patting him with friendly cheerfulness.

Then he made his way forward to walk by the side of his master's litter and encourage the carriers with that mixture of light badinage and heavy swearing which composed his method of dealing with the natives.

Three days after the arrival of the rescuing force at the Plateau, Guy Oscard had organised a retreating party, commanded by Joseph, to convey Jack Meredith down to the coast. He knew enough of medicine to recognise the fact that this was no passing indisposition, but a thorough break-down in health. The work and anxiety of the last year, added to the strange disquieting breath of the Simiacine grove, had brought about a serious collapse in the system which only months of rest and freedom from care could repair.

Before the retreating column was ready to march it was discovered that the hostile tribes had finally evacuated the country; which deliverance was brought about not by Oscard's blood-stained track through the forest, not by the desperate defence of the

Plateau, but by the whisper that Victor Durnovo was with them. Truly a man's reputation is a strange thing!

And this man—the mighty warrior whose name was as good as an army in Central Africa—went down on his knees one night to Guy Oscard, imploring him to abandon the Simiacine Plateau, or at all events to allow him to go down to Loango with Meredith and Joseph.

'No,' said Oscard; 'Meredith held this place for us when he could have left it safely. He has held it for a year. It is our turn now. We will hold it for him. I am going to stay, and you have to stay with me.'

For Jack Meredith, life was at this time nothing but a constant, never-ceasing fatigue. When Oscar helped him into the rough litter they had constructed for his comfort, he laid his head on the pillow, overcome with a dead sleep.

'Good-bye, old chap,' said Oscard, patting him on the shoulder.

'G'bye;' and Jack Meredith turned over on his side as if he were in bed, drew up the blanket, and closed his eyes. He did not seem to know where he was, and, what was worse, he did not seem to care. Oscard gave the signal to the bearers, and the march began. There is something in the spring of human muscles unlike any other motive power; the power of thought may be felt even on the pole of a litter, and one thing that modern invention can never equal is the comfort of being carried on the human shoulder. The slow swinging movement came to be a part of Jack Meredith's life—indeed, life itself seemed to be nothing but a huge journey thus peacefully accomplished. Through the flapping curtains an endless procession of trees passed before his half-closed eyes. The unintelligible gabble of the light-hearted bearers of his litter was all that reached his ears. And ever at his side was Joseph—cheerful, indefatigable, resourceful. There was in his mind one of the greatest happinesses of life—the sense of something satisfactorily accomplished—the peacefulness that comes when the necessity for effort is past and left behind—that lying down to rest which must surely be something like Death in its kindest form.

The awe inspired by Victor Durnovo's name went before the little caravan like a moral convoy and cleared their path. Thus, guarded by the name of a man whom he hated, Jack Meredith was enabled to pass through a savage country literally cast upon a bed of sickness.

In due course the river was reached, and the gentle swing of the litter was changed for the smoother motion of the canoe. And it was at this period of the journey—in the forced restfulness of body entailed—that Joseph's mind soared to higher things, and he determined to write a letter to Sir John.

He was, he admitted even to himself, no great penman, and his epistolary style tended, perhaps, more to the forcible than to the finished.

'Somethin',' he reflected, 'that'll just curl his back hair for 'im; that's what I'll write 'im.'

Msala had been devastated, and it was within the roofless walls of Durnovo's house that Joseph finally wrote out laboriously the projected capillary invigorator.

'Honoured Sir (he wrote),—Trusting you will excuse the liberty, I take up my pen to advise you respectfully'—while writing this word Joseph closed his left eye—'that my master is taken seriously worse. Having been on the sick-list now for a matter of five weeks, he just lies on his bed as weak as a new-born babe, as the sayin' is, and doesn't take no notice of nothing. I have succeeded in bringing him down to the coast, which we hope to reach to-morrow, and when we get to Loango—a poor sort of place—I shall at once obtain the best advice obtainable—that is to be had. Howsoever, I may have to send for it; but money being no object to either master or me, respectfully I beg to say that every care will be took. Master having kind friends at Loango, I have no anxiety as to the future, but, honoured sir, it has been a near touch in the past—just touch and go, so to speak. Not being in a position to form a estimate of what is the matter with master, I can only respectfully mention that I take it to be a general kerlapse of the system, brought on, no doubt, by too long a living in the unhealthy platters of Central Africa. When I gets him to Loango I shall go straight to the house of Mr. and Miss Gordon, where we stayed before, and with no fear but what we will be received with every kindness and the greatest hospitality. Thank God, honoured sir, I've kept my health and strength wonderful, and am therefore more able to look after master. When we reach Loango I shall ask Miss Gordon kindly to write to you, sir, seeing as I have no great facility with my pen.—I am, honoured sir, your respectful servant to command,

'Joseph Atkinson,
'Late Corporal 217th Regt.'

There were one or two round splashes on the paper suggestive, perhaps, of tears, but not indicative of those useless tributes. The truth was that it was a hot evening, and Joseph had, as he confessed, but little facility with the pen.

'There,' said the scribe, with a smile of intense satisfaction. 'That will give the old 'un beans. Not that I don't respect him—oh no.'

He paused, and gazed thoughtfully at the evening star.

'Strange thing—life,' he muttered, 'uncommon strange. Perhaps the old 'un is right; there's no knowin'. The ways o' Providence *are* mysterious—onnecessarily mysterious, to my thinkin'.'

And he shook his head at the evening star, as if he was not quite pleased with it.

With a feeling of considerable satisfaction, Joseph approached the Bungalow at Loango three days later. The short sea voyage had somewhat revived Meredith, who had been desirous of walking up from the beach, but after a short attempt had been compelled to enter the spring cart which Joseph had secured.

Joseph walked by the side of this cart with an erect carriage, and a suppressed importance suggestive of ambulance duty in the old days.

As the somewhat melancholy *cortège* approached the house, Meredith drew back the dusky brown holland curtain and looked anxiously out. Nor were Joseph's eyes devoid of expectation. He thought that Jocelyn would presently emerge from the flower-hung trellis of the verandah; and he had rehearsed over and over again a neat, respectful speech, explanatory of his action in bringing a sick man to the house.

But the hanging fronds of flower and leaf remained motionless, and the cart drove, unchallenged, round to the principal door.

A black servant—a stranger—held the handle, and stood back invitingly. Supported by Joseph's arm, Jack Meredith entered. The servant threw open the drawing-room door; they passed in. The room was empty. On the table lay two letters, one addressed to Guy Oscard, the other to Jack Meredith.

Meredith felt suddenly how weak he was, and sat wearily down on the sofa.

'Give me that letter,' he said.

Joseph looked at him keenly. There was something forlorn and cold about the room—about the whole house—with the silent, smiling, black servants and the shaded windows.

Joseph handed the letter as desired, and then, with quick practised hands, he poured a small quantity of brandy into the cup of his flask. 'Drink this first, sir,' he said.

Jack Meredith fumbled rather feebly at the letter. It was distinctly an effort to him to tear the paper.

'My dear Meredith' (he read),—'Just a line to tell you that the Bungalow and its contents are at your service. Jocelyn and I are off home for two months' change of air. I have been a bit seedy. I leave this at the Bungalow, and we shall feel hurt if you do not make the house your home whenever you happen to come down to Loango. I have left a similar note for Oscard, in whose expedition to your relief I have all faith.

'Yours ever,
'Maurice Gordon.'

'Here,' said Meredith to his servant, 'you may as well read it for yourself.'

He handed the letter to Joseph and leant back with a strange rapidity of movement on the sofa. As he lay there with his eyes closed he looked remarkably like a dead man.

While Joseph was reading the letter the sound of bare feet on the cocoa-leaf matting made him turn round.

A small, rotund white figure of a child, clad in a cotton garment, stood in the doorway, finger in mouth, gazing gravely at the two occupants of the room.

'Nestorius!' exclaimed Joseph, 'by all that's holy! Well, I *am* glad to see you, my son. Where's Mammy, eh?'

Nestorius turned gravely round and pointed a small dusky finger in the direction of the servants' quarters. Then he replaced the finger between his lips and came slowly forward to examine Meredith, who had opened his eyes.

'Well, stout Nestorius. This is a bad case, is it not?' said the sick man.

'Bad case,' repeated Nestorius, mechanically.

At that moment Marie came into the room, dignified, gentle, self-possessed.

'Ah, Missis,' said Joseph, 'I'm glad to see you. You're wanted badly, and that's the truth. Mr. Meredith's not at all well.'

Marie bowed gravely. She went to Meredith's side and looked at him with a smile that was at once critical and encouraging. Nestorius holding on to her skirt looked up to her face, and, seeing the smile, smiled too. He went further. He turned round and smiled at Joseph as if to make things pleasant all round.

Marie stooped over the sofa and her clever dusky fingers moved to the cushions.

'You will be better in bed,' she said; 'I will get Mr. Gordon's room made ready for you—yes?'

There are occasions when the mere presence of a woman supplies a distinct want. She need not be clever, or very capable; she need have no great learning or experience. She merely has to be a woman—the more womanly the better. There are times when a man may actually be afraid for the want of a woman, but that is usually for the want of one particular woman. There may be a distinct sense of fear—a fear of life and its possibilities—which is nothing else than a want—the want of a certain voice, the desire to be touched by a certain hand, the carping necessity (which takes the physical form of a pressure deep down in the throat) for the sympathy of that one person whose presence is different from the presence of other people. And failing that particular woman, another can in a certain degree, by her mere womanliness, stay the pressure of the want.

This was what Marie did for Jack Meredith by coming into the room and bending over him and touching his cushions with a sort of deftness and *savoir faire.* He did not define his feelings—he was too weak for that; but he had been conscious, for the first time in his life, of a distinct sense of fear when he read Maurice Gordon's letter. Of course he had thought of the possibility of death many times during the last five weeks; but he had no intention of dying. He set the fact plainly before himself that with care he might recover, but that at any moment some symptom could declare itself which would mean death.

Both he and Joseph had, without making mention of it to each other, counted entirely on finding the Gordons at home. It was more than a disappointment—very much more for Jack Meredith. But in real life we do not analyse our feelings as do men in books—more especially books of the mawko-religious tenor written by ladies. Jack Meredith only knew that he felt suddenly afraid of dying when he read Maurice Gordon's letter, and that when the half-caste woman came into the room and gently asserted her claim, as it were, to supreme authority in this situation, the fear seemed to be allayed.

Joseph, with something bright glistening in his keen, quick eyes, stood watching her face as if for a verdict.

'You are tired,' she said, 'after your long journey.'

Then she turned to Joseph with that soft, natural way which seems to run through the negro blood, however much it may be diluted.

'Help Mr. Meredith,' she said, 'to Mr. Gordon's room. I will go at once and see that the bed is got ready.'

(*To be continued.*)

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MATTHEW AUSTIN.[1]

BY W. E. NORRIS.

CHAPTER V.

A FRESH PATIENT.

THE often noticed and often resented unwillingness of doctors to multiply visits after the condition of a patient has been pronounced hopeless is probably not due to that lack of humanity which is apt to be laid to their charge. Their mission is to heal; and from the moment that they know it to be out of their power to fulfil that mission, they not unnaturally shrink from wasting their own time and other people's money—perhaps also lose interest in a case which, so far as they are medically concerned, has already taken its place amongst bygone experiences. It may have been some quasi-professional feeling of this sort that rendered Matthew Austin, than whom a kinder-hearted man never breathed, a little reluctant to seek occasion for a second private interview with Miss Frere. He now knew why she looked so sad, and, although he was sincerely sorry for her, he did not see what he could possibly do to help her. This brother (with whom it was easy to guess that she was keeping up a clandestine correspondence) was evidently a scapegrace. He might, under the chastening influence of adversity, reform, and at some future date his father might possibly be interceded with; but for the present, as she herself seemed to be fully aware, the only service that could be rendered to him was to supply him with money, which he would doubtless hasten to expend in a manner not to his own advantage.

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As regards Anne herself, it is quite true that, while she had been talking to him at the horse-show, and while he had been admiring her courage and her straightforward simplicity, as well as her personal beauty, Matthew had not been very far removed from falling in love with her; but, since Matthew was very far removed indeed from suspecting a fact which only dawned upon him at a much later period of his life, he did not at the time experience anything of a lover's eagerness to see her again. Added to which, he had his work to attend to.

Nevertheless, he conscientiously devoted his first free afternoon to driving over to Hayes Park, in order to pay his respects, and shortly after he had been admitted into Mrs. Frere's presence there came a sound of rushing footsteps outside, followed by the tempestuous entrance of Maggie, who hastened to state breathlessly that she had finished her lessons.

'My dear child,' remonstrated Mrs. Frere, 'are you quite sure that Fräulein Backfisch gave you leave to come down? It seems very early for you to have done your day's work.'

Some light was thrown upon the customary standard of discipline maintained in the Frere household by Maggie's reply. 'Oh, yes, I think she did; but it does take her such a long time to say anything, and I told her I *must* go, because the medicine-man had come at last. We always call you the medicine-man now,' Maggie continued explanatorily, addressing herself to Matthew, of whose hand she had taken possession. 'It sounds rather a nasty sort of name; but Anne says it has nothing to do with powders or black draughts.'

'Everybody knows that the greatest compliment you can pay a man is to give him a nickname,' Matthew said. 'I rather like mine, and I hope it may help you to bear in mind that I have something to do besides visiting young ladies who don't require medicine. Your sister told me I was in your black books because I hadn't been to see you since your recovery.'

'It wasn't me, more than mamma and Anne,' Maggie returned. 'You lunched here ever so long ago, and people who have been to luncheon or dinner ought always to call afterwards. Mamma said so, and she wondered why you hadn't done it.'

Mrs. Frere was not much disconcerted. She merely remarked:

'Maggie has been an *enfant terrible* from her cradle. One would think that at the age of fourteen she ought to be growing out of it; but, after all, one likes to keep them young as long as one can. I will forgive you for not having called, Mr. Austin, if you will forgive me for having said that you were neglecting your duties. Now I'm going to ring for tea.'

But it was intimated to Matthew that before he had his tea he really must come round to the stable-yard and inspect a litter of retriever puppies which Maggie was eager to exhibit to him, and he was the more willing to comply with this request because he had noticed that Mrs. Frere had been busily engaged in writing letters when he was announced.

If it be a compliment to a man to have a nickname conferred upon him, it is a still greater compliment to be admitted into the unreserved confidence of his juniors. Maggie had many things to say to her friend, some of which were extremely amusing to him, though perhaps they might not be found equally so by the general reader. The puppies were duly admired, the sadly empty stables were explored, a visit was paid to the pigs, and it was under consideration whether there would not be just time to go and see the cows milked, when Miss Frere suddenly appeared upon the scene to put a summary veto upon any such project. Miss Frere, it seemed, was the emissary of Fräulein Backfisch, who had been justly incensed by her pupil's unceremonious flight, and who would have come out to claim her in person, had she not been afraid of catching cold.

Maggie had inherited her share of the family good nature and philosophy. She only sighed heavily and said: 'Horrid old beast! All right, then; I'll go in. But you must come again soon; and please come on a Saturday, if you can, because Saturdays are half-holidays. I can always get rid of Backfisch by telling her that I want to go out for a walk. She hates fresh air, and her corns hurt her when she has to put on thick boots.'

Nobody, except those rare persons who recollect what they themselves were in their early years, can tell how much of ignorance and how much of mischievous intent goes to constitute an *enfant terrible.* It was with an air of perfect innocence that Maggie, lingering for a moment over her adieux, added: 'Do you know, I have been thinking how nice it would be if you were to marry Anne. I wish you would! She likes you awfully, and she doesn't generally like men. Do think of it!'

'I will give the subject serious consideration,' answered Matthew composedly (though he could not help reddening a little). 'Meanwhile, I should advise you to be off as quickly as you can and bestow serious consideration upon your own business. If I were Fräulein Backfisch, you would have a bad five minutes to look forward to, I can tell you.'

Now, there was really nothing in this piece of childish impertinence that ought to have caused annoyance to two sensible persons; but Anne had evidently been vexed either by it or by something in the tone of Matthew's rejoinder; for as soon as Maggie had vanished, she said, rather stiffly and distantly:

'You will find tea ready in the drawing-room, I believe. I must say good-bye, as I have to get down to the village and back before dark.'

'You will hardly manage that,' Matthew observed. 'We are going to have rain, too, presently. Is it absolutely necessary for you to go to the village this afternoon?'

'It isn't absolutely necessary,' answered the girl; 'but I want a walk and I don't mind rain. I won't keep you standing any longer out here in the cold, though.'

The air was in truth raw, with that moist, penetrating chill, which accompanies the gales and rains of early winter; low, ragged clouds were being driven across the grey sky from the south-eastward by a wind which was rising in gusts and hurrying the fallen leaves before it; and there was a forlorn look about the tall figure which was half turned away from him that moved Matthew with a sudden feeling of intense compassion. She seemed to be so utterly alone.

'It is you who choose to be left out in the cold,' he said. 'Why should you choose what no human being likes? I was in hopes that, if I saw you to-day, you would go on with what you were telling me the last time we met.'

'Oh, thank you,' answered Anne, in a constrained voice, 'but I think I told you all there was to tell—all I had a right to tell, anyhow. Afterwards I was rather sorry that I had said so much. Only I was sure you must have heard a garbled version of the story from Mrs. Jennings. Please don't look so sorrowful about it; there is a skeleton in almost every family, I suppose.'

It was plain that she was under the influence of one of those shy moods to which she had made allusion, and that sympathy would not be welcomed by her at that especial moment. Matthew, understanding this, wisely allowed her to go her way, without much further parley, and returned to Mrs. Frere, whom he found cosily established between the tea-table and the fire. It was but a word here and there of Mrs. Frere's cheerful prattle that reached his intelligence, while, as usual, only a very few of his occasional absent-minded remarks reached her hearing. This, however, did not prevent them from spending a pleasant half-hour together nor from enjoying one another's society.

'It's a queer thing,' thought Matthew to himself, as he climbed into his dogcart and gave the reins a shake, 'that the faculty of speech should help us so little towards mutual comprehension. I couldn't, for the life of me, say what that dear old lady has been talking about all this time; but I know just exactly what she is and how she feels. There can't be any doubt that she takes a far saner and more reasonable view of existence than her daughter does, and that makes one like her—though her daughter is probably worth a hundred of her.'

Without any consciousness of being so, he was a trifle irritated with Anne. He had already forgotten Maggie's indiscretion and, even if he had remembered it, would not have ascribed the elder sister's change of manner to that cause. The waywardness of women, towards which he was, as a rule, lenient enough, knowing their physical constitution and the inevitable influences of the body upon the mind, did not in this instance represent itself to him as an excuse; and perhaps the circumstance that it did not might have warned him that he had ceased to regard Anne Frere as a woman like other women. But he was much more given to the study of his fellow-beings than to self-scrutiny; so that he reached home in what, for him, was almost a bad humour.

There was a note lying on his study table—a note which, had he but known it as he carelessly tore the flap of the envelope with his forefinger, was to prove the first word of a new and important chapter in his life. It certainly bore no outward indication of being so portentous a document; for it merely stated, in the third person, that Lady Sara Murray was anxious to consult Mr. Austin and would be obliged if he would kindly call upon her at the Royal Hotel as soon as he could spare time. He shrugged his shoulders and made a grimace, glancing at the gold monogram and the thick paper, which exhaled a faint perfume of that detestable scent known as 'white rose'—probably so called because, among all the white roses that bloom, not one smells in the very least like it.

'Some fashionable lady who is suffering from late hours and over-nourishment and want of exercise,' he muttered. 'More in

Jennings's line than mine, I suspect. Well, I had better go round and see her, since she has been pleased to send for me; most likely one visit will suffice.'

But Lady Sara Murray was by no means the sort of person that he had hastily taken her for: that much he discovered very soon after he had walked to the Royal Hotel and had been ushered into the stuffy little gas-lighted sitting-room occupied by her ladyship. Fashionable she might be, and doubtless was; but she was genuinely ill. In fact, she had such a complication of maladies that she established an immediate claim upon his regard with which her personality had nothing whatsoever to do.

Her personality, however, was not unpleasing. She was a woman of between forty and fifty—nearer fifty than forty, perhaps—and, notwithstanding her ruined complexion and sunken cheeks, it was easy to see that she had been handsome once upon a time. Her hair, like her complexion, had faded; it was now of an indeterminate hue and was turning grey at the temples; but her small, slightly aquiline nose and her soft dark-brown eyes had lost little of their beauty, while her mouth, though somewhat spoilt in shape by lines of age and suffering, could still smile very pleasantly. As a matter of fact, Lady Sara had driven not a few members of the opposite sex to the verge of temporary despair in days long past and forgotten.

Matthew was not long in discovering that this poor lady would never be anything but an invalid; for rheumatic gout had her in its grip, and although the Wilverton waters might, and probably would, do something for her, the enemy was too firmly established to be permanently dislodged. As for the asthma and the bronchial troubles with which she was likewise afflicted, treatment had a chance of success there, and she seemed to have such a wretched constitution that to set her on her legs again, even for a few years, would be quite a triumph. So interesting, indeed, was she as a patient that the young doctor had been examining and questioning her for a good half-hour before he heeded or replied to certain items of information which she had bestowed upon him parenthetically.

'You were saying that you know my brother,' he remarked at length, after jotting down some notes in his pocket-book. 'I scarcely ever see Godfrey; but I am always glad to hear of him, and I'm sure it was very good of him to mention my name to you.'

Lady Sara laughed: she had a low, musical laugh, and a gently modulated voice, he noticed. 'That means that you are grateful to him for having sent you such a wreck to patch up,' she observed. 'Sir Godfrey warned me that you were a social recluse and that you didn't care to make fresh acquaintances, unless they had something terrible the matter with them. I hope you think I have enough the matter with me!'

'You will have to take very great care of yourself and do just what I tell you,' answered Matthew seriously. 'I hope that, if you will consent to do that, you will be feeling much better soon, and in a few weeks' time you may begin to take the waters. But for the present, you see, it is most important'——

'Oh, yes, I know,' she interrupted a little impatiently. 'Of course I shall obey your orders, and you can't realise half as keenly as I do how important it is that I should live a little longer. When once my daughter is married and settled in a home of her own, I dare say I shall begin to disregard physicians—whose orders, to tell you the truth, haven't helped me much hitherto. Now, if you are not in a great hurry, perhaps you wouldn't mind telling me who lives here and what amusements there are for a girl of not quite eighteen. I suppose it is a desperately dull place?'

Matthew was bound to admit that Wilverton was neither Cannes nor Homburg. 'Still,' he said, 'there is a certain amount of gaiety during the winter season, I believe—balls at the Assembly Rooms and dances at private houses, and so on.'

'Oh, I don't mean balls and dances,' Lady Sara told him; 'Lilian is not out yet, and I don't wish her to make a provincial *début*. But if there were a few nice people in the neighbourhood, a few girls of her own age whom she could associate with, that would be something.'

Matthew at once thought of the Freres, and was about to mention their name, when he was momentarily struck dumb by the entrance of the most beautiful human being whom he had ever beheld in his life. That was his impression of Lilian Murray at the time, and he still maintains its accuracy. Possibly she may not be quite as beautiful now as she was then, although many people would doubtless declare her to be more so: it is a question of individual taste. There is a kind of beauty which belongs only to girlhood—or rather childhood—and that, of course, is necessarily transient.

But the beauty which has form, feature, and colouring for its constituent elements Lilian possessed and possesses almost in perfection. Very few women have ever been blessed with a complexion like hers—a complexion comparable only to the petals of a dog-rose; not many can boast of a figure in which the most exacting sculptor would find it hard to point out a defect; not above many shoulders is the head of the Capitoline Venus delicately poised, nor is wavy hair of that golden-copper tinge often seen. Red-brown eyes are not usually admired, but Lilian's, which were of that shade, harmonised with her hair and were so softened by long, curved lashes that no one could have wished to improve upon their colour.

For the rest, she did not appear to be conscious of her loveliness or to exult over the silent, unmistakable homage rendered thereto by an amazed country doctor. She was evidently rather shy, and took little part in the conversation which was resumed after she had seated herself on a footstool beside her mother's sofa. But Matthew, who watched her during the ensuing five minutes, and saw how anxiously she was watching him, was not surprised that she summoned up courage to follow him out on to the landing when he had taken his leave. He answered her quick questions as encouragingly as honesty would permit. Lady Sara would be almost sure to benefit by the baths, he said; he certainly thought that her present sufferings might be much alleviated; he had every reason to believe that, if she could be kept from catching cold and if the tendency to bronchitis could be checked, her general health would improve.

'But that doesn't mean getting quite well,' the girl remarked, in a disappointed voice.

'It doesn't mean that, of course; doctors are not fond of promising more than they are sure of being able to perform. My business just now is to try and make your mother better; after we have advanced a few steps we may begin to look further forward.'

The girl did not seem to think this very satisfactory. She was silent for a moment and then asked, all of a sudden with a mixture of temerity and timidity which he afterwards found to be characteristic of her, 'Don't you hate being a doctor?'

'No; I like it,' he answered, laughing. 'Otherwise I shouldn't be one.'

'Yes; Sir Godfrey said it was your own choice and that he couldn't understand it. Nor can I; I should have thought it was a horrid occupation. It isn't as if doctors ever did people any good. Mamma has had dozens; but she only gets worse and worse.'

The tears that had gathered in the girl's eyes and the appealing expression of her quivering lips atoned for her petulance.

'Oh, you must not be downhearted,' Matthew said; 'we medical men are not quite such a useless class as you think, and, though it does not become me to boast, I may tell you for your comfort that I have successfully treated much worse cases than Lady Sara's. Only you must not ask us to perform miracles.'

She surveyed him consideringly for a few seconds, and then smiled. 'Will you come again soon?' she asked.

'I will come the day after to-morrow, in any case,' he replied, 'and before that, if you send for me.'

Thereupon he withdrew; and if, in the course of his long, solitary evening, he thought more frequently of Lilian Murray than of Anne Frere, there was nothing surprising in that. To the appreciative and dispassionate bystander an exquisitely beautiful child must always be a more pleasing subject for retrospective study than a woman whose claims to good looks fall decidedly short of that lofty level, and whose behaviour has been a little bit unreasonable into the bargain. Moreover, as was remarked at the beginning of this chapter, it is painful and discouraging to have to deal with people to whom no practical assistance can be given.

CHAPTER VI.

ANNE PREFERS SOLITUDE.

It would be doing Matthew Austin a gross injustice to assert that he took more trouble about Lady Sara Murray than he would have taken about any other woman similarly afflicted because she happened to be the mother of an incomparably beautiful child; but he certainly did take a great deal of trouble to render her more easy and comfortable, and the gratitude of the incomparably beautiful child was, to say the least of it, an agreeable reward for his pains. Not in his medical capacity alone did he make himself serviceable to these friendless and forlorn ladies. It was he who (having ascertained that expenditure was a matter which they had to consider) removed them, without any fuss or difficulty, from the costly discomfort of the Royal Hotel into quiet, sunny lodgings in Prospect Place; it was he who undertook to provide them, at a very moderate outlay, with the trained nurse who was essential to the invalid's well-being, and his conservatories supplied them daily with the flowers that brightened their little drawing-room.

'Lilian says you told her not to ask for miracles,' Lady Sara remarked one day; 'but you seem to be one of those extraordinary people who give a great deal more than they have been asked for. If you go on as you have begun, I believe you will be ordering me to take a long walk every morning before you have done with me. Isn't that a part of the regular course of water-drinkers?'

It was not a course which was likely to be ever prescribed for that poor crippled water-drinker; still at the end of a week or ten days she had greatly improved both in health and spirits, so that she felt able to indulge in such occasional mild jocularities.

Indeed it was rather as a friend than as a professional adviser that Mr. Austin was received in those modest apartments. Perhaps his visits were more frequent than was necessary; assuredly he made no note of them in his carelessly kept books. There was generally some excuse for looking in on his way home, after the labours of the day, and the excuse of refreshing himself by a chat with Lilian was one which he could allege both inwardly and openly without *arrière-pensée.* He was fond of children, and Lilian, notwithstanding her seventeen or eighteen years, was nothing but a child. Her shyness—a mere childish shyness, which had no affinity with Anne Frere's constitutional reserve—speedily wore off; she told Matthew quite frankly that she liked him, and his successful treatment of her mother, so far as it had gone, had inspired her with an implicit confidence in him upon which he could not find it in his heart to throw cold water. Often, while he sat gazing at her, returning haphazard replies to the quick questions with which it was her habit to ply him, he wondered what her future would be and felt a quasi-paternal jealousy of the man to whom she was destined to belong. Probably, he thought, she would make a great match; probably her mother had the intention and the ability to arrange such a match for her. But he did not know whether Lady Sara Murray was the daughter of a duke or of an impoverished Irish peer, and had never had the curiosity to inquire; for human beings interested him simply and solely as human beings, and with regard to conventional degrees of rank he was a Radical of the Radicals—

differing in that respect from certain eloquent and more prominent demagogues whom we all know of.

Still, without being either a demagogue or a tuft-hunter, one really ought to know who is who; and Mr. Frere, for one, was not destitute of the knowledge which all ladies and most gentlemen have at their fingers' ends.

'So poor Lady Sara Murray has come down here for the winter, I'm told,' said he, chancing upon Matthew in the County Club one frosty evening. 'And you've annexed her, eh? Very glad of it! One more unfortunate rescued from the clutches of that useless old Jennings. She's a deplorable wreck, they say. Dear me! How time does fly! It doesn't seem like more than a generation ago that I used to admire her from a respectful distance at Kingsbridge House—wouldn't deign to look at me, of course. That was in the old Lord Kingsbridge's time, before the crash came, you know.'

'I never heard of Lord Kingsbridge and I didn't know there had been a crash,' Matthew said; 'but I have been wondering whether I might beg Mrs. Frere to call on Lady Sara. She and her daughter are rather lonely, I am afraid; so that it would be a real act of kindness to take some notice of them.'

'Oh, my wife will call with the greatest pleasure,' Mr. Frere answered. 'At least, I should think she would; but you had better ask her yourself, because women have such queer prejudices. The fact is that poor old Lord Kingsbridge's children were a baddish lot. The young man—not that he's young any longer—played the very deuce, ruined the property and had to go through the Bankruptcy Court; and his brothers were no better than he was. Then there was Lady Laura Keane, Lady Sara's sister, who bolted with a groom and was divorced—a nasty business! There's nothing against Lady Sara, though, that I know of. Married Murray in the Diplomatic Service, and was left very poorly provided for when he died, I believe. She might have married anybody at one time, but waited too long, I suppose, as they often do. Well, now, look here, Austin: why not come home with me and take pot-luck? Then you can have a talk with Mrs. Frere, who will be delighted to see you. You're such a difficult fellow to get hold of nowadays that you'll become priceless presently. How long is it since you last crossed the threshold of this club, I wonder?'

It was not much time that Matthew had to spare for frequenting that establishment, nor of late had he been able to bestow a thought upon social obligations. His practice was rapidly increasing; winter visitors had arrived in large numbers; he had been well spoken of by influential persons; possibly—though he was not aware of it—his intimacy with a lady of title and his relationship to a baronet may have helped to swell the list of his patients. But he knew of no reason why he should not accept Mr. Frere's invitation, and he willingly did so, only adding that he would have to go home first to change his clothes and see whether there were any messages for him.

Mr. Frere, who liked company, seldom went into Wilverton without bringing some stray man or other back to dinner from the club; so that his wife was always prepared to receive an impromptu guest. When Matthew entered her drawing-room, about two hours later, she said it was charming of him to come and enliven their solitude, and looked as if she meant what she said; but it struck him at once that Anne, who approached with slow steps from the other end of the long room, was not quite equally charmed. Although she smiled upon him, as she shook hands, and had no longer the air of holding herself aloof which had vexed him on the occasion of their last meeting, his faculty for quick observation told him immediately that she was wishing him away. He was momentarily hurt, feeling that he had done nothing to forfeit the friendship which, only a short time before, she had seemed so willing to extend to him; but he forgave her as soon as he noticed the dark circles under her eyes and perceived that she was nervous and out of sorts. Innumerable causes suffice to throw the complicated human machine out of gear, and he had not the vanity to imagine that he could have been one of them in this instance. Very likely she had had bad news of her brother and did not want to be troubled with entertaining a guest while she thought it over. Or possibly she was simply suffering from a headache. At all events, he resolved to display practical sympathy by troubling her as little as he could help.

With Mrs. Frere at his elbow, it was easy enough to avoid making conversational demands upon anybody else. His hostess was much interested in Lady Sara Murray, whom she remembered to have met in the days of her youth and whom she declared to be the only decent member of a family whose conduct had not been precisely conspicuous for decency. There was so much to be said about Lord Kingsbridge and the unfortunate Lady Laura Keane, and one set of reminiscences led by such an easy process of transition to another set, that dinner was half over before Mrs. Frere thought of inquiring what sort of a girl Lilian was.

'Well, I am very glad to hear that,' she said good-naturedly, when Matthew had drawn a vivid and enthusiastic portrait of the young lady in question. 'People may say that beauty is no use in these days without money, but my belief is that men always have been and always will be attracted by it. If she is anything like what her mother used to be, she ought to marry much better than her mother did. Take care that you don't lose your own heart to her, that's all!'

Then she put up her glasses, contemplated her neighbour, and exclaimed:

'My dear Mr. Austin, you are positively blushing! Anne, do look at Mr. Austin! Is he turning pink, or is it only the rose-coloured shades on the candles?'

Anne smiled very slightly, but returned no answer; Mr. Frere burst into a loud laugh, while Fräulein Backfisch, the remaining member of the party, gazed modestly down at her plate. Fräulein Backfisch had rather strict notions upon the subject of propriety and had already been a good deal scandalised by the freedom with which Lady Laura Keane's escapades had been discussed.

There are moments when kind-hearted, thick-skinned people tempt their less-favoured fellow-creatures to do or say something extremely unpleasant to them; but Matthew, whose heart was as kind as his hostess's, if his skin, unluckily for himself, was not quite so thick, displayed no resentment. He only laughed and said: 'You are enough to make anybody blush, Mrs. Frere; I shall expect to be accused of nourishing a secret and hopeless passion for your daughter Maggie next. By the way, am I to be allowed to see Miss Maggie this evening?'

The change of subject proved effectual, and Maggie, when she came down to dessert, was agreeably loquacious; but Matthew did not enjoy himself very much during the interim. Why, he wondered for the hundredth time, cannot women understand that a doctor, when engaged upon professional duties, ceases to be a man, just as a parson does when similarly employed? It is because they will not realise this that silly little jokes are made which are sometimes taken in earnest and which are apt, in the long run, to turn out destructive of all comfort. To be sure, it was scarcely in his professional character that he had asked Mrs. Frere to call upon the Murrays and had described Lilian in terms of such fervid admiration; still, if Lady Sara had not been ill, he would never have had anything to do with her or her daughter.

Anne, who had only opened her lips once or twice from first to last, save for the purpose of putting food between them—and who, as he observed, had not opened them very often for that purpose—had disappeared by the time that Mr. Frere suffered him to leave the port and return to the drawing-room. She was not feeling very well, her mother said, and had gone upstairs.

'I suggested,' added Mrs. Frere, 'that, having you on the spot, she might as well consult you; but Anne always declares that solitude is her best medicine. Fortunate, perhaps, considering that she is fated to have so much of it, poor dear! Well, now, George, what shall we do to amuse Mr. Austin? I suppose he wouldn't care to play dummy whist.'

'I shouldn't think he would,' answered the old gentleman, with his back to the fire; 'I expect he would much rather let you go to bed and come to my den for a quiet smoke.'

'Do what? revoke?' asked Mrs. Frere. 'Now, George, you know very well that I never did such a thing in my life.'

Her husband, a trifle jocose after his three glasses of port, placed a hand on each side of his mouth and shouted in a stentorian voice: 'Lucy ahoy! I did *not* say that you would revoke; I said you had better go off to bed and let me and Mr. Austin smoke.'

Mrs. Frere raised her pretty little hands to her ears and then struck at him with her fan. 'Isn't he rude!' she exclaimed. 'This comes of living down in the country from year's end to year's end; his manners deteriorate every day. Go away, then, both of you. I am not quite ready for bed yet, but I won't keep you from your cigars.'

But Matthew protested, truthfully as well as politely, that he would much prefer half an hour's chat with Mrs. Frere to a cigar. He would have to go in about half an hour, he added, because it was by no means certain that he might not find some urgent summons awaiting him on his return home. So he seated himself near the pretty old lady, whose prettiness and charm were still rather those that belong to youth than to age, while her husband sank into an easy-chair on the opposite side of the fire and was soon fast asleep.

It was pleasant and soothing even to look at Mrs. Frere, as she sat there, with all her costly little knicknacks, refinements, and luxuries around her, and still more so to listen to her while she enlarged complacently upon the inconveniences and discomforts of pauperism. She had been purchasing an additional supply of bulbs, she said, but had been obliged to deny herself some of the newer and more expensive varieties. 'One can't attempt to go in for competition with one's wealthy friends when one's purse is all but empty and the end of the year is still so far off.' Then she related how Harry had written in the best of spirits and how she hoped that, sooner or later, Lord This or Lord That would secure a staff appointment for him. Dick, it appeared, had recently got into trouble at Windsor Fair and had suffered the extreme penalty of school-law in consequence—'But he seems to be rather proud of his achievements than otherwise, and I am sure flogging must be good for boys. Such a mistake to try and abolish it, don't you think so? Though I can't say I should like it myself.' Anne and Maggie also came in for their share of mention and more or less compassionate discussion; but to her eldest son she did not allude even remotely. Yet she must have guessed that her hearer had by this time been made at least aware of the existence of that black sheep.

Her hearer, nursing his knee and gazing at her with his head a little on one side, was thinking what an enviable, not to say admirable, specimen of the human genus she was. Nobody could call her selfish; she was evidently wrapped up in her children and quite unsuspicious that other people might be bored by long disquisitions upon their several perfections and imperfections; still it could be surmised that her buoyant temperament would tide her comfortably over any calamity that might be in store for them or her. She was one of those thrice happy few who are content to let things happen to them, who do not attempt to control the course of events very much, who have but a slight sense of personal responsibility, and who are almost incomprehensible to the nervous and anxious amongst their fellow-beings. Mrs. Frere was not at all incomprehensible to Matthew; but he could easily believe that she might be that, and provoking into the bargain, to her daughter. The more he saw of this really delightful and amiable family the more he realised the complete isolation in which one member of it must necessarily dwell.

'Of course it is her own fault,' he mused; 'but one can no more help faults of that kind than one can help being tall or short, fat or thin.'

When you come to think of it, the number of things that can be helped is quite astonishingly small. Matthew was thinking of this when the butler came in to tell him that his dogcart was at the door, and when Mr. Frere, waking up with a start, rubbed his hands and declared that there was snow in the air. He was thinking of it while he said good-night to his entertainers and absolutely refused to let the old gentleman accompany him into the hall; he continued to think of it after he had struggled into his heavy overcoat and had emerged into the starry night. Some snow had actually fallen while he had been sitting by the warm fireside, and the ground was thinly powdered with it; but the clouds had now dispersed, and a hard frost had set in. Away went the mare with a loose rein, notwithstanding the outspoken remonstrances of the groom; her heedless driver was occupied with other problems than that of keeping her upon her legs, and perhaps, after all, she was better able to take care of herself than he was to take care of her.

Of what avail, indeed, are knowledge, experience, good will, salutary precautions? The same stupid blunders are committed over and over again, as generation follows generation; sin and disease remain unconquered; ninety-nine mortals out of every hundred act in obedience to inherited tendencies; if young men see fit to go to the deuce, if young women choose to fret vainly over the ruin of their brothers, and if fathers deem it their duty to be stern and implacable, the philosophic mind can only console itself with the reflection that there is a bright as well as a dark side to existence. Nevertheless, it is not easy to sit still and make no sort of effort, however small, towards brightening dark places.

Now, it came to pass that, while Matthew was thus cogitating, he reached a place where the darkness in which he had hitherto been travelling was brightened by the rays of the gas-lamps which the Wilverton Local Board had set up, at rare intervals, on the outskirts of their town; and these, falling upon the buttons of a military overcoat, drew his attention to the wearer thereof. A soldier in cavalry uniform is not an everyday sight in those parts; still Matthew's curiosity would doubtless have been satisfied by a passing glance, had not this soldier and his female companion drawn back somewhat hastily on the approach of the dogcart. They did not draw back quite hastily enough. The female companions of private soldiers do not generally appear in dresses of the material and colour worn by Miss Frere at dinner, nor is it very much their habit to sally forth at night in thin shoes and long, fur-trimmed opera-cloaks. Matthew involuntarily drew rein ; but his impulse was but momentary, and he immediately laid his whip across the flanks of the mare, who resented such uncalled-for treatment by throwing herself into her collar, whisking her tail, and breaking into a gallop.

'So that's it, is it ?' thought he to himself, as he narrowly avoided collision with the next lamp-post. 'Well, the fellow might do worse than go in for soldiering, and I have no business to spy upon her. All the same, he ought to be ashamed of asking her to come out all by herself in the middle of the night, and she risks catching her death of cold, if she runs no other risk. At least, he will see her safe home, I suppose. I wonder whether she knew that I recognised her ! Anyhow, I hope she knows that I shall not betray her.'

But that, as it happened, was exactly what Miss Frere did not know.

CHAPTER VII.

A LITTLE ESCAPADE.

THE two persons whom Matthew had left standing upon the footpath just outside Wilverton remained silent for a moment or two, while they watched the rapidly retreating dogcart. Then the man in the military overcoat remarked :

'Not much of a coachman, that chap. I didn't recognise his face ; do you know who he is ?'

'Oh, yes, indeed I do !' sighed his companion. 'He is Mr. Austin, the new doctor, who, as I told you, has been dining with us this evening ; and the worst of it is that I am quite certain he saw me.'

The other laughed. 'What a popular doctor he will be for the next few weeks ! Miss Frere sneaking out in the dead of the night to meet an unknown Tommy Atkins alone !—it can't be every day that he gets such a firstrate bit of scandal as that to retail to the old women. This is what comes of being so reckless.'

'But you told me to meet you here, Spencer,' pleaded Anne reproachfully ; 'you said it was the only way.'

'Oh, no, my dear girl ; excuse me ; it was you who said that.

I, having nothing to lose and precious little to gain, should have been game to walk up to the front-door and ring the bell. Besides which, I mentioned that a letter, enclosing a cheque or postal order, would answer all immediate purposes.'

'Don't talk like that! What pleasure can it give you to hurt me, when the time is so short, and we may not see each other again for months or years?'

He shrugged his shoulders. He was a tall, good-looking young man with a heavy fair moustache. His hair was plastered down in a wave over his forehead, and his cap was jauntily set on one side, after the fashion affected by the branch of the service to which he belonged. A close observer might have guessed that he was a gentleman by birth; but he seemed to have assimilated the outward aspect of his fellows.

'I talk like what I am,' he declared; 'if you expect me to be what I once was, you expect an impossibility. People who associate with brutes become brutes—there's no help for it—and you can't have the slightest idea what brutes those fellows are. Fine soldiers too, and as plucky as you like; but—well, you must live amongst them to know what they really are. If I hadn't a very fair prospect of being promoted to Sergeant before long, I should desert.'

'But you have that prospect, and you say the Colonel is inclined to do all he can for you. You won't be so crazy as to throw away your only chance, will you, Spencer?' asked Anne anxiously.

'Oh, I don't suppose I shall desert. For one thing, it wouldn't be easy, and for another thing, I should feel that I had defrauded myself by having gone through this hell upon earth without compensation. Still there are moments when one longs to take a short cut to the real hell—if there is such a place—and have done with it. A week of cheap debauchery, and then a jump into the canal or over a railway-bridge in front of the express—painful for one's family, of course; but one's family would probably survive the shock.'

Anne did not give utterance to the apprehensive cry which may have been expected of her. She knew her brother, and was well aware that, although he might do many foolish things out of bravado, suicide was not likely to be one of them. After a pause, she began to question him about the possibility of his eventually obtaining a commission. What steps could be taken on his behalf? Did he think that Colonel Egerton would be willing to recommend him? Would it be necessary to wait a long time before the desired promotion could be asked for?

The young fellow jerked up his shoulders again. 'Upon my word, I can't tell you,' he answered. 'I believe commissions used to be given rather more freely some years ago than they are now; too many gentlemen have taken to enlisting in these days, you see. If it came to that, I dare say the old Colonel would back me up, for he isn't a bad old sort, and he happens to like me; but I expect a good deal of interest in high quarters would be wanted. After all, what would be the use? A man can't live in the 22nd Lancers upon nothing a year, and you know whether my dear Papa would be likely to make me an allowance or not.'

'I think he would,' Anne returned; 'I think you forget what provocation he has had and how natural it is for him to feel that he can't trust you. But if it were proved to him that you really wished to make a fresh start and that you had worked hard for it, I believe he would be ready to forgive you. Anyhow, it is worth trying for, isn't it? Especially as there is nothing else to try for.'

'H'm! In the meantime, there are other and more attainable blessings which are quite worth having, I assure you. Beer, for instance. Well, no; we won't say beer; we will say socks and under-clothing and pocket-handkerchiefs, and perhaps a decent cigar once in a while, for a real treat. I am sorry to appear greedy, but the time is getting short, and I warned you just now that I have become a slave to brutish appetites. My dear Anne, how much coin have you brought with you?'

It was not very much; for her allowance had of necessity been curtailed, and her mother did not like to see her shabbily dressed; but she gave him all that she could spare—in fact, to be strictly accurate, she gave him a good deal more than she could spare—and he accepted the amount with a careless word or two of thanks. Then he was in a great hurry to be off. He had not much more than time to catch the train to the cathedral-town where he was quartered, he said, and he did not expect that he would obtain permission to absent himself until so late an hour again.

'But you can write when you like,' he added, laughing, 'and you can enclose a postal order as often as you please. The smallest contributions thankfully received.'

'Yes,' answered Anne meekly. 'But, Spencer—stop one moment!—what am I to do about Mr. Austin? Had I not better tell him the truth when I get an opportunity? He must have seen us, and he may not have guessed—men are often so extraordinarily stupid!—he may not have guessed who you were.'

'By all means tell him, then; personally, I don't care a button who knows that I am a non-commissioned officer in the 22nd Lancers. All the same, I doubt whether he will believe you, and I'm sure he won't thank you for spoiling a good story. If I were you, I should swear through thick and thin that his eyes had deceived him.'

'Mr. Austin is a gentleman,' said Anne rather coldly; 'I am not in the least afraid of his mentioning what he saw as a good story. Only he might imagine'——

'Well, my dear girl, I can't help your friend's imaginings, and it's no fault of mine that you are in this equivocal position. I warned you that the game wasn't worth the candle. Now I really must bolt to the station.'

He submitted to her long, clinging embrace and kissed her lightly on the cheek as he disengaged himself. Of course he did not enjoy being hugged; he never had liked such demonstrations even in the old days, nor do brothers ever care about being hugged by their sisters. This was what Anne said to herself in order to make him out less callous than he affected to be; but for all that, she had not many illusions respecting him. She remained motionless until the sound of his quick, ringing footsteps upon the hard ground had died away: then she turned, with a sigh, to speed upon her own homeward journey.

Anne was no coward; still she did not altogether relish the prospect of that long tramp along the lonely road. It had been one thing to slip out and hasten through the falling snow, sustained by the hope of seeing Spencer once more; it was a somewhat different thing to retrace her steps, with possible detection awaiting her at the end of her walk and many other disagreeable possibilities attendant upon the course of it.

Now, she had not advanced very far, hugging the shadow of the bare hedgerows and stepping as noiselessly as she could across the grass, when her attentive ear caught the distant sound of hoofs and wheels. She stood still and listened. Yes; there could be no doubt about it; a vehicle of some sort was approaching rapidly from the direction of the town. Presently she knew that it was a two-wheeled vehicle, and then a horrid suspicion flashed across her mind which was verified almost as soon as formed. In the bright moonlight that high dogcart, that fast-trotting roan mare, that seated figure in the thick driving-coat were only too clearly recognisable. Mr. Austin kept turning his head from side to side as he drew nearer; quite evidently he was looking for somebody. Really it was a little unfair and not a little impertinent of him to behave as he was doing, and for a moment Anne thought of casting herself full-length into the dry ditch by the wayside until he should have passed. But what would have been the use of doing that? Since an explanation was inevitable, the sooner it was made the better; so she emerged from the somewhat ineffectual ambush afforded by an elm-tree and waited calmly in the middle of the road until he pulled up beside her.

He took off his hat and said, in the most matter-of-course tone in the world: 'May I drive you as far as your gates, Miss Frere? I am going that way.'

Without noticing his offer, she replied: 'I was sure you had seen me. I don't know why you should have thought it necessary to pursue me, but I am glad you haven't brought your groom with you. Perhaps I had better tell you at once that the soldier to whom I was talking when you passed, on your way home, was my brother.'

'Of course it was: I guessed that at once, and I may tell you, for your comfort, that you were not recognised by the groom. I said a word or two to him about the cavalry soldier just to satisfy myself that he had suspected nothing, and I found that it was all right. And indeed I did not come out again in pursuit of you; it is perfectly true that I have to go and see a patient who lives some miles beyond Hayes Park; a note from his wife was waiting for me when I reached home. I plead guilty to having left James behind, much against his will, because I thought it not unlikely that I might overtake you; but I did not contemplate giving you a lift home when I started. I thought your brother would surely take the trouble to escort you as far as the lodge.'

'He couldn't; he was obliged to catch a train. And nothing could have happened to me; there are no tramps about at this time of year. It is very good of you,' Anne added, with a more friendly intonation, 'to take this so sensibly.'

'Oh, I don't know about sensibly,' said Matthew, laughing. 'Can you manage to climb into the cart without my getting down? I can't quite trust the mare to stand, unless she has somebody at her head. There!—that's all right, and will you put this plaid over your shoulders, please? I don't know so much about sensibly—a sensible man might think it his duty to inform Mr. Frere. But I have my own little ideas upon the subject of duty, and you may rely upon me to hold my tongue. Nevertheless, if I may take the liberty of saying so, I do trust you will not repeat this escapade. It really is dangerous—horribly dangerous; though perhaps not to life or limb.'

They were speeding along the high-road again by this time, and Anne, obedient to instructions, had enveloped herself in the doctor's warm plaid.

'Yes, I know it is,' she answered, meekly enough; 'but I don't think it will happen again, and if you keep my secret, I am not likely to be found out this time. Nurse, who knows where I have been, is sitting up for me and will let me in through the window of the housekeeper's room. I couldn't resist going out tonight; I don't know when I may have another opportunity of seeing poor Spencer.'

'Well, it was a plucky thing to do; I only hope he appreciates your courage and unselfishness. So that was why you looked as if you were wishing me at Jericho when your father brought me into dinner!'

'Did I look like that? I am sorry if I did; but of course your being there rather complicated matters. I was so afraid Mamma would insist upon my remaining in the drawing-room.' After a short pause, she asked: 'What made you conjecture at once that the soldier was Spencer?'

'Could it possibly have been anybody else? I am glad, for your sake, that he has taken the Queen's shilling. He might have done very much worse, I should think.'

'Oh, he *has* done worse,' answered Anne, with a melancholy little laugh; 'but whether this will help him to do better eventually or not I'm sure I don't know. It isn't in him to persevere with things, and I hardly dare to hope that he will ever get his commission. If it were possible to tell Papa what he is doing, there might be a chance; because we have still a few friends in high places, though we have dropped so completely out of society.'

'But isn't that possible?'

She shook her head. 'Not at present. We aren't allowed even to mention Spencer's name, and there would be a terrible explosion if it were to appear that I had been corresponding with him all this time. It isn't that my father is unforgiving; he has forgiven again and again; only there are people—of course you must know that—who are forced to make themselves out relentless just because they are a little afraid in their hearts of relenting. Oh, no; I am sure he would never consent to ask a favour of anybody for Spencer; the one hope would be to get the commission without his having heard anything about it. Then he would have a fair excuse for saying that a fresh start had been made and that the past had been partly atoned for.'

'I see. Well, it isn't much influence that I can boast of with official personages; but my brother, I believe, has some and is rather fond of exercising it. Would you mind my applying to him? He is very cautious and trustworthy, and even if he refused to help, he would not chatter about anything that had been imparted to him in confidence.'

Anne was kept silent by a sudden access of the shyness from which she had been free up to that moment, but which now rendered her somewhat unwilling to lay herself under obligations to comparative strangers. 'You are very kind,' she said constrainedly at length.

'That means "Mind your own business!"'

'No; I didn't mean anything so rude and ungrateful as that; but'——

'But you doubt whether I could be of much assistance to you, perhaps? Very likely I can't; still it is a mere question of writing a note, and Godfrey, as I tell you, is perfectly safe. It seems rather a pity to leave any stone unturned.'

Anne could not but agree that it was. She assented presently to the writing of the note, remarking apologetically that she knew of no one else to whom it would be safe for her to avow that she had been holding communication with her brother. 'And I suppose it wouldn't be necessary for you to say anything about me in writing to Sir Godfrey, would it?'

'Oh, dear, no! I should only explain the circumstances as concisely as possible and say that I wanted to do some little thing towards repaying all the kindness and hospitality that your family have shown me. That will sound natural enough, and will satisfy Godfrey, who is not inquisitive.'

'You are very kind,' Anne repeated.

But this time she spoke as if she meant what she said, and in truth she did mean it. Perhaps she exaggerated a little the value of such kindness as she had received and might be going to receive at Matthew's hands; perhaps she scarcely realised that to be of service to his fellow-creatures was as sincere a pleasure to him as the promotion of our personal enjoyment is to the rest of us; still, as a matter of fact, he had refrained from placing her in an awkward predicament and had volunteered to aid her towards accomplishing the object nearest to her heart—not to speak of having given her a very welcome lift and the loan of a much-needed wrap.

The wrap, however, had to be surrendered presently, notwithstanding his earnest entreaties that she would keep it until she should have an opportunity of returning it to him.

'Thank you very much; but I shouldn't dare,' she said, after she had made him stop beside a stile some three or four hundred yards short of the lodge; 'one of the servants might see it, and then questions might be asked. I shan't catch cold during the few minutes that it will take me to run across the park. Good night, and a thousand thanks! If ever I am able to do anything for you in return—but it isn't much use to say that, I am afraid.'

'There are several things that you could do for me without loss of time,' Matthew declared. 'Have you a fire in your bedroom?'

'Oh, yes.'

'Then warm yourself thoroughly in front of it before you go to bed; that's one thing. Another thing that you might do would be to make friends, if you can, with that Miss Murray about whom I was speaking to your mother. The poor girl is lonely, and it would make all the difference to her to have some nice friend.'

'Very well; I will do what I can,' Anne promised.

'In that case, I think we may cry quits, as far as we have gone. By the way, don't build too much upon Godfrey; it is only a sort of hit or miss attempt, you know, and he may very likely say that he can do nothing at the Horse Guards. Anyhow, I'll let you know as soon as I hear from him.'

He watched Anne's tall, slim figure across the snow-covered grass until a belt of evergreens concealed it from view; after which he drove on. He was filled with compassion and admiration for her, and was pretty well pleased with himself into the bargain now that there seemed to be some definite prospect of assisting her. The quiet satisfaction with which he recalled their colloquy was not disturbed for a moment by any suspicion that he had made a somewhat maladroit request in begging her, as a favour to himself, to take Lilian Murray under her special protection. That was the sort of ignoble idea which would never have found its way into Matthew Austin's mind, for all his exhaustive acquaintance with the intricacies of human nature.

CHAPTER VIII.

MATTHEW MAKES HIMSELF USEFUL.

MRS. FRERE was notorious throughout the neighbourhood for the lenient view which she took of her liabilities in the matter of paying visits. Busy she could hardly be called; but, like many other persons who have no settled work to do, she was never without a plausible excuse for procrastination, and although she spoke every day of calling upon Lady Sara Murray, she allowed a fortnight to elapse before redeeming her promise to Matthew Austin. Perhaps she would not have made her way to Prospect Place even then, had she not been forcibly dragged thither by her more conscientious daughter.

Anne, to be sure, was not precisely consumed with anxiety to make the acquaintance of these two ladies, whom, for some reason or for no reason, she did not expect to like very much; still she remembered that Mr. Austin had made a point of her showing something more than ordinary civility to the younger, and her conscience reproached her for a delay which, after all, was no fault of hers.

Lady Sara, who seldom left the house, was at home, and her daughter was reading the newspapers to her when the visitors were announced. Anne, following in Mrs. Frere's wake, scrutinised the girl with some curiosity. The girl was unquestionably very pretty, perhaps even beautiful; but whether her mental were on a par with her physical gifts it was not easy to discover. At all events, it was not very easy to talk to her; nor, for the matter of that, did Anne ever find it very easy to talk to girls. She did her best; she asked such questions as seemed appropriate; she hoped Miss Murray would come to tea with her some afternoon; she suggested country walks and spoke of the dances which were usually given about Christmas time; but she elicited little more than monosyllabic replies. Lilian evidently did not take to her, and she, on her side, did not take particularly to Lilian. Anne often felt that she was predestined to be an old maid, and that young people looked upon her as having prematurely fulfilled her destiny. Before long she had exhausted her list of possible topics; so that she was driven in despair to listen to the conversation of her elders, hoping that she might derive some fresh ideas from that source.

Her elders were getting on swimmingly and experienced none of the embarrassment with which she was afflicted. Mrs. Frere always had plenty to say for herself, and, as she knew a great many people whom Lady Sara knew, she had the good fortune to be interested as well as interesting. In these latter days a coterie has been formed in London the members of which are understood to have bound themselves to converse only of things, not of people. It is a rule to be admired rather than imitated. We cannot all of us be so superior as that, and why should we be forced to proclaim our inferiority by remaining mute when we are really provided with quite a large number of fascinating subjects to discourse upon? Mrs. Frere and Lady Sara discussed social celebrities to their hearts' content, and enjoyed the process so much that Anne had to wait fully five minutes before they dropped down to the mention of a humble individual with whom she also could boast of being tolerably intimate. However, when they did reach Mr. Austin, they had nothing but the most unqualified laudation to bestow upon him.

'It seems rather eccentric of him to be a doctor,' Lady Sara said; 'but I am sure I ought to be the last person to complain of his taste, for he has done me an immensity of good, besides cheering us up with constant visits for which he won't accept any payment. I was obliged to ask him, the other day, what I owed him, because money is an object with me; and how much do you suppose his account came to? Three guineas! I was really ashamed; but he assured me that his regular professional charges amounted to no more than that, and that, if I wanted to pay him for looking in when he had nothing else to do, he wouldn't be able to come again until he was sent for.'

'That is the advantage of having a gentleman for one's medical attendant,' observed Mrs. Frere placidly. 'One doesn't mind mentioning the subject of fees to him; one knows he won't have any silly affectation about it, as poor old Jennings had. Not that we have mentioned the subject to Mr. Austin yet; and I don't suppose we shall until after the new year, when one's poor little dividends begin to come in. We are all quite devoted to him—all, except Anne, who doesn't bestow her friendship upon man or woman until she has summered them and wintered them. To be sure, Mr. Austin is one of these middle-aged sort of men who get on best with old people and children. I dare say your daughter, for instance, finds him a somewhat tedious person.'

Lilian rather astonished one of her hearers by the warmth with which she repudiated this imputation. 'Whatever Mr. Austin may be, he isn't that,' she declared. 'I don't know what we should have done without him all this time, and if the other people who live hereabouts are half as amusing to talk to as he is, Wilverton can't be as dull a place as it looks.'

The inference was not precisely flattering, and Lady Sara, who had had some experience of her daughter's occasional frank utterances, showed symptoms of nervousness; but Mrs. Frere only gathered that the girl liked Mr. Austin and nodded smilingly back at her. After a few more words, the subject dropped, and Lilian relapsed into taciturnity. As for Anne, she was more than ready to depart when her mother at length rose. She had done what in her lay to make friends with this beautiful but not (to her) very attractive Miss Murray, and her advances had not been welcomed. She could say nothing further; it was no fault of hers if she was less amusing to talk to than Mr. Austin. As she followed Mrs. Frere down the steep, narrow staircase, there was a decided feeling of resentment in her mind against Mr. Austin, who might, she thought, have had the common sense to understand that girls of a certain and tolerably numerous class never derive amusement from intercourse with members of their own sex. But when she emerged into the semi-darkness outside, she had to forgive Matthew; for there he was, helping Mrs. Frere into the carriage, and before showing the same polite attention to Anne, he took occasion to say hurriedly, in a low voice:

'I am so glad to have chanced upon you! I have heard from Godfrey, and I want to tell you what he says. When could I see you alone?'

She had no time to do more than answer: 'I shall be at St. Mark's on Sunday afternoon. Could you contrive to be there? Then you might walk part of the way back with me.'

'All right,' said Matthew; 'I'll manage it.'

Indistinct eulogies of Miss Murray's loveliness and facetious warnings to Mr. Austin to beware of Cupid's darts were proceeding from the obscure interior of the landau, where Mrs. Frere was making herself comfortable with a fur-lined rug and a foot-warmer. The young doctor responded with the jocosity which the occasion seemed to require; after which Anne took her place and the vehicle was set in motion.

'Really and seriously,' Mrs Frere remarked, when she had kept silence for a minute or two, 'I think he had better be careful, poor dear man! That girl is simply exquisite! I couldn't take my eyes off her all the time I was talking to Lady Sara, and it wouldn't surprise me to hear that he was in much the same case. No wonder he charges nothing for his visits!'

'I suppose there is no harm in his looking at her, if he likes,' Anne said.

'Well, that depends. I wouldn't look at her more than I could help if I were a country doctor.'

But Anne, during the last few minutes, had made up her mind not to trouble herself about matters which did not concern her. The matters which did concern her, and with which Matthew had been so kindly pleased to concern himself, sufficed to engage her whole attention; if he chose to admire Lilian Murray, he was at liberty to do so, and no exception could be taken to his taste. Meanwhile, the chief question to be considered was whether it would be practicable to attend afternoon service at St. Mark's, Wilverton, on the following Sunday afternoon, unaccompanied. To walk as far as the town on Sunday afternoons for the purpose of being present at St. Mark's, which boasted of an old-fashioned cathedral service, a fairly good choir, and an organist of florid propensities, was a practice to which she was much given while the days were long; but her father did not approve of her being out alone after dark, and she was much afraid that, on hearing of her intention, he would either offer to escort her himself or insist upon her being followed at a respectful distance by the footman.

There is, however, as most daughters and some sons are aware, one excellent way of avoiding paternal frustration of their intentions—which is to say nothing about them. When Sunday came Anne employed this simple method with success, and as soon as she reached the church she had the satisfaction of beholding the back of Matthew Austin's curly head in a prominent position. There was no sermon, and the anthem was a short one;

so that it was still comparatively early when the worshippers trooped out, leaving behind them one of their number, who seemed to experience some difficulty in getting on her gloves. Anne, knowing that Matthew had seen her, and not wishing to be accosted by other acquaintances whom she had recognised amongst the congregation, did not hurry herself. She allowed them plenty of time to disperse before she moved down the darkening aisle to the porch, where a tall gentleman, with a bundle of letters in his hand, was patiently waiting for her. She glanced interrogatively at these documents while responding to his greeting.

'Well?' she said.

'Well, I have pretty good news for you. I have been in correspondence with Godfrey, who is quite inclined to bestir himself, and indeed has bestirred himself. Luckily, he happens to be acquainted with your brother's Colonel, which has rather facilitated matters. Of course you won't have expected to hear that a commission could be granted to-morrow, but there really seems to be every hope of its being granted before very long, provided that'——

'Yes?' said Anne, catching her breath.

'Provided that no hitch occurs. In short, to speak plainly, provided that your brother continues to behave with ordinary circumspection.'

They had left the church and were walking slowly down the quiet street which gave access to it. The sun had already set, the stars were becoming visible, and a chilly wind was beginning to blow from the north-east.

'Ah,' sighed Anne, after a prolonged pause, 'that's a large proviso!'

Her manner of receiving what should surely have been a welcome communication was so unexpectedly despondent that Matthew could not help laughing. 'But, my dear Miss Frere,' he remonstrated, 'the authorities could hardly make a more modest stipulation than that, could they? I must tell you that, according to my information, these promotions of gentlemen from the ranks are becoming less and less frequent. One can understand that there are obvious objections to what, after all, must partake a little of the nature of favouritism; besides which, it appears that commanding officers don't, as a rule, like having gentlemen in the ranks at all. I suppose that, as a rule, these gentlemen-rankers are not particularly apt to be circumspect, and

I was thinking that it would be just as well for you to mention, when you write to your brother' ——

'Oh, I won't fail to do that,' interrupted Anne; 'the only question is whether he will listen or have patience. What has he been doing? You have heard something, I am sure.'

'No, indeed; nothing of any real consequence. Colonel Egerton speaks most highly of him in a military sense, and is evidently anxious to push him on. I believe there have been some peccadilloes, but at present, so far as I understand, there is no serious obstacle in the way of his advancement.'

'And how long will he have to wait, do you think?'

'Ah, that I can't say. He must reach the highest non-commissioned rank—troop-sergeant-major, I think they called it, but I am very ignorant about military matters—before he can be recommended for a commission; only I gathered that his promotion up to that point might be made tolerably rapid. Perhaps he would have to wait a year.'

'Oh, a year!—that sounds manageable. I was afraid it would be three or four years at least.'

She turned towards her companion, at whom she had not hitherto been looking, and exclaimed, in an altered tone, 'What a wretch you must think me! You have been taking all this trouble for me, and I have not even said "Thank you" yet! I suppose I didn't dare to be thankful until I could hope that your trouble would be rewarded. But I do hope now, and I do thank you from the bottom of my heart.'

Matthew really deserved some thanks; for he had taken more trouble about this business than he had cared to confess. Although he was not upon unfriendly terms with his brother, he would have preferred not to ask a favour of Sir Godfrey, and, as a matter of fact, his first letter had not been very graciously received, Sir Godfrey having declared, in reply, that it would be out of the question for him to use his influence on behalf of a young man who had avowedly gone to the bad, while he professed himself quite unable to understand on what grounds he had been requested to do so. Thereupon Matthew had hastily journeyed up to London, had managed to move the reluctant baronet to action, if not to sympathy, and had likewise called upon a certain high official at the War Office whom he had once attended in a dangerous illness. The high official, fortunately, had not forgotten Mr. Austin, though he shook his head and pursed up his lips when the nature of Mr. Austin's errand was unfolded to him. However, he promised to make inquiries, and the upshot of it all had been that Matthew, after his return home, had received the sheaf of encouraging letters which he now held in his hand. His task had not been an altogether pleasant one, because he had had some difficulty in explaining why he took such a particular interest in young Frere, and he had also been informed of episodes in young Frere's past and present career which did not redound to the credit of that warrior; still he had been rewarded by ultimate success, and he had no intention of telling Anne what uncomfortable moments the pursuit of success had caused him to pass through.

'Oh, you had better thank Colonel Egerton, if you must thank anyone,' he answered lightly. 'My share in the transaction was simply to beg somebody to beg somebody else to do what could be done.'

She opened her lips, as if to speak, but closed them again and walked on for some little distance in silence. She and her escort had left the streets behind them, had passed through a gate, and were crossing a pasture coated with hoar-frost before she said:

'I understand perfectly well whom I have to thank, and I am all the more grateful because I am sure you hated begging anything of anybody. It is hateful to have to beg; but how can one help it when one is asking on behalf of one's own flesh and blood? The worst of it is that Spencer is nothing to you, and you must have heard things about him—I know by what you said just now that you must have heard things. I wonder whether you would mind telling me what they were.'

Well, he really could not tell her exactly what he had heard; so he took refuge in evasion. 'You are much too apprehensive,' he replied; 'your brother wouldn't have been a sergeant now unless he had had a pretty clean regimental record, you may be sure. One doesn't expect the average young man to be a saint; but at any rate he doesn't appear to have taken to drinking, and that, they say, is the rock upon which gentlemen who enlist are most apt to wreck themselves.'

'Are you sure of that?' asked Anne quickly.

'I am sure that Colonel Egerton said so. Have you any reason to fear the contrary?'

'I suppose I have reason for every kind of fear. Mr. Austin, I don't want to deceive you, and I can't deceive myself, about

Spencer. He is not to be trusted, and I feel now as if I had had no business to let you make yourself in a way responsible for him. If he were to desert, or to do some other disgraceful thing, after this, your brother would be very much displeased with you, wouldn't he?'

'I don't think so,' answered Matthew; 'but if he were, I could make shift to endure his displeasure. Don't begin to worry yourself with morbid ideas which there is nothing in the case to warrant. You have done your best, and I have done my little best, such as it has been. Let us rest satisfied with that knowledge and talk about something else. How did you like the Murrays?'

Anne, being a truthful person, had to confess that she had not hit it off particularly well with Miss Murray. 'But I dare say that was my own fault,' she added magnanimously. 'I don't make friends very easily, and the things that interest young girls don't interest me much. However, I will do my best to cultivate her, if only because you asked me to do so and because it is my bounden duty to do all I possibly can when you ask me.'

'You will like her when you know her better,' Matthew declared confidently. 'She is a mere child as yet, and she has childish *gaucheries*, but when once she is at her ease, she can chatter as quaintly as anybody I ever met in my life. I am sorry for her too; for I am afraid there is no hope that her mother will ever be really well again, and one doesn't see what sort of future lies before her.'

'She will marry somebody, I suppose.'

'Yes; but whom? The first that comes, provided that he is rich enough and aristocratic enough, I am afraid. A commonplace fate; but a pathetic one all the same.'

He enlarged upon this theme, which, with Anne's occasional comments thereupon, sufficed to keep the conversation alive until Hayes Park had been reached. The truth was that he did not wish to be catechised any further about Sergeant Frere of the 22nd Lancers, and his companion was quick-witted enough to divine that much. However, on taking leave of him, she could do no less than reiterate her thanks, to which she added a promise that he should not regret his kindness if she could help it.

'After all, when so much is at stake, he can surely keep steady for one short year!' she exclaimed half interrogatively.

'Oh, dear me, yes, I should think so,' was Matthew's encouraging reply.

(*To be continued.*)

WINTER ASSIZES.

Aylesbury, November 15th.—'Robert Naylor, alias Dentoff, aged 45,' described in the calendar as an artist, of imperfect education, but who turns out to be a distinguished bicycle-rider in the music-halls, and head of the famous Dentoff Troupe—who circle the stage, man, woman, and child, in Polish costume—regards us from the dock with little, bright, bird-like looks and gestures, while the prison surgeon gives it as his opinion he is insane and ignorant of the distinction between right and wrong; an opinion received by Dentoff with metallic merriment, and shrill comments that the doctor is talking a 'lot of stuff.' But let us hope the doctor's right, seeing that Dentoff undoubtedly felled a defenceless policeman and then beat him about the head in his own station with a Bucks Constabulary poker, whereof he still bears the mark among his clipped hair in the shape of a large cross of white sticking-plaster, as if he were a Knight Templar branded in the wrong place.

He has had his losses, has poor Dentoff; saves 1,400*l.* as distinguished bicycle-rider, and then must needs take a public-house out at Tooting, and build a gymnasium and fashion a bicycle training-ground for friends and pupils behind it. Result, 800*l.* gone. Then, his judgment unsettled and vacancy beginning to set in, a Turkish Bath up Newington way claims his attention, merely happening to pass and like the look of it; 200*l.* he gives for it, bringing in, alas! at this moment only four or five shillings a day. Whereupon Dentoff decides that luck is against him, and that nothing but libations will bring the angry gods round; so he withdraws 30*l.* from the bank, and, leaving wife and children unnotified over the Turkish bath, is off, head down, into the night, and turns up, after a course of which no man can tell anything, in a Bucks village, drunk and noisy enough to be arrested, with 9*l.* 1*s.* left in his possession out of the thirty pounds. And when they let him out of his cell in the morning for a wash, he fells the policeman as aforesaid, innocently bending over the fire, and is remitted to Northampton gaol to await his trial. Undoubtedly mad, says the doctor, and extremely dirty in his habits, at which the unhinged Dentoff laughs merrily and fixes him with mocking, bright black eyes.

The best the Court can do for him is to give him six months, rather than let the jury find him insane and consign him to Broadmoor. He pays no more attention to his sentence than if the learned judge had said, 'Look ye, Dentoff, in this brief-bag are your 1,400*l.*; return to Newington and build no more Tooting gymnasia,' but lurches powerfully below, urging the rather nervous policemen sharply not to assist him. His brother comes forward and begs permission of the judge to be allowed to visit him; a burly, kindly fellow, he leans his head on the witness-box and cries bitterly at poor Bob's misfortune. I met him afterwards in the post-office and asked how he found his brother. Very mad, he said; piping shrilly of a new idea he had and the money to be made out of it. 'A thousand a week, and five hundred of it for you, Bill, and the kids.' Bill is afraid the confinement and indifferent food will further injure his so-powerful brother, accustomed to strong meats, and plenty of them; perhaps render him unfit for taking up his profession when he comes out. I think not. I think they will clear him and remove his humours; render him, instead, more of an artist, more delicate in the handling of his machine, more daring and graceful in his flights and evolutions. Certainly, the first time, six months hence, I see Dentoff advertised I shall make a point of patronising him; so his misfortunes will have gained him one friend at all events. In the meantime must the troupe ride sadly round and round the stage without their illustrious chief, for the wheel has taken a foul turn.

Bedford, November 17th.—How strange, monstrous, and inexplicable are these sudden frenzies, these blood-red outbreaks that land the otherwise decent and orderly with a devilish twitch here into the assize court, plump into the dock! Here's an old man, a grizzled Darby of sixty-four, who has lived with his Joan for over forty years in fair content and considerable happiness (no neighbour, at any rate, has ever heard a quarrel), and all on a sudden, at daybreak, he kneels on her with a bread-knife and batters her skull with an old wine-bottle holding medicine. Joan screams, struggles, and gasps; Nellie, the grandchild, runs through the room with her long hair flying over her night-gown; son-in-law baker, living opposite, getting up early to bake, comes rushing and pulls off the otherwise mild old Darby, all transformed and blood-boltered. 'Well, Dad, you've done it this time' is his grim comment, as they tend the apparently lifeless Joan; while Darby flies to secreted laudanum, but is brought round to declare it has been in his mind for months (though he has never given any hint of it), and that he meant to finish both. Not a sign of insanity, but, as one might expect, some few of incoherence. He fancies, it is true, a dog is in his cell and mutters continually of 'the cause, my soul, the cause;' as if, years ago, he had been jealous of Joan, and this the late blossoming of the deadly plant. Beyond that, nothing; and all the doctor can contribute is some few phrases of homicidal mania, punctured with ineffective *pince-nez*. But why now, after forty years of married life—the last ten of them, as Darby declares, the happiest he ever spent? Joan gives her evidence, shaky still, with grandchild Nellie, standing staid and protective by her; and in explanation can only say the August night when it happened was very hot and that Darby seemed sleepless. Now he seems very gentle and sorry, and wrinkles his old forehead and blinks his baggy old eyes, and drops out of Joan's sight for eighteen months' imprisonment, entirely heart-broken and contrite.

Again; a sturdy, sharp-featured young fellow with tousled hair, who, by no means drunk, only for the time deadly mad, tries to fire the thatch under which he lives; beats his old hedger father and his brother, a market gardener's labourer; struggles with and bites them on the floor; seizes an axe and pursues them into a neighbouring rickyard; is knocked down by a ruddy carter called in to help; but rises again, more than ever frenzied, to grasp a hook (terrible weapon, a hook: most like a cross between a scythe and a halbert) with which he slashes the aforesaid ruddy carter, who again floors him, and finally hands him over to the police, tattered and gashed, fighting still and biting with distended veins and black, gaping mouth. Never did it before; doesn't seem to get drunk; only appears, from this specimen, to go occasionally *fanti*. No one would guess it, to look at the intelligent little fellow with his bright eyes; he has no recollection of it himself—seems, indeed, quite incredulous at the recital. Some mad devil of an ancestor asserting himself, I suppose; leading him away for nine months with hard labour to an old haunt of his, *videlicet*, Bedford gaol.

Not much else in the calendar to claim one's speculations. Only a boy who has been robbing a relative of 37*l*. and spending the money on his young friends, quieting their not too active consciences by declaring he found it 'under a brick in Duke Street;' only a would-be prison warder, decent-looking young chap, who, to get the berth, has altered the certificate to prove himself the right age (he still wanting one year of the necessary twenty-four); only an athlete from Leicester, white-faced, with crisp red curls, who, in reality the well-known Sprint, falsely and fraudulently pretends to be the undistinguished Brown, thereby securing himself a long start in the Bedford Bank-holiday quarter-mile race and almost a lien on the electro-plated cruets, the first prize; only the usual vagabond, mouldy, prison-haunting firers of stacks. These apparently senseless arson cases have nearly always the same explanation; the perpetrators are only just out of prison, they have nowhere to go, they can't get any work, winter is upon them with its horrors of cold and wet and hunger. They don't want to commit a crime of violence—perhaps they haven't the pluck—so they fire a stack instead, and back they go to gaol for six months, very glad to be provided for till the warm weather comes round again. But it's very hard on the farmers, very. It would be wise, I think, if, in these and some other cases, the judge had flogging powers.

Leicester, November 24th.—From out the dingy crowd of prisoners at Leicester only two stand out with tolerable distinctness: one, a short black and yellow man, sturdy, still defiant; undefended, drearily answering all questions 'No, sir,' and shifting only from one foot to the other.

He was the girl's uncle; he ruined her, and when he was turned out of the house swore he'd have his revenge. Once he came upon and chased her with a knife, and the poor frightened creature, fleeing down a passage and into a house, saw him go past with tense mouth and staring eyes. At last, one night he breaks a pane of glass at the back, and with a coal-pick creaks up to the bedroom. Thence he flees again, the lamp broken, the girl a lifeless heap of tumbled, blood-stained linen. He had done for her, as he believed; he had had his revenge. A real passion, this revenge of his, it seems; he lives only for it, hanging round the market, living on nothing, begging his food, biding only his time. And the time comes and his hand seems to have faltered; he doesn't seem to have dared strike as hard as he had gloated over; after all, as in other things, the pleasure was not so keen when it came; the wounds were not dangerous, the girl lives, the gratification has not been complete. His poor old mother—'Oh, don't ask me any questions, gentlemen'—cries sadly as she gives evidence against him, telling us how she used sometimes to send him out food, never allowing him into the house. Fifteen years' penal servitude. An interval as between the flash and the report of a distant gun, then the sentence has struck the mother waiting outside. One hears bitter, hollow cries of anguish; they grow fainter and fainter. Mother and son are each carried away their different sad roads.

Now curtsies at us an ancient, withered charwoman, her thin peaked face, her hard eye and high yellow forehead, crowned with a crape bonnet. She looks like a cross between Mrs. Pipchin and Irving in Louis XI. She's over seventy, and since the age of fifty she's scarcely been out of prison. Oddly enough, up to fifty there seems no record of her peccadilloes, if any. Now she curtsies vaguely and confesses to drink. Six months. She's very much obliged; she curtsies. In prison I doubt not that one day she will curtsy herself into the infirmary, and thence out of her long, pilfering old life.

Northampton, *November* 21*st.*—'The Night Poachers,' a burletta in one act—and that an illegal one, contrary to the peace of our sovereign lady the Queen, and the statute in that case made and provided.

I wonder on how many such scenes the fat stucco figure of the majesty of the law in the highly ornamented ceiling has looked down; on how many stalwart keepers from out Yardley Hastings way who have been 'strook' on the shoulder and returned the blow ('Have you the stick in court?' 'A believe the sergeant's got ut some weers'), and closed with the prisoner and captured him after a struggle, and faced the companions returning to the rescue with stones and horrid oaths about knocking brains out, fleeing only finally into the 'peak o' dawn' after gunshot directed at their legs, leaving on the ground the still warm bodies of the foolish rabbits. And I wonder how many stoutly sworn alibis have risen and nestled among the preposterous stucco garlands and pomegranates of this sombre Georgian assize court; sturdy oaths of disinterested friends who remembered the night of August 17th with singular distinctness and accuracy; how the prisoner had had beer, and stumbled up to bed at half-past eleven, leaving his boots under the table downstairs, where they were found in the morning just as he left them. Only, unhappily, the disinterested friends all fade like autumn snow before a few questions as to their character from the prosecuting counsel, all of them having been in trouble at one time or another for poaching and drunkenness, and assaults and housebreaking. *Noscitur a sociis.*

And lastly, let me wonder, sadly wonder, how often the loud sigh, the half-stifled sob, has risen from the poacher's wife at the back of the court, as the red judge pronounces doom of four months or eight months on the lazy ne'er-do-well standing callously at the bar; how often counsel has had to ask, 'Would your lordship permit the prisoner to have an interview with his wife?'

These people all come from Olney—Cowper's Olney—and seem just the same as in his day—just as violent, drunken, dissolute. I dare say the lazy ruffian who is slouching off to the cells may be the grandson of the woman Cowper describes robbing her neighbour when the fire broke out opposite, by Mr. Palmer's house.

Lincoln, November 29th.—The prisoner in the dock is being tried for his life, and the galleries are full of young girls. The court windows are most of them open, and pleasant, springlike airs come careering in; the sunlight falls in changing light and shadow. One hears the deep tones of the cathedral bell strike the hour and the quarters with calm, distinct emphasis.

The prisoner, Henry Trumbell, is a Grimsby skipper, owner of the smack *Nightingale.* His age is thirty-seven; his thick hair is dark brown; his moustache and short beard are lighter in colour, almost chestnut; with a little trimming and smartening he would make a typical leader of the Confederate cavalry. The face is open and pleasant, bold as befits the seaman (so bold was he that none of the Grimsby men would go to sea with him, and he had to get crews sent him up from Yarmouth), determined without being brutal. I venture to believe that no man of pleasanter, more confidence-inspiring aspect, or better general character ever stood in the dock on a capital charge. He is charged with having shot Harriett Baskby on the night of November 7th. Clearer case of murder, alas! never was.

Very fond of the girl, very anxious to reclaim her from her irregular life, very ready to marry her. For two years he has been keeping company with her, spending money on her; always together were they when the skipper was on shore. Nothing stood in the way of their happiness apparently but poor Harriett's incorrigible lightness. A fortnight before November 7th, the day of Trumbell's going to sea again, they go together to Harriett's grandfather's—grey, forgetful, mouth-fallen-in old shoemaker, untouched by all this tragedy, anxious only in the witness-box about his grotesque old tall hat—and there Trumbell makes arrangements for Harriett's stay while he is at sea, for on his return they are to be married. Till then he wanted her to board at this undeniably respectable house under the care of her aunt; he wanted to feel that while he was out in the November weather, spray-dashed, cold, and valiant, she was warm and safe, seated by the fire in the snug kitchen—safe from the drink and riot of the Grimsby music-halls. Never goes thither Harriett, poor wilful soul—wilfully seeking her own destruction; comes down to the quay-side and sees him off with many tears and vows of fidelity, but never from that moment goes near her grandfather's, where all is ready and paid for her; goes instead to Mrs. Crowder's—light, shady friend in sham fur trimmings, whose husband is at sea. Mrs. Crowder, young and white-faced, shakes and trembles in the witness-box—remembering, perhaps, all she is responsible for; weeps as she thinks of the dead Harriett, only twenty. Too late for tears now, Maud Crowder; ah, too late!

So Trumbell comes on shore again, unexpectedly; having been only a fortnight at sea, instead of the eight weeks he shipped for, seeing that he has had an accident to the mainsail (blown to ribbons, I hear, by his gay, fearless seamanship); comes on shore, happy, 'with 40*l.* under a mould' to spend on Harriett and make her his wife with; goes to the grandfather's; grandfather, who looks up lustreless and incurious, tap, tapping on his boots as though on a coffin, to say only that Harriett has never been there, never been near them since the day when Trumbell went to sea; knows nothing of her, can only recommend a visit to Bet Hopless, who, no doubt, has news. Bet Hopless (who, by the way, denies the name she is known by, asserts herself as Mrs. Jarman, doesn't know what anybody means by Bet Hopless) has news for the brooding Trumbell, and of the worst: that his Harriett has been seen at music-halls and with Mrs. Crowder; nor does any good seem to be expected of anybody in Mrs. Crowder's company, with her tight jacket, silver locket, veil down to the tip of her nose, and sham fur trimming. Trumbell's mind seems made up at once. To the gunsmith's. He is smoking a cigar, he is quite cool and collected, he buys a revolver; he won't have a cheap one, either because he fears its mechanism, or thinks it not good enough for such a deed; buys a shining nickel one for fifteen shillings, and fifty cartridges, and goes in search of Harriett and Mrs. Crowder. He is tired of the business, tired of trying to reclaim; he, the steadfast, the bold, loves the light and fleeting, the impossible-of-fidelity (perhaps for that very reason); loves her well enough to kill and die for her. And then there comes the meeting and the quarrel, and the shots heard in the bedroom with its locked door, and Harriett's pitiful scream, 'Don't kill me in my sins, Harry.' Not long after, Trumbell comes downstairs and asks for his hat. Mrs. Crowder, who has fainted, is sufficiently recovered to open the door for him and to notice there is blood on the back of his hand as he goes.

Something inexpressibly touching to me in the visit he pays after the tragedy to the faithful friend's where he has always lodged for the past three years when in Grimsby. Faithful friend is in bed, but comes down into the parlour. It is nearly twelve, and Trumbell is trembling and dazed; spots of blood are to be noticed on him. He begs his friend to go to the docks next day and get his clothes, chart, and compass and send them to his brother. He says he has done something 'against the law' and must suffer for it; he has shot that girl. Friend, without asking, knows he means Harriett; there was but that one girl in the world for Trumbell. But is he sure she's dead? Trumbell believes so; she fell, he raised her, kissed her once, and then left the house. Constantly he passes his hand over his brow and asks what he is to do. He asks for a little supper; friend gives him what there is in the house, but observes he eats nothing. Again he asks what he is to do. Friend advises him to give himself up. Trumbell lights a cigar and goes, about half-past twelve. Soon after two, still smoking, he walks into the police-station. 'My name is Trumbell. I am a murderer.' He sits smoking moodily by the station fire. Stalwart policemen are more sorry than they can say; they have long known and liked his fresh, open face; they call him Harry. The Superintendent says: 'This is a terrible business, Harry.' Faithful friend, before he leaves the box, declares that a kinder-hearted man never breathed, nor a better-natured. How often that is the case in this class of crime! Who ever heard of a libertine or *viveur* caring enough about a girl to kill her?

And now it is ten minutes to two, and the jury return. They have only been out ten minutes; so short an absence in a murder trial is always fatal to the prisoner. The foreman trembles slightly as he says 'Guilty;' Trumbell is white; his face seems to grow for the moment smaller, so undying is hope, and his fingers drum the dock ledge. Has he anything to say why the Court should not pronounce sentence of death on him, according to law? He makes a short speech, beginning hoarsely, as though his voice were worn with shouting in a gale, but growing gradually clearer and sharper. He comments on some of the evidence as false, acknowledges he took the girl's life, says the jury have done their duty, announces his determination to die 'like an English hero.' He speaks of his execution as 'a simple little affair,' to be gone through without flinching, for fear the girl should laugh at him when they meet again. Only this request: he is a great smoker; will his honour give an order that he may have as many cigars and cigarettes as possible before the end? That is all. He doesn't think he has anything more to say.

A hush, a simultaneous waving of the heads at the back of the court as they turn from Trumbell to the judge, a craning of shoulders and hats from the young girls in the gallery; sentence of death is pronounced, solemnly, feelingly, while the heavy cathedral bell tolls two. Trumbell bows slightly and goes below, out of our sight for ever, with a sweep round the back of the court to see if he may meet there a friendly pair of eyes that still mean for him 'Harry.'

It is just three weeks since he killed her; in three weeks more he will have paid the penalty. I shall read a few lines in a London paper—the names probably misspelt, the facts misstated—to say that he died with fortitude, thanking the warders for their kindness. I scarcely dare to think that he and Harriett will meet again. He believes it; is buoyed up only by the hope; rushes to meet his death; counts the days, I dare say, as a boy does to the holidays. Adieu, bold seaman! This at any rate I know: thou hast deserved a better fate.

Derby, December 1*st.*—*Une affaire ténébreuse* from a lodging-house kitchen; personages before the court: the rag-and-bone picker and his missus, and the survivor of the other couple—a woman in a crape bonnet, with a gashed mouth and an india-rubber nose, and a rutted face, in which almost the wheels of her dead master's grinding-machine might run.

There's a certain class in the country who describe themselves as widows, as in London police-courts there is a class reported as actresses and dressmakers. They wear old straw hats and bonnets decked with black feathers and crape, for they are always in mourning; either a knitted shawl or a brown-yellow jacket with huge plated buttons covers their bulging figures; and for the last fifteen years, or fifteen months, they have been faithful to the fortunes of the deceased (sometimes receiving ha'pence, though more often kicks), or are still the illegal portion of the man in the dock. And they are always widows, *dum viduitate incastâ.*

All that roistering afternoon when the affair happened, the rag-and-bone picker's missus had been fetching cans of beer from the 'Star.' When pence gave in, she parted with her apron and her skirts, and with the proceeds fetched more cans, till the rag-and-bone picker had dropped from the hilarious to the 'nasty' stage of drink. Then follows the quarrel; all on the rag-and-bone picker's side, being the bigger man of the two and the scissors-grinder drowsy, leaning his head on his hand on the kitchen table. It appears that early in the afternoon there had been accusations of charity from the scissors-grinder's missus; how that many a time she and her master had filled the bellies of the rag-and-bone picker and his trull—bitter drink for so proud a pair of stomachs to sip at. On consideration, can't bear it, can't the rag-and-bone picker; so he rouses himself, pot-cowardly, and strikes the drowsy scissors-grinder a couple of heavy blows on the side of the head, whereof he sinks on to the kitchen floor and dies *instanter*. The missus comes running in from the yard, 'You villain, you've killed him!' 'Ah'll serve you the same,' bellows the rag-and-bone man, and strikes her across the face. Decent woman keeping the lodging-house, rather deaf, with a pretty, clean, rather deafer daughter, runs in and sends for the police and the doctor. Poor scissors-grinder quite dead, and his unhappy missus cast on the world again at fifty-six to find another master who shall sometimes be good to her and sometimes cut her head open. The end of it is twelve months for the *chiffonnier*, who pleads his sixty-nine years and previous quarrelling and provocation. 'Thank you, my lord,' he says, and salutes like the rusty, disreputable old soldier he is.

Follows him a painter, aged 32; been married eleven years, and now tries to cut his wife's throat—little light-haired woman with a large nose, of the type esteemed a beauty in the portraiture of the Middle Ages. Of course, now she's got George safe in the dock, in the witness-box she weeps and tries to defend him. 'I gave him great provocation, my lord,' she whimpers. But since the great wheels of justice have been set grinding, her little, feeble cog can do nothing. Stolid policeman holds up collar and bodice she was wearing, slashed and stained with blood, as though he were offering it for sale; bright little daughter, in clear infant voice, says that father, after struggling with mother and grasping the knot of hair at the top of her head, proceeded to throw her down and kick her as she lay on the ground.

Audi alteram partem. One Duggett, it appears, is the *teterrima causa*; a squat buck with a heavy, oil-charged fringe of the East End type, a sullen eye, and a 'Family Herald' moustache. However ready he may be in love, Duggett is not particularly dauntless in war, for on the outraged husband calling him a scamp—even a damn'd scamp—Duggett tremulously entreats Mister French to hear reason, and on being saluted for answer with a boulder in the ribs (monstrous stone suddenly produced from outraged husband's coat-tail pocket) he bolts into the next room and closes the door, palpitating with an actuality of terror, 'to be out of the bother.' Nor does he, apparently, ever come out of that room again until he comes into court to give evidence against the husband, which he does in a lurching, sidelong fashion that impresses us but middling with his chivalrous qualities. His Monsieur Alphonse-like air has the effect of securing for the painter a lighter sentence than he would otherwise have got. Let us hope that when he comes out and resumes his labours he will not dip his brush in quite such vivid colours.

Nottingham, December 7th.—It appears it is not always 'light come, light go.' Here's a little bit of a woman, described in the calendar as a housekeeper, who whispers 'Guilty' to us from under the shade of her broad hat, in answer to the charges of burglary and forgery. She has robbed the house of a Board School mistress away on her holiday; stolen, among other things, her post-office savings-book; forged a withdrawal order, and with the money opened a small and highly respectable shop. Whether from that humble and irregular beginning she might have risen to Co-operative Stores and affluence I am unable to predict, as on the schoolmistress's return she was with very little trouble detected and arrested. Yes, if you please, she wishes to plead guilty to everything. She drops her face so that we can only see the crown of her hat, and duly receives sentence of eighteen months with hard labour. Now, if she had not been caught, and had prospered in business, it is quite likely that one day the schoolmistress might have mysteriously had her losses made good to her; for it does not at all follow that because a person is a thief she may not have a remarkable business capacity. One knows many instances to the contrary in the city of London. Indeed, I dare say that the half-crown out of which many fortunes have been built was no more honestly come by than the stock in the little housekeeper's shop.

En l'amour, il n'y a que les commencements qui sont charmants, says the Prince de Ligne. So Joe found it, who has been trying to cut Bina's throat, and then went 'sagging,' as one of the witnesses expressed it, at his own. Joe is a nice-looking, clear-faced young man of twenty, and Bina is a pretty little girl of seventeen. They were both employed in the same taphouse, and had been engaged since February, but Bina had cause to be dissatisfied with Joe, and since October they had been nothing to each other, as the phrase goes—rather awkward, as they were working on the same premises and met each other a dozen times a day. Not like Edwin and Angelina of South Kensington, who can easily find that gaunt and stucco region broad enough to lie *perdus* in, if after the parting they no longer desire to catch sight of each other. It all so works on Joe that he spends 5*s*. 6*d*. on a razor, and announces to the youth who shares his couch that he means to give Bina one. The opportunity arrives when Bina, coming down early one morning, finds the back door closed, and remarks, with petulance, that one of them might have opened it for her. Thereupon Joe expresses the unmanly desire to kick her, so far has he wandered from the delicate attentions of May and June. Bina says she will tell the master, as she fills her pail at the pump; Joe follows, and puts his arms round her; Bina says, leave off or she'll throw water over him; at which Joe is so transported that he gets his razor and makes the attempt on Bina's throat aforesaid, and, on Bina screaming and falling, is observed by the witness to cross the yard 'sagging' at his own, and tumbles headlong and senseless in the passage. As they carry him in a cab to the hospital he recovers to say, 'Tell Bina I love her,' and adds, on hearing she is not much injured, that this will be a lesson to him all his life.

Now indeed is a gulf fixed between them, as Bina stands in the witness-box with a thin red line up towards her mouth where the razor cut her, and gives clear and gentle evidence against Joe, whose throat is enveloped in a stock, like one of Napoleon's marshals. Of such are lovers' quarrels in taphouses. When Edwin and Angelina tiff, the young lady weeps and the young gentleman is scornful and defiant; there is a return of letters and presents, but no blows are given, except to pride and vanity and injured love. Not so the Joes and Binas of the provincial *faubourg*; shrewd blows often pass between them, and Bina goes about with a bruised cheek and tells her mother 'Look what the brute's done to me.' And Joe's face sometimes shows signs of fairy fingers having passed that way. Our own particular Joe gets eighteen months, while Bina gives a little cough and rejoins her parents in the chilly waiting-room.

Warwick, December 11*th.*—The young clerk in the plum-coloured overcoat with the low-cut heart-shaped velvet collar recalls the portrait of Alfieri, in his rough, strong features and his shock of vermilion hair. To the charges of forgery and embezzlement he pleads dramatically, 'I am guilty,' in much the same tones and attitude as Alfieri might have pleaded to the charge of paying too exclusive an attention to the Countess of Albany. Love of finery, I take it, has been the young man's ruin; a desire to cut a plum-coloured dash before the young lady he was engaged to marry has led to his diverting his master the ironmonger's cheques to an account of his own at the bank that his salary scarcely warranted opening. He is not yet one-and-twenty, and of excellent character; faultless school certificates and a silver-gilt good-conduct medal are handed up in proof of what he once was. A Congregationalist minister, moved by that potent *amor theologicus* that thrills the sectary, announces all he has done and means to do for him if only his lordship can see his way to do what is plainly impossible, even for a hitherto blameless member of his congregation.

Misery of miseries, this class of case! Conceive the unhappy father and mother, of the highest respectability, the supremest confidence in the future of a son who has started so well—conceive, if you can, what a blow of this kind means to them. They get the boy a good place; they have every reason to believe he is doing well and giving every satisfaction; they hear with pleasure of his engagement to a girl who is all she should be; it is giving a veritable hostage to fortune, if any such were needed, for his still steadier work and future advancement; and the next they learn of the fair edifice is its ruin. Dust and shrieks and then a horrible silence.

He gets eight months, and will, I suppose, on his release go to the Colonies, that universal refuse-heap of ours. We tip everything out there, over the edge, that we don't want at home; much as the country-house squire generously presents the local museum with blocks of spar and bad pictures that have long been family eyesores and incumbrances.

I confess to a sneaking fondness for a thorough-paced rogue, especially if he fights hard for his liberty; and I watch the encounter with all the more amusement when I know, as in this case, how bad the fellow's record is. Part of his little game is to wear a workman's apron in the dock, as though he were an honest son of toil just called away from his carpenter's bench to answer a ridiculously false charge. He's quite right, for you really never know what will influence a jury in a prisoner's favour; yesterday they recommended a woman to mercy, an obvious thief, simply because she was feeding her baby with maternal solicitude during the hearing. If it had been twins, I imagine they would have let her off altogether. But the evidence against the sham workman of breaking into the church is a little too strong to be outweighed even by the apron, and they very properly convict. The point he is chiefly anxious to make in his defence is that the policeman who caught him after a struggle in the churchyard was indulged in a drink of brandy by a sympathising friend, possibly a churchwarden. He maintains that the other man, the real sacrilegist, would have been caught instead of him, the entirely innocent, if the policeman hadn't accepted refreshment. He returns to the charge again and again with amazing persistence. 'Now, wasn't you struggling with a brandy-bottle instead of with the man who really did the job?' 'No, I were not.' 'Hoh, you wasn't? Come now, you're on your hoath, you know. Now, really, wasn't you struggling?——' and so on *da capo*. It won't do. You're a very impudent rascal, George Barnes; you're convicted on the clearest possible evidence, and you'll go to gaol for twelve months with hard labour. And he goes without a word. You can always tell whether a prisoner is really guilty by the way he takes his sentence. The fizz dies out of him at once; he becomes ditchwater again—and bad ditchwater at that.

I asked the governor of the Nottingham gaol the other day how they made sure they'd got an old hand if he consistently denied his identity, stoutly refused to admit he'd been convicted before. He told me that, failing other *indicia*, the man's demeanour and unconscious familiarity with prison ways were always, sooner or later, spotted by the warders. But they had one case of a man they were quite unable to catch, until one morning he inadvertently folded his blanket in a particular way. So particular, that it was instantly noted by a warder as the fashion only practised and enforced at Warwick, where, sure enough, he had not long before been incarcerated. As La Rochefoucauld observes, 'One can be sharper than the individual, but not than all the individuals.'

BIRD FORAGING.

THE chief object in a bird's life seems to be the getting of food. I blush to have to say this of the beautiful creatures whose soaring flight, sweet song, brave journeyings, endue their lives with fanciful emotion when we watch them from the artist's or the poet's point of view; but it is, alas, too true, and in an ornithologist's record must be confessed—the birds, for all their aspirations, are subject to the mundane consideration of ways and means. The pressing necessity of knowing where the next meal is to come from is ever upon them. Very few are as provident even as the rooks, who, on rare occasions, do lay by a store of acorns under the leaves in the wood, yet only so seldom as just to prove the rule of the thriftlessness of birds. But though they do not husband any of the wild harvests so bountifully prepared for their needs, the birds are not altogether imprudent. Although the next meal has to be gotten each time the need for it is felt, the birds exercise some prevision and know where, each in its season, the necessary foods may be sought. This in itself is a science involving a detailed knowledge of the flora and fauna of many lands, and of the fly-lines which safely carry winged creatures far over land and sea. How the birds learn it all is a mystery; but so great is the importance of this branch of knowledge and so wide the ramifications which it involves, that it is no wonder little heads can carry little else of thought. Grubs, worms, insects, larvæ, rats, mice, frogs, lizards, fish, seeds, and nuts and berries and tender shoots of leaf and grass—how, when, and where—these are the things the sweet creatures with the silver flute and the wishing wings are thinking of, though they may look as wise as the old barn owls, as sentimental as the nightingales, or as fantastic as the harlequinading tits.

Such thoughts as these it is, when winter battens down the stores with layers of sheet ice, that prompt each unit of the myriad host of Arctic birds that flock southward in the autumn to seek fresh woods and pastures new.

Food provision is the object for which birds periodically change their dwelling-places. The sovereigns, the bishops, the barons of old and mediæval times, when they had exhausted the resources of one estate, moved on to another. This was the reason of the constant journeyings of our ancestors in the days gone by when each district provided for its own needs. The fashion, among birds, still prevails. Hence the great waves of bird life constantly ebbing and flowing high up in the ocean of air; hence the regular migrations so wonderful in the distances and dangers little birds compass in their long flights over thousands of miles; hence the fitful flittings which, on a smaller scale, distinguish even the birds that are classified as stationary species.

There is no food at all left for the birds in the higher arctic regions in winter; plants, fish, insects are killed or buried in the ice and snow; the vast hordes of lemmings, little creatures near akin to the voles that have made such ravages on the sheep-farms of Southern Scotland of late years, leave these high latitudes; there is nothing left even for birds of prey.

In the summer wild luxuriance of forest, field, and fen, shoals of fish in the great rivers and the deep blue sea, swarms of insects flying in dense clouds over fjeld and fjord and steppe, and birds in teeming multitudes—sea birds, river birds, sand birds, hill-loving birds, wood-haunting birds, field birds, birds big and birds little, myriad hosts of birds. In the winter frozen seas, ice-bound rivers, iron hills, snow-clad forests, snowy fields, no fish, no insects, no seeds, no berries, no worms visible even to sharp bird eyes, therefore no birds.

In the countries bordering on the Polar Seas, where the changing seasons bring alternately the two extremes of dearth and plenty, birds are more numerous in the short summer than anywhere else all the world over, and in winter absent altogether. All are migrants there by force of circumstance.

In like manner the birds of temperate climates are affected by the seasonal changes, though in less degree, indirectly through the influence of cold and heat upon their food supplies rather than by effect of cold upon their well-protected bodies. A coat of mail is not to be compared to a coat of feathers for safety so far as a bird's life is concerned. Layer upon layer of down and feathers can withstand almost any amount of water or any degree of cold; in proof of this, see how the delicate tern, after wintering in comparatively mild weather, go back to the ice-floes of the Polar sea and lay their eggs on the bare ice. For two or three weeks the tender breast of the sea-swallow is pressed against a cold block of ice! Again, as another example of the influence of food rather than climate in governing bird actions, take the colony of beccaficos at Worthing. The beccafico is a Mediterranean bird common on the southern shores of Spain and Italy, in the Grecian Islands, Sicily and Malta, and on the northern shores of Africa. Formerly it was quite unknown in the British Isles, but some years ago a large orchard of fig trees was planted near Brighton and the beccaficos have discovered the fact and come over to share the spoil. Doubtless the nightingales told them the story of English figs and showed them the way; be this as it may, the little birds from the warm shores of the Mediterranean bid fair to become established as naturalised British subjects. It is possible that the circumscribed fly-line of the nightingale might be accounted for by the absence of some favourite insects in the lands beyond that western boundary which it so persistently delimits. It is certain that temperature alone cannot account for the fact that nightingales are found on the eastern side of a line drawn through Exeter and York, and continued considerably further north and south, while throughout its entire length the west of this frontier is forbidden ground.

The countries bordering upon the Arctic circle are extreme examples of the influence of food supply upon migration. It is not less interesting to trace it where more partial causes produce less impartial results.

England in winter is a land of plenty compared with the stricken home of bird refugees from the far North. Our inland waters are seldom frozen over, our seas never, and upon their hospitable shores large flocks of sea and water fowl that have journeyed from the Liakofs, Nova Zembla, and Spitzbergen, from dreary wastes beside the Obi, the Petchora, and the Dvina, from all the lone interminable coasts of Scandinavia, Russia, Siberia, find sanctuary—and food. On the shores of islands like Malta, that are composed entirely of hard rock and where the sea-bottom is rocky for some miles also, there is not that teeming insect-life that we find so abundantly on our sea borders; few birds dwell on such shores. All round the British Isles, on the contrary, the formation is very varied, and long stretches of sand, thick layers of mud, deep beds of earth, alternate with rock beaches, where easily disintegrating sandstone, soft gault, and stiff clay crop up among the harder formations. I wonder if the birds know anything of geology. Each plant that bears fruit for them, each grub in the ploughed fields, knows its own particular kinds of earth as well as the tiny creatures on the sea-shores, and refuses to colonise in any others;

a plover might as well look for wire-worms in rich leaf-mould, or a thrush seek for the berries of the wayfaring tree in a Middlesex lane, as a sandpiper hope to find good cheer in the bay where St. Paul's shipmates cast four anchors out of the stern, 'fearing lest they should have fallen upon rocks.' So much at least the birds know, and when they come in lovely flocks to winter on our river estuaries, oozy mud-banks, and golden sands, it is in full expectation of the feast that awaits them. Tiny fish, small molluscs and crustaceæ, sand-eels, mud-worms, shrimps, larvæ, sandboys, all manner of marine insects swarm on our beaches in winter as in summer. Delicate sanderlings, godwits, turnstones, long-legged stilts, plump ringed plovers, waders many, oyster-catchers quaint, ugly hooded crows, gulls and tern and ducks, are not slow to take advantage of the fact. To the seas that wash our shores—waters kept tempered by the gentle office of the Gulf Stream, and by the rule of the road which orders that the currents of warm water from the South shall flow on the surface, while the cold streams from the North Pole must travel deep below—come fleets of true seafarers. These fisheries are open all the year round, and Arctic gulls and skuas, divers, auks, puffins, razorbills, kittiwakes, tern, gannets, cormorants, come over and join our fishing birds.

Inland, too, we have stores of bird food in winter. Very seldom indeed is the ground so hard frozen that the rooks and the thrushes cannot probe it with their long bills and find here a worm and there a grub, and there the larva of some bright butterfly. And there are always the beautiful wild fruits; the harvests of wild orchards that grow free for the birds—English berries, red, white, and blue. The berry-bearing plants of our woods and hedges are most bountiful. Good old-fashioned hedges, where the hips and haws redden high up and the brambles trail over, and sloe and privet and elder grow thick, afford many a feast to the field birds, and foster the bird-life that is so essential to the wellbeing of the farmer's crops. The value of these beautiful old hedges is scarcely appreciated as it should be in these days of high farming. In the first place, they afford protection to the crops from the wind. Have you ever noticed how thick and strong the grass grows in a hayfield to the leeward of a brave hedge? For an acre or more all along the line that is something more than a boundary, the crop is twice as heavy as out in middle of the mead. The unbroken screen of greenery has sheltered it. This is the moral of that tale of a wayfaring man who caught cold by sleeping in a field with the gate open. And in cherishing the birds, hedges do still better service—real hedges, long thickets of flower and leaf, of crimson berry and matted thorn. In the spring the birds nest there—birds that must catch destructive insects by the hundred to provide food for the hedgerow nestlings; in the autumn for the berries the birds come, and gladly stay to eat the insects that are harboured there. Even in winter there are plenty of insects for birds in England. Spiders under the dead leaves and broken boughs, beetles at the foot of the wall where the blackbirds are catching snails and breaking their shells on a big stone, but the berries are spread more lavishly than all else for the birds' winter faring. Vermilion beads on the rowan trees, these are all eaten up first, and sometimes most improvidently early are they finished; then the elder berries and the hips and haws; but plenty still are left for harder times. Coral pink corymbs on the wayfaring tree wherever chalk downs undulate in softly distant waves; ivy and mistletoe berries in the woods, some always left till the early spring; privet and yew; bilberry and whortleberry—on the hills for the game birds; and many more, like the square berries of the skewer tree, little known except to the birds and the gipsies.

Little wonder that the birds from a land of famine come to winter here. Fieldfares, redwings, bramblings, buntings, larks, siskins, finches, starlings, thrushes, blackbirds, robins, wrens, tits, redstarts, pigeons, crows, game birds, come to divide the spoil with our resident species.

But there are some birds that depend almost entirely for their means of subsistence upon the light-winged summer flies that love the sunshine. These the economy of our cold season does not provide for. The tree-creepers and the tits, insectivorous in their propensities, are content to seek food in the crevices of bark up and down the branches of old trees, in the cracks of walls, in and out among the stones and bricks of old buildings, peering, probing, pecking at the creatures that have thought to get safely through the cold weather by hiding. Not so our migrant singers. Many of them, like the swallows, eat only such things as they can catch in their swift flight open-mouthed through the air; these are few and far between in the raw and cold atmosphere of winter here. Swift and swallow, nightingale and cuckoo, warbler, wheatear, whinchat, blackcap, wryneck, flycatcher—all the merry troupe of strolling singers, must follow the sun and the creatures that dance in the sunbeams to lands that are sunny in winter.

The movements of the birds that come and of the birds that go in spring and autumn are prompted by the abundance or the scarcity of certain kinds of food among the varied store our land affords. The nomadic wanderings of our resident birds are also foraging expeditions. Only in the spring and the early summer are any birds able to find the food they require in one particular neighbourhood. Then insect life abounds, and round about the nesting-place enough and to spare is to be found both for the busy parent birds and the insatiable chicks and squabs. But in the autumn and winter there is, strictly speaking, no such thing as a stationary population of birds in any place. Then all turn gipsies, and hither and thither wend their restless way, eluding the famine of a frost here, the dearth of a snowstorm there, or the buffeting of storm winds, by continually moving on.

The first of these wanderings takes place when the cornfields ripen their golden store, and flocks of birds go thither to steal or to glean. Sparrows from the cities, finches from the copses, pigeons from the woods, travel for many miles to spend a season in the harvest-fields, and gather there in hundreds of thousands. Later these travelling companies visit all the low-lying fields, the water meadows and marshy lands, where there is always an abundance of small creatures. As the day lengthens and the cold strengthens these journeys all tend in one direction—to the south, and especially to those southern counties that lie to the westward. All through the winter there are twice as many robins in the southern half of England as in the summer, and in the northern counties but few are to be seen. This anyone may observe in his own garden; twice as many tits and wrens, and blackbirds and thrushes, and chaffinches, too, even without taking count of those that have come from over the seas. These wandering flocks of birds may be seen passing through various districts. One day in the fields a great concourse of thrushes, the next not one to be seen; one week on the hillside numberless larks, and the next they are gone as surely as the migratory wheatears. Often these passing flocks of home birds precede cold weather. The birds are great weather-prophets, and people who are much out of doors—shepherds, sailors, gardeners—know by experience that their flittings presage a change of wind and weather; for the birds do not wait to be overtaken by famine—

they exercise prevision. Often some time before cold weather sets in over the counties farther north, the fields and lanes and the cliffs by the sea in Devonshire and Cornwall are crowded with birds. Such multitudes of rooks and starlings, and thrushes and finches, and all small fowl, go down to the West Country in winter weather. And why? Because there is always an abundance of bird food in the soft and balmy weather that proclaims open house and an open winter there.

No little bird need fold its wings and idly face starvation; no little bird need sit on a tree-top and smile at grief. Some few are found dead from cold and starvation each year, it is true; but among all the hundreds of millions of birds that survive these are only exceptions that prove the rule. Often they are old birds. Perhaps, after long years of restless going to and fro, their wings are weary, and their hearts have failed them at the thought of more travelling, for the life of a bird is a very Odyssey of Wanderings.

AN EPISCOPAL SCANDAL.

It had been an eloquent sermon; the Bishop had been at his best. That was the general feeling. At the informal meeting which was held in the Dean's parlour, the morning after, this feeling was strongly expressed.

'If,' said Mr. Dean, 'words can make men temperate, then surely the words which we were privileged to hear proceeding from the pulpit in our beloved cathedral yesterday afternoon must have carried conviction to many an erring soul.'

So said all of them. Canon Gorse, in particular, felt bound to say that he had heard many temperance sermons in his time, but never one which had impressed him more strongly than the one which the Bishop had delivered yesterday to the clerical and lay workers in the cause of total abstinence. When the Canon made this outspoken declaration, every parson in the room—and every man of them had preached temperance sermons in his time, so they ought to have been good judges—exclaimed, 'Hear, hear!'

Perhaps the enthusiasm was rendered greater by the fact that, until quite lately, the Bishop had scarcely been a stalwart. Always on the side of temperance—oh yes, certainly that—but on the question, the vital question, of total abstinence his views had scarcely been so pronounced as some of his admirers, both clerical and lay, would have wished. Indeed, it was understood that the Bishop himself favoured a good glass of wine at times. In fact, it was reported that he was even esteemed a connoisseur in the matter of certain Spanish wines which are nowadays esteemed old-fashioned. That this should have been so was, in a degree, unfortunate; because how could teetotalism, as a propaganda, assume those dimensions which were in every way desirable in a diocese, the bishop of which, as it was well known, himself looked with a by no means unloving eye on the wine when it is red? When, therefore, it was announced that, if only for example's sake, the Bishop would henceforward shun the spirit which is man's universal curse, it was felt, and rightly felt, that a victory had been won. That victory had, so to speak, been consummated by the Bishop's sermon in the cathedral yesterday, in which he had declared himself a teetotaller, on the side of the teetotallers, and willing, nay, anxious, to stand in their forefront and to lead the van.

'One thing,' observed Canon Gorse, 'seems plain—that is, that we now shall be on safe ground in refusing to renew the lease of "The Rose and Crown." For that, thank Goodness!'

Again the reverend Canon seemed but to give voice to the opinion of all who heard him. This question of 'The Rose and Crown' had been as a thorn in the side of the cathedral chapter. 'The Rose and Crown' was an inn which actually faced the door by means of which the choir and officiating clergy were wont to gain admittance to the sacred edifice. Sad tales were told of it: of how quarts of stout, and suchlike obnoxious fluids, had been sent in from 'The Rose and Crown' to the choirmen while they had actually been engaged in practice, and other dreadful stories. The lease of the inn was running out. The landlord—one George Boulter—desired its renewal. The house, and the ground upon which it stood, were the property of the cathedral chapter. Mr. Boulter had already been privately notified that, in all probability, his lease would not be renewed. It was the desire of the chapter that the house should be transformed into a Church institute. The only factor which might upon this point breed dissension had hitherto been the Bishop. But now, as the Bishop himself had signed the pledge, it seemed plain that, as Canon Gorse had observed, the scandal of a number of clergymen owning a public-house would be put an end to.

The Canon had scarcely uttered his remark when the library door opened, and a servant, entering, advanced to Mr. Dean.

'Mr. Boulter, sir, says he wishes to see you most particular.'

'Mr. Boulter!' exclaimed the Dean. The man himself, the landlord of 'The Rose and Crown.' The Dean reflected. He rubbed his nose with his glasses. 'What is it that Mr. Boulter can wish to say to me? However, I will see him. Tell him so.' The servant vanished. The Dean turned to the assembled clergymen. 'It is, perhaps, just as well that I should see the man at once, and let him know clearly what our position is.'

'Exactly,' said Canon Gorse. 'Let him understand that plainly. It will not only be fair to ourselves, but it will also be fair to the man.'

Mr. Boulter was a portly person: his countenance was ruddy; in manner he was affable. He was, all over, Mine Host of the Inn; a type of Boniface which, if we may believe the chroniclers, used to abound, but which, under the present advance of the teetotal forces, is, we will say fortunately, becoming extinct. He reverenced a gentleman, but above all things he reverenced the cloth. His motto as a boy had been 'Church and Crown;' but in these latter days he had begun to fear that both Church and Crown were on the side of the enemy.

'Mr. Boulter,' observed the Dean, as he entered the room in which that gentleman was waiting, 'I am pressed for time. Indeed, I have a meeting in the library. I must therefore ask you to tell me in as few words as possible what it is you wish to say.'

Mr. Boulter turned the brim of his hat round and round in his hands.

'It is about the lease, Mr. Dean.'

'I thought so. I may as well be brief with you, and clear. You may take my word for it that the lease will not be renewed, and that, in short, "The Rose and Crown" will cease to be an inn.'

'I think not, Mr. Dean.'

'You think not, Mr. Boulter! May I ask what you mean?'

There was something in the tone in which Mr. Boulter said that he thought not which the Dean did not understand. He stared at Mr. Boulter with dignified surprise. Mr. Boulter actually smiled.

'I think that "The Rose and Crown" will continue to be an inn. That is what I meant, Mr. Dean.'

The Dean shrugged his shoulders.

'If you choose to persist in thinking so, in spite of my assurance to the contrary, that is your affair, not mine.'

The Dean turned to go, as if the interview were already at an end. Mr. Boulter coughed behind his hand.

'I should like to have one word with you before you go.' The Dean faced round. 'Then am I to tell my tale?'

'Your tale? What tale?'

'About the Bishop, Mr. Dean.'

'About the Bishop?' The Dean looked the innkeeper up and down. A vague suspicion crossed his mind. Already, at this hour of the morning, could the man be drunk? There was nothing in the fellow's bearing to denote anything of the kind. And, indeed, it was matter of common notoriety that, personally, the landlord of 'The Rose and Crown' was an abstemious man. But, none the less, there was at that particular moment something about Mr.

Boulter's manner which the Dean was at a loss to understand. 'What do you mean by your tale about the Bishop, sir?'

For a moment or two Mr. Boulter continued to turn his hat round and round in his hands, as if he found some difficulty in choosing the exact words in which to frame what he wished to say.

'I understand,' he began at last, 'that yesterday the Bishop preached a sermon upon temperance.'

'You understand quite rightly. It would have done you good, Mr. Boulter, to have heard that sermon. Had you done so, you would understand how strong would be the Bishop's opposition to any renewal of the lease of "The Rose and Crown."'

'Indeed!' Mr. Boulter's tone was dry. 'I am not so sure of that.'

The Dean stared. The man's manner was so very odd.

'Be so good, Mr. Boulter, as to say plainly what it is you mean.'

'I don't know what you think, sir, of a bishop who comes straight from preaching a sermon on temperance into my public-house.'

'Mr. Boulter!'

'It's no good your looking at me like that, sir. I was surprised, I don't mind owning it. But just let me tell my tale.'

The Dean let him tell his tale.

'Yesterday afternoon I was standing at my private door, looking out into the street. It was getting dusk. The service in the cathedral was over, and I thought that every one had gone. All of a sudden I saw the little door open which we call the Dean's door, and which you know is right in front of my house. Some one came out and walked quickly across the street towards my place. I drew back and went inside. When I got inside the bar I saw that there was some one in a little compartment which only holds about two comfortably, and which I call a private wine-bar. I heard him ask Miss Parkins, one of my young ladies, if we had such a thing as a glass of good sound port.'

The Dean shuddered—he scarcely knew why. The fact is that port was the liquid of which the Bishop, in his less stalwart days, had been esteemed such an excellent judge.

'The compartment in which he was is meant for parties who wish to keep themselves quite private. It's boarded up on either side, and in front of it, facing the bar, is a panel of glazed glass set in a mahogany frame, with just enough room between it and the counter to pass, say, a glass of wine. If the party inside wants to keep himself to himself, it's next to impossible to see his face unless you go round by the door in the front. I couldn't see this party's face, but I could see enough of him to see he was a parson. He was short and stout'—the Bishop was short and stout—'and though he had the collar of his coat turned up, it wasn't turned up enough to hide the collar of his shirt. Seeing that I had seen him come out of the Dean's own door in the cathedral, and that he was a parson, things seemed a little queer. So I asked Miss Parkins, on the quiet, if she knew who it was. I could see she couldn't altogether make it out. She said, although she hadn't seen his face, she seemed to know his voice. Well, he liked my port. I heard him say so; and I heard him tell Miss Parkins that he was considered as good a judge of port wine as any man in England.' Again the Dean was conscious of a shiver. 'Anyhow, he drank a bottle of it before he went.'

'A bottle, Mr. Boulter?'

'Yes, sir, a bottle, and one glass over. Directly he had gone my potman went into the private wine-bar for something or other, and as soon as he got inside he called out, "Hallo! the gentleman's left his bag behind." And he handed a little leather bag across the bar. Any gentleman who had put away a bottle of port wine in the time that gentleman had done might forget a trifle of a bag like that. It was a beautiful little bag. I had never seen one quite like it before. It had got some initials and a crest stamped on one side. I opened it to see if there was anything inside by means of which I could identify it, and return it to the owner. There was something inside—a sermon. I never saw anything more beautifully written than that sermon—it was like copperplate.' Once more the Dean was conscious of a shudder travelling down his spine. The Bishop's beautiful caligraphy was famous—a fair handwriting is nowadays too rare. 'On the front page was written the Bishop's name and address in full, and in the top left-hand corner was written: "Preached in the cathedral on the afternoon of the 13th of November, 189–." That's yesterday afternoon, sir. I've brought that bag with me. You'll find the sermon still inside. Perhaps you know whose bag that is, sir.'

Mr. Boulter picked up a small leather bag which had been lying, hitherto unnoticed, upon a chair, and handed it to the astonished Dean. The Dean *did* know whose bag it was—he knew too well. There was no mistaking those initials and that crest. There was no necessity to examine the sermon which Mr. Boulter assured him was inside. The Dean gazed at that excellent example of fine workmanship in leather bags as if he realised that he had all at once become an actor in what might turn out to be a tragedy. Words proceeded from his stammering lips.

'You are, I am sure, too reasonable a man, Mr. Boulter, to jump to impossible conclusions from imperfect premisses.'

'I don't know what you call "imperfect premisses." Directly I saw the name and address which was written on the front page of that sermon, Miss Parkins cried out, "Why, it was the Bishop's voice!" She stared at me as if she was going to have a fit—and well she might. Miss Parkins is a good girl, as all my young ladies are, and, indeed, everybody else about my place, although I say it.' Mr. Boulter glared at the Dean with eyes which were full of meaning. 'She never misses a chance of hearing the Bishop preach when she can get one, and if there's any one who ought to know the Bishop's voice it's her. It seems to me, begging your pardon, sir, that I ought to have a reward for bringing that leather bag back safe and sound.'

'Certainly, Mr. Boulter. Any sum in reason you like to mention.'

'The reward I want is the renewal of my lease.'

'That, as I have already told you, is——'

'Excuse me just one moment, sir. You see that?' Taking an envelope out of an inner pocket of his coat, Mr. Boulter flourished it in the Dean's face. 'I've a boy who lives in London, and writes for the papers; a smart chap he is, and well respected in his trade. I've written an account of how the Bishop preached a sermon on temperance in the cathedral—a fine sermon it was, I'm told by those who heard it—and of how he then walked straight out of the cathedral into my public-house, and put away a bottle of old port, and got so drunk that he forgot his bag and left it behind him, with the sermon which he had just been preaching on temperance inside of it. That account 's in this envelope. I'm going to send it to my boy, and I'm going to tell him to turn it into money; and I'll lay you what odds you please—although I'm no more a betting man than you are—that, before a week is over, the tale will be told in every paper in England, ah! and known all the world over. You're going to take away my living. My grandfather kept "The Rose and Crown" decent, my father kept it decent, and I've kept it decent; there's never been even so much as a shadow of a complaint made against me by the police, nor by no one. And yet you cathedral gentlemen have taken a sudden fad into your heads, and you're going to ruin me. Very well, ruin me! You think you're going to do good to the cause of temperance by shutting up "The Rose and Crown." What harm do you suppose will be done to the cause of temperance by that tale being told, as they do tell that sort of tale nowadays, in all the newspapers of the world? I guess the cause of temperance will not get over that tale for years—it will be always being told. At the very least, if I do have to go I will take care that somebody else goes with me. Now which is it to be—am I to have my lease renewed, or am I to post this envelope?'

The Dean hesitated.

'In any case, as you must be aware, Mr. Boulter, the matter is not one which can be decided on the spur of the moment; the decision is not with me.'

'Understand me, sir. If I go away from here without a promise of renewal, I post this letter. I know as well as you know that in the whole business your voice will be the ruling voice. You give me a bit of writing in which you undertake to do your best to get my lease renewed, and I will give you this envelope, with what's inside. And I will give you my promise never to breathe a word that the Bishop ever so much as came near my place. As for Miss Parkins, I know she won't speak unless she's forced. She's a religious girl; she thinks a lot of the Bishop, and she's too much shocked at the whole affair. I never saw a girl so upset. Now which is it to be?'

The Dean still hesitated—with sufficient cause.

'What term of renewal would you require?'

'The last lease was for ninety-nine years, and I want this lease to be for ninety-nine.'

'Ninety-nine years, Mr. Boulter?'

Mr. Boulter did not get a promise of renewal for ninety-nine years, or anything like it, but he did get 'a bit of writing.' With that 'bit of writing' in a secure division of his plethoric pocket-book he went away. The Dean was left to his reflections. The leather bag he held in one hand, the envelope which the landlord of 'The Rose and Crown' had given him he held in the other. Putting down the bag, he tore the envelope into halves, then into quarters, and crossing the room he dropped the fragments in the fire which burned brightly in the grate.

'Terrible! terrible!' This he said as he watched the pieces of paper being consumed by the flames. Then he seemed to endeavour to pull himself together. 'Well, I shall have to tell them. I must give reasons for the thing which I have done. The tale will have to travel so far, but'—the Dean pressed his lips together; few men's countenances were capable of assuming a severer aspect than Dean Pettifer's—'I will make it my especial business to see that it goes no farther.' He still seemed to hesitate before returning to the apartment in which his colleagues were awaiting him. 'I must say that I never thought it of him. I have been always conscious that in his latitudinarianism there was a certain element of danger. But I never dreamed that he was capable of such a thing as this—no, never!'

It was with a distinctly unsatisfactory look upon his face that he made his reappearance in the little impromptu meeting. The criminatory leather bag he carried in his left hand. It is not impossible that those who were present became immediately conscious that with the Dean, since they had seen him last, all things had not gone well. The buzz of conversation, which had been audible as he opened the door, ceased upon his entrance, as though something in his bearing acted as a damper.

The somewhat awkward silence was broken by Canon Gorse.

'Well, was Boulter troublesome?'

The Dean laid the bag in front of him upon the table.

'He was.' The Dean carefully wiped his glasses. There was a suggestion of curious expectation in the eyes which were fixed upon him. Their owners already perceived that there was something in the air. Was it possible that the landlord of 'The Rose and Crown' had behaved in the manner which, in the estimation of some persons, is a natural characteristic of individuals of his class, and had been guilty of actual violence in the sacred precincts of the Deanery? 'He was troublesome in a sense for which, on this occasion, I will simply say that I was unprepared; and to such a degree that I have given him what amounts to a virtual undertaking that his lease shall be renewed.'

This was evidently not the sort of thing for which his listeners had been waiting—one could see it by their faces. Some of them changed colour, and some of their jaws dropped open. Canon Gorse stared at the speaker, as if he found it difficult to believe that his own ears were capable of fulfilling their normal functions.

'Pettifer, impossible!' Perceiving that the word might seem too strong, he amended it. 'That is to say, how do you mean?'

The Dean leaned over the table. His attitude, indeed his whole manner, suggested severity tempered by sorrow.

'Before I say anything further I wish to have an understanding with all of you that not one word of what I am about to utter will be breathed by any one of you to any creature living—and by that I mean neither to your wives, nor to your daughters, nor to any member of your households—that it will be received as though it came to you under the seal of the confessional.' There was silence. 'If any one feels himself, for any cause whatever, unable to give such a pledge, then I must respectfully ask that person at once to withdraw.'

No one did withdraw. No one said either Aye or Nay. So it may be supposed that the pledge which the Dean required was unanimously given. That the Dean understood that to be the case was evident. He held up the little leather bag in front of him as if it were some dreadful thing.

'This bag is the Bishop's—our beloved Bishop's bag. I know it, of my own knowledge, to be the bag which he had with him in the cathedral yesterday afternoon. It still contains the MS. of the sermon which the Bishop preached, and which we all rejoiced to hear. This bag has just been brought to me by the landlord of "The Rose and Crown." It was left, unintentionally left, on his premises by a person who, at the close of yesterday afternoon's service, went out of the Dean's door of the cathedral into one of Mr. Boulter's private bars, and there and then consumed a bottle of port wine.'

The Dean ceased. There again was silence—there well might be. The Dean again went on:

'A son of Mr. Boulter's is engaged on one of those scurrilous journals which are called society papers. Mr. Boulter proposed to send this story up to his son to print. On the understanding that the matter shall be confined to his own breast, I have deemed it wisdom to give him, as I have said, what virtually amounts to an undertaking that his lease shall be renewed. That is all I have to say. You will feel with me that it is too much. May I ask you not to speak of this matter even among yourselves, but, as I shall do, to do your best to blot it from your minds? Let us, if we can, forget that this thing has ever been. And now, with your permission, I will wish you all good-day.'

They went like a flock of sheep, although there was almost a suspicion of pathos in the manner of their parting. When they were gone the Dean set himself to perform a task of the exceeding delicacy of which, to say the least, he was fully conscious. He was not a man to palter with what he deemed his duty. He was certainly not a man to shrink from doing a thing merely because the thing was disagreeable. Therefore, scarcely had the last of his colleagues turned his back on the Deanery when he put the little leather bag into a larger bag, and, with that larger bag grasped firmly in his hand, he strode off to the Palace.

He was going to make it his business to see that, without any further unnecessary loss of time, the Bishop came into what was, undoubtedly, his own again.

He found his lordship in the library. The Bishop was dictating to his secretary, the Rev. John Budgen. The secretary was seated at a table; the Bishop took his ease in a capacious armchair. As the Dean entered, his lordship greeted him with that genial heartiness for which the Bishop of Boundersville is famed. Not a trace of guilty consciousness about him anywhere—not a trace! It was with a sort of shock that the Dean noticed that there was nothing of the kind.

'How do, Pettifer? I'm doing what I call my morning task of stone-breaking—writing letters, by proxy, to a lot of people who have more time on their hands than they know what to do with, and who, therefore, insist upon wasting mine. Anything particular to say to me?'

The Dean was, perhaps, too refined—the thing is possible. He was not only a fine scholar, he was a fine gentleman. He was of opinion that dignitaries, and particularly all dignitaries of the Church, should have the standard of manners which was peculiarly his own. The Bishop's heartiness, his rough-and-ready methods of expression, had always grated on his high-strung sensibilities; especially did they grate just then.

'I am bound to state, my lord, that what I have to say to you is of the first importance.'

The Bishop looked at him a little quizzically. Possibly the Dean's exaggerated preciseness appealed to a sense which there is no reason why even a bishop should be without.

'Excuse me, Budgen; I'll ring when I'm ready.' The secretary withdrew. 'Now, Pettifer, fire away. Who killed the cat, and which cat 's been killed?'

Such a fashion of speech was actually offensive to the Dean. Perhaps the spirit of mischief still lingered in the Bishop's breast; perhaps, at times, the Bishop found the Dean almost as trying as the Dean found him. Under the circumstances such a bearing on the part of the Bishop shocked the Dean almost into speechlessness. He gazed at his spiritual superior in a manner which, unless he was mistaken, made his lordship wince. 'Has your lordship not missed your lordship's sermon-bag?'

At the question his lordship plainly started.

'My sermon-bag, Pettifer? What do you mean?'

'My lord, I mean what I say.'

The Bishop was perturbed. Rising from his chair, he began to fidget about the room. 'Why do you ask?'

'Because it has been returned to me.'

'Returned to you—no!'

'Yes, my lord; I have it here.' The Dean produced the little bag from inside the larger one. He held it up in front of him as he had held it up in front of him at the impromptu meeting at the Deanery. 'I will not ask how it came to stray from your lordship's keeping.'

The Bishop looked at the Dean; the Dean looked straight at him. It was evident that his lordship was not completely at his ease.

'I perceive that you have heard the story.'

'I regret, my lord, to say that I have.'

The Bishop plainly flushed; perhaps he found the Dean's tone and manner slightly galling.

'Perhaps it was not quite the thing to do, but'—his lordship shrugged his shoulders—'what does it matter?'

The Dean, in his turn, winced.

'What does it matter, my lord? Surely your lordship knows that it matters.'

'How did the bag come into your possession, Pettifer?'

'It was brought to me by Mr. Boulter, the landlord of "The Rose and Crown."'

'Boulter!—"The Rose and Crown!"—No, by George!'

His lordship said, 'By George!' and as he said it the Dean shrunk back as if he had received a blow.

'Mr. Boulter, as the price of his silence, extracted from me a promise that his lease should be renewed.'

The Bishop woke up. He showed more alertness than he had hitherto displayed.

'You promised him that his lease should be renewed--the lease of "The Rose and Crown"?'

'I did. I thought it better that I should do so than that such a story should be told.'

'Story? What story?'

The Dean, before he answered, indulged himself with a pause for consideration.

'My lord, if any word which I may utter seems lacking in respect, as coming from me to you, I entreat your pardon. My lord, when I heard that, after preaching a sermon, and so grand a sermon, upon total abstinence, you passed straight from the cathedral pulpit to the bar of a common public-house, and there drank so large a quantity of wine that, in the temporary forgetfulness which it occasioned, you left the sermon itself behind you in the bar, I felt that it were better that I should promise almost anything than that such a story should be told.'

As he listened the Bishop's countenance underwent a variety of changes. When the Dean had finished the Bishop dropped into a chair, and—laughed. Not a genteel simper, but a loud and a long guffaw. The Dean felt that he could not endure such levity even from a bishop—his own bishop, too.

'My lord, in such a matter you may see occasion for merriment, but if you could have seen, at the Deanery, the faces of the cathedral clergy as I told to them this story——'

'Pettifer, what do you mean?'

Springing to his feet, the Bishop grasped the speaker by the arm. The Dean was startled.

'I say, if you could only have seen their faces——'

'Do you mean to say that you have told this story to anyone?'

'I was constrained to state my reasons for giving such a promise to the landlord of "The Rose and Crown."'

'I hardly know if I ought not to strike you, Arthur Pettifer.'

'My lord!'

'I hardly know if I ought not to pillory you in the market-place, and so compel you to do penance for your slanderous tongue. I have long been conscious of a certain pharisaical narrowness in your mental and in your moral outlook. I have seen in you what has seemed to me a hideous tendency to think the worst both of women and of men. But I never thought you capable of such gross obliquity of judgment as you yourself appear now to own to. Is it possible that you believed that such a story as you have told me could be true?'

The Dean had turned quite pale. He seemed to speak beneath his breath.

'Is it possible that Boulter lied?'

'Is it possible, Arthur Pettifer, that you could believe that I—I, Ralph Ingall, with whose life's history you are as well acquainted almost as myself—could so perjure myself that, as God's minister, in God's house, I could pledge myself never again to let alcohol pass my lips in any shape or form, and that then, with that pledge still warm upon my lips, I could pass straight into a pot-house, and stupefy myself with wine?'

'Was it—was it Budgen, then?'

'Budgen? Budgen? Pettifer, this is worse and worse! You know that Budgen has never touched a drop of alcoholic stimulant since the day that he was born. I will tell you the story of that bag so far as I know it myself. And I will see that your promise to the man Boulter is kept both in the spirit and the letter. I will place it upon you, as an enduring penance, that for the continued existence of his drink-shop you, and you alone, shall be responsible.'

The Dean was silent. He seemed to totter as a man who received a crushing blow. The Bishop paced up and down the room. Like an accusing spirit—possessed of a tolerable corporation—he poured out upon the Dean a curious, correct, and circumstantial history of the adventures of his sermon-bag.

'There was a man at my college whose name I need not mention. We were ordained together. I will put it gently, and will say that he did not take full advantage of his opportunities. I believe that, for some time now, he has ceased to exercise his clerical office. He has become a reporter for the "——"'—the Bishop named a paper which all good Churchmen are supposed to read—'and he came to me yesterday afternoon, into the vestry, after I had done my sermon. Possibly you may have seen him there. He told me that he had come down from town specially to report my sermon. According to him the train had been late, and he only arrived in time to hear a part. He asked me if I would let him see my notes. On the spur of the moment I handed him my bag, with the sermon in it. I told him that he might make, what he expressed a desire to make, a verbatim copy, and that he was then to return to me my property. I felt immediately afterwards that I had, perhaps, not done the wisest possible thing. But it was then too late. After the story you have told me, what he did with bag and sermon I can guess.'

While the Bishop was still speaking a servant appeared at the door.

'My lord, a person—I believe a clergyman—desires me to inform your lordship that he wishes to see you at once upon very pressing business.'

'Yes, my lord; that is so.'

The scandalised servant turned to find that the person alluded to had, uninvited, found his way into the Bishop's presence. The Bishop recognised his visitor; he signified the same to the servant who had *not* shown him in.

The visitor in question was an individual of somewhat doubtful appearance. He looked half cleric, half layman. He was short and stout, and so far resembled the Bishop, but the resemblance went no farther. The Bishop, taking possession of the little leather bag which the Dean still retained, held it out to the newcomer.

'Well, sir, have you come to make another copy of my sermon? As you perceive, it has been returned to me, but not by you.'

The stranger wiped his brow. He seemed more than a trifle embarrassed.

'I regret to say that I have not yet taken a copy of it, my lord. The fact is, my lord, that, as I told you yesterday, I left town without having lunched, and after leaving your lordship in the cathedral I felt so exhausted that I just stepped across the road to take a glass of wine——'

'Quite so, sir. I understand too well. Since my sermon upon temperance has once been returned by the landlord of a tavern, I do not think that I care to run the risk of its reaching me by means of a similar channel a second time. So far as you are concerned, sir, my sermon must go unreported.' The Bishop rang the bell. The servant reappeared. 'Dawes, show this gentleman out.'

The gentleman was shown out, though it seemed, from his manner, that there still was something which he would have wished to say.

When he had gone the Bishop placed the little leather bag upon a table. He turned to the Dean. He looked at him, and he said, more in sorrow than in anger:

'Pettifer, how long does it take you to know a man?'

A MALAGASY FOREST.

A GREAT part of the country between the interior of Madagascar and the low-lying land of the east coast is covered by a dense and continuous forest, with innumerable detached outliers of woods and thickets, great and small, which doubtless once were joined to their big neighbour. This mighty primeval forest forms one of the principal features in the physical character of the island. It stretches probably for a distance of 800 miles in a northerly and southerly direction, and in an easterly and westerly averages about thirty, its greatest width, which is in the north-east of the island, being perhaps sixty or seventy. There is thus an area of about 24,000 square miles of forest-clad country. The interest of this forest, however, consists not in its dimensions but in its occupants. So numerous and curious are its forms of animal life, so rich and varied its vegetable productions, that no lover of nature could fail to be inspired with a desire to dive into and explore its mysterious depths. It is not pretended, of course, that this forest can rival in extent or grandeur some of the primeval forests of the world, such as that, for instance, on the banks of the Amazon; but, for strange and anomalous forms of organic life, it stands second to none.

If the day be fine, what can be more delightful than a day's ramble in the forest? No matter what your taste may be, scientific or artistic, you will find an inexhaustible supply of material for study and reflection. But if the day be wet, nothing can be more wretched. The trudging through the mire, the pushing through the wet bestraggling bushes, the ceaseless drip, drip, drip of the myriad leaves, and the trickling of the little water runnels up your arms and down your neck, all conspire to damp both body and spirit. That man must be a veritable enthusiast who can ramble in the forest in wet weather and call it pleasant.

The endless ascents and descents of the forest-clad country seriously detract from the pleasure of the pedestrian, for no sooner is one hill surmounted than he is brought to the foot of a second, which only lands him at the base of a third, to be succeeded by a fourth, making him perpetually hope that the next may be the last. But the true lover of nature almost loses his sense of fatigue in the excitement and pleasure afforded by the infinitely varied and beautiful forms of vegetable and animal life that are around him. The tall trees of innumerable species, in fierce competition with their neighbours, rearing their great bodies heavenwards that they may spread out their foliage and open their blossoms in the light above, the fantastic foldings and twistings of the snake-like lianas, the countless shapes and tints of the leaves, the bright colours of some brilliant beetle, the delicately traced wing-design of some happy butterfly, the merry chirping of a gaudily adorned bird, the hurried steps of the busy little ants, the languid movements of a chameleon with its strange skin and stranger eyes, the patient watching for prey of a red three-cornered spider, the tiny mosses and delicate ferns nestling snugly among their big brothers under the rocks, all these and a thousand other objects of interest and beauty help one to forget the exertion and the toil caused by the difficulties of the road, and make one feel that it is with a lavish and artistic hand that their great Maker has formed and bedecked them all. Moreover, there is in travelling in the forest a strange and fascinating illusion, a vague feeling of expectancy, which persistently recurs in spite of disappointment, that somewhere on in front something of exceptional interest will be found.

Being of a mountainous character and well supplied with moisture, streams with waterfalls and rapids rush through almost every ravine. Some of these cascades hide themselves away in the most charming spots, veritable fairy dells, and only betray themselves by their distant tones. To get to these lovely dells is often an extremely bewildering task, not only on account of the dense undergrowth and liana cables which impede the way, but also because of the echoes and the sound-shifting breezes, which apparently seem bent on befooling and luring away the intruder. To know the exact locality, distance, and character of forest sounds is by no means so easy as one would suppose.

The roads in the forest are mere tracks cut through dense masses of vegetation, which diverge and wind about in endless bewilderment. Even the highway from the chief port to the capital cannot be dignified by the term road; in many places it is a mere rut. The rains being frequent and heavy, every depression in the path is often filled with mud, sometimes knee-deep, and it is only by a series of undignified leaps that one can pass over them unbemired. In some parts of the forest, owing to the steepness of the ground and the heavy rains, the path is scored into deep and slippery ravines. Now the road passes through a steep and narrow gully between high banks debarring all progress except in Indian file; then it follows the windings of a stream, with broken branches of trees and awkward projecting logs threatening one's head. Moreover, it is not at all uncommon to come across the stumps of trees that have been hewn down for timber, almost blocking the entire pathway, or the intricate roots of others appearing above the surface as gnarled knots or loops ever ready to trip up the unwary traveller, so that constant vigilance is required. The trunks of trees that have been felled by the woodman, or that have fallen of themselves from insufficiency of foothold or sheer old age, often lie athwart the path. These must be surmounted, crept under, or escaped by a detour, as circumstances permit.

The valleys are frequently occupied by bogs, to pass over which various alternatives are before you. One may sometimes clear them by a series of leaps from tuft to tuft, any one of which may land you in the mud; you may wade them by doubling up your nether garments or taking them off entirely; you may be carried on the back of a swarthy native; or occasionally you may pass over an apology for a bridge in the shape of a number of parallel round poles or bamboos laid end to end on the ground, and placed on rickety or treacherous supports, the whole being more or less sunk in the mire. Such being the character of the forest roads, King Radama had some reason for his statement (if indeed it is founded on fact) that he had two generals that were a match for any European officers, General Hazo and General Tazo (General Forest and General Fever).

Notwithstanding all these untoward circumstances, however, the forest so teems with objects of interest and beauty, and is so remarkably free from dangerous animals, noxious insects or poisonous snakes, that, provided the weather be fine, any one who is prepared to rough it is well repaid for any little annoyances he may have to experience.

It is well known that the fauna of Madagascar is of the most interesting and remarkable character, no country in the world indeed affording more anomalous forms of organic life. Separated from Africa since the middle of the Tertiary era, as the island has probably been, and thus allowing of an immense amount of specific, and even generic, differentiation, it is not surprising to find the fauna differing largely from that of the neighbouring continent. None of the larger animals, and but few of the smaller, that roam on the plains or in the woods of South Africa, are anywhere to be found in Madagascar. Indeed, the animal life of this country presents such remarkable and anomalous types that it has been seriously proposed to constitute the island into a distinct zoological region. A large proportion of the mammals, and a still larger proportion of the birds, possess such abnormal structures that to classify them satisfactorily has always been a puzzle to naturalists.

The largest wild animal found in the island is the wild boar, of which there appear to be two species, the *Potamochœrus africanus* (Gray) and *P. Edwardsii* (Grandid.), the latter, it is said, being the larger of the two, and occurring in the eastern forest. This animal is so abundant that it often commits sad havoc in the native plantations, which are therefore generally securely guarded against its depredations by strong fencing.

The people often hunt the wild boar with dogs, but whether for food or for mere sport I am not able to say. Considering how extremely numerous these beasts are, it has often surprised me how very seldom they are to be seen. I have perhaps roamed over the Malagasy forests as much as any one, and yet, though I have heard them in the night, I have never yet seen a single specimen. This may doubtless be accounted for by the fact that their prowling expeditions are only undertaken in the night, and that they remain securely in their hidden lair in the daytime.

But the most abundant of the forest animals are undoubtedly the lemurs. Of these creatures about thirty species are known in Madagascar. Some of them are found only in the western part of the island, others are confined to the east; some live in the forests; one species (the ring-tailed lemur) inhabits the bare rocky hills of the southern interior; others find their habitat among the bamboos of the riversides; others again make their home in the tall rushes of the marshes; some roam over a wide extent of country; others are exclusively confined to particular localities, but a large number of them have their habitat in the great eastern forest. To describe the habits of these creatures one by one would be impossible, as no careful observations have been made on the subject. Besides, many of the lemurs are nocturnal, rendering it a difficult task to learn their habits in their native haunts. It is scarcely necessary to say that all the forest lemurs, like the monkey, which they distinctly resemble, lead an arboreal life, skipping from tree to tree with the most marvellous agility. Some of them roam the forests singly, some in pairs; others are gregarious, wandering about from place to place in bands of from eight to a dozen. It is an interesting sight to see a family of these agile, graceful creatures flinging themselves one after another from tree to tree in their forest journeyings, the father or grandfather of the family leading the way, the baby lemurs clinging tightly to the long thick hair of their mothers. Occasionally they may be observed whiling away their time in mere play, evidently brimful of frolicsome enjoyment. The lemurs vary considerably in size, some species being as large as a good-sized monkey, others being no bigger than a rat. Many of the smaller species (*e.g.* the Dwarf Lemur, *Microcebus Smithii*, Gray) build nests in the tops of trees, in which they pass the day in sleep, coming out from their hiding-places only when the stars are overhead. One of these small nest-building lemurs (the Brown Mouse Lemur, *Cheirogalius Milii*, Geoffrey), according to the observations of Mr. Shaw, who kept one in captivity for some time, apparently hibernates during the winter months. The majority of these creatures, however, are devoid of nest-building or hibernating propensities.

In some places the cry of the lemurs may be heard almost continuously, making the forest ring again. A prolonged melancholy wail is characteristic of one or two of the more common kinds, giving the impression that the creature is suffering from intense pain. The cry of others is a mere grunt, frequently repeated. One species occasionally quacks like a duck. The natives who live in and about the forest can recognise the species at once by their voices.

The lemurs differ widely in their power of domestication. Some species seem quite unable to live in confinement; they refuse all food, become sulky, melancholy, and irritable, showing their teeth when approached, and finally die of grief and starvation. Several kinds are caught in traps by the natives, and kept as pets,[1] more especially the common brown lemur, which is easily tamed, and becomes extraordinarily affectionate. One that I had some years ago seemed never to be so happy as when on his master's shoulder enjoying his caresses. Almost immediately after capture this creature becomes remarkably confiding, losing all fear. It likes nothing better than being petted. By sundry little grunts, by various signs and gestures, it endeavours, in the most unmistakable manner, to coax you to scratch and pet it, during which proceeding it will even put down its head and shut its eyes in high enjoyment. It will even endeavour to put your hand on its head, as much as to say, 'Please, sir, I want stroking.' But beware of lifting it, especially by the fore legs, as unless it be exceptionally forbearing, it will be almost sure suddenly to turn round and bite you, a species of treachery of which many of the lemurs are guilty.

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[1] In the *Animal Creation*, by T. R. Jones, it is stated that some of the lemurs 'are trained to hunt, like dogs.' This, however, is probably incorrect.

The food of the lemurs is various. The dentition of many of them is adapted to animal rather than vegetable diet, though it is quite certain that the latter is preferred by many of them. Fruit, birds' eggs, birds, and insects probably form the chief part of their food.

A more remarkable animal than any of the lemurs, however, is the famous Aye-aye (*Cheiromys madagascariensis*). Its structure is so anomalous that it is difficult to know what position to give it in any system of classification. Being a nocturnal animal, little is known of its habits in its native haunts. Almost all our knowledge of it has been, therefore, derived from specimens in captivity. In Carpenter's 'Zoology' it is said to be rare, and Mr. Gosse, in one of his books, supposes it to be probably nearly extinct. But this, I feel confident, is a mistake. From what I have gathered from the natives in different places, the creature seems to be pretty common; its nocturnal habits, and the superstitious fear with which the natives regard it, accounting for its apparent rarity. The Malagasy say that it only lives in the dense parts of the forest, where it builds a nest, two or three feet in diameter, of twigs and dead leaves, in the thick foliage in the upper branches of trees. This is entered by a hole in the side, and in it the creature sleeps the whole day, prowling about in quest of food only at night. The male and female, which have but one young one at a time, accompany each other in their midnight wanderings. Its food seems to be chiefly insects and grubs which hide beneath the bark of trees. It therefore taps the trees, and by the sound it quickly finds out the lurking-places of its prey, and with its long claw drags out the dainty morsel. Owing to the superstitious fear of it on the part of the natives, it is somewhat difficult to obtain specimens. To many of the people no amount of money would be sufficient to induce them to go in pursuit of it. It is, however, sometimes taken to the coast, where it may be bought for a few dollars.

The 'Fosa' (*Cryptoprocta ferox*) is another remarkable animal, found in the forest and I believe also in the open country, particularly in rocky, mountainous districts. I have myself never met with one in the forest, nor have I ever heard of any European that has; but there can be no doubt that it lives there. Nothing, so far as I am aware, is known of the habits of this creature in its native haunts. It is said, however, by the Malagasy to climb trees and to be a ferocious, bloodthirsty creature, which latter character it also manifests when in captivity—hence its specific name. In length it is only about fourteen inches from the snout to the root of the tail, and yet it is the largest of the Malagasy carnivora. It forms a link between the cats and the civets, partaking of the characters of both.

Inhabiting the forest are two or three small animals belonging to the civet family; they are known as 'Vontsira.' They are pretty little creatures, are easily tamed, and become very affectionate. In captivity they seem to be almost devoid of fear, but owing to their mischievous propensities they can scarcely be allowed to roam about the house without danger to the crockery. They are splendid rat and mice hunters, and in a remarkably short time the premises become freed from these and other objectionable vermin. But, besides the rats and mice, they have unfortunately a liking for poultry, and especially their eggs. Give a 'Vontsira' an egg, and watch the operation; it is interesting. It does not bite the end off and then suck out the contents; but it first of all rolls it to within a few inches of some hard object, then lies on its side, takes the egg between its fore feet, and violently flings it against the obstacle. When it has thus cracked the shell it laps up the exuding contents.

To spend a night in the forest is an experience worth having. Bivouacked in some glade, through which a small stream creeps lazily along, with a warm cheering fire to keep off the dew and chill of the night, one gains a quite different knowledge of the forest from that one gets in the daytime, for all nature is not asleep even in the midnight hour. Just as the darkness is setting in, the fireflies, with their tiny lanterns, flit about among the bushes; and the cicada, of various species, perched on the trunks of trees, commence their strange song. They are small in size, but they certainly make a big noise. Well may the Malagasy proverb say, 'Don't be like the cicada, whose voice fills the whole valley, though the creature itself is not a mouthful.' The sound it makes is not a buzz exactly, and it is not a hum. It is a deafening, unceasing, rasping, irritating monotone. Some tribes in certain parts of the world keep these cicada in cages for their music. As the darkness increases various nocturnal creatures come forth from their hiding-places, like thieves in the night, every now and then stealthily pouncing upon their unconscious and slumbering prey. Keep awake awhile, and listen to the strange and, for the most part, mysterious sounds. Suddenly there is a terrific scream. Some bird or beast finds itself all at once in the jaws of death. And what is that ceaseless creaking throughout the night? Fancy or fear pictures some strange hobgoblin; it is, however, nothing but the leaves of the screwpine twisted and strained by the breeze. And what is that remarkable string of sounds for all the world like water bubbling out of a bottle? It is the 'Toloho,' a kind of cuckoo with a very long tail, disturbed in its night's repose. And then, at regular intervals, 'Cuck-cuck-cuck-oo, cuck-cuck-cuck-oo,' lowering in tone as it proceeds—what is that? Another cuckoo, the 'Kankafotra.' This bird never seems to go to bed; it 'cuck-oos' through the day and 'cuck-oos' through the night. Does it get snatches of sleep at intervals, I wonder? From the stream or marsh close by there rises the unmusical croak of the frogs. After an interval of silence you hear, first of all, a single croak, then another, and a third, until gradually there arises a perfect chorus of croaks, followed by a few minutes' silence. After a few moments' rest the tune is resumed, for croak the creatures must and croak they will throughout the night, 'for 'tis their nature to.' The tree-frogs, perched on the leaves, not a whit behind their cousins in the marsh, pass the night in croaking. Some of these tree-frogs are remarkably pretty creatures, spotted and barred with green and black and red and white. One fellow—a pretty large one, of three or four inches in length—is, as most of the tree-frogs are, all green; and, unless your eye happens to light on it on the leaf on which it is squatting, it will absolutely defy detection. Numerous other strange and weird noises are to be heard during the night in the forest, but from what throats they proceed it is beyond me to say.

In passing through the forest while the foliage is damp from recent rain or dew, the traveller is not infrequently pestered with numerous leeches. The worst experiences I have had of this kind have been in the south-eastern part of the forest. You turn up your trousers, feeling a slight itching, and lo! your legs are streaming with blood, and firmly fixed on your flesh are numerous slippery worm-like blood-suckers about half an inch in length. You get hold of them to pull them off, but they object to retire from the feast. You pull, and, like a piece of elastic, they allow themselves to be stretched to twice or thrice their length; however, as it breaks no bones, they are persistent, and, as the old song says, 'The more you try to pull them off, the more they stick the faster.' But observe the natives; they give the creatures a sudden smack, which startles them; they can then be removed with ease.

Of the various forms of Myriopoda that are found in the forest there are two, if not more, species of *Sphærotherium.* One is black, the other green, the former being much the larger of the two. When you take them up they immediately roll themselves into a ball like a hedgehog, depending, however, not upon spines for protection, but upon their horny armour-like exoskeleton.

Other creatures trust in their mimetic powers for immunity from their foes. One of these, *Uroplates fimbriatus*, a gecko, or, at any rate, allied to the geckoes, is the most marvellous piece of mimicry I have ever seen. It is arboreal in its habits, and exactly resembles a piece of bark in colour with lichens growing upon it. In the number of 'Nature' for May 17, 1883, appeared a letter entitled 'Curious Habit of a Brazilian Moth,' by Mr. E. Dukinfield Jones, in which the author stated that he had observed a kind of moth in Brazil engaged in sucking up water in large quantity through its proboscis. Now this strange habit is by no means confined to the Brazilian *Panthera apardalaria.* I have seen the same thing in two species of lepidoptera in the eastern forest of Madagascar, and I imagine that the phenomenon is by no means rare. These two creatures are very common by the sides of streams and damp places in the forest. One morning, while sitting by the side of a mountain stream, one of these insects (*Papilio oribazus*, I believe, a common blue-winged moth, and measuring about four inches from tip to tip of its wings) settled on the wet mossy bank. Wishing to procure it as a specimen, I approached as cautiously as possible, and, to my surprise, I found that it was so absorbed in what it was about as to be apparently totally unconscious of my proximity. Noticing strange and unaccountable movements, with sundry jerkings and probings of its proboscis, I very quietly and noiselessly sat down near to watch it more closely. I observed that every second or two it ejected (not merely exuded) a drop of pure liquid. I picked up a leaf that was lying near, folded it, and slowly inserted the edge of it between the insect's body and the ground, so as to catch the liquid, and reckoned that about thirty drops were ejected per minute. I held the leaf for about five minutes, and at the end of the time there was caught in it about a salt-spoonful of what seemed to be pure water, without either taste or colour. After watching the moth for a time, I seized it by the wings between my thumb and fingers with the greatest ease, so utterly lost did it appear to be to what was going on around it. The abstraction of food from the water thus passed constantly through the body was doubtless the object of the strange action.

In another spot I saw as many as sixteen of these large moths within the space of a square foot on damp ground, all engaged in the same occupation. Some of them ejected the liquid more frequently and in greater quantity than others, and I noticed one of them squirt it so as to drop fully a quarter or a third of an inch beyond the point on the ground perpendicular to the end of its body.

I also noticed in another place a number of white butterflies all busily engaged in the same curious action; and I imagine that further observation would prove that the phenomenon is somewhat common.

All who have journeyed through the great forest must have frequently noticed large black or dark-brown balls attached to the higher branches of trees, which are called 'votry.' They are generally a little larger than a football, but occasionally attain the dimensions of a bee-hive. These are ants' nests. If you take one down and examine it (a rather ticklish business), you will find that it consists of a tough substance exactly resembling dry cowdung. This, however, is not to be found in the depths of the forest, and is therefore not the material of which it is made; it is composed of earth mixed with vegetable fibre, but so manipulated as to yield a stiff parchment-like substance. On the outer surface are numerous entrances into the interior. Now, if you can find it in your heart to be so ruthless and cruel, take a large knife and cut a vertical section through the nest; you will then discover that it is made up of more or less irregular concentric galleries, the floors of which are about as thick as a shilling and about a quarter of an inch apart. Each of these floors or layers is supported by a number of pillars rising from the one immediately below it. Near the surface of the nest a number of ants may be seen, but in the centre there is a perfect swarm of them, all doubtless wondering what can have caused such a terrible catastrophe. But they waste not a moment of time in idle speculation. See! they are all as bustling and as busy as they can be, and their first thought is to save their helpless young and their guests. For guests, indeed, they have. If you carefully examine the ants, you will see one here and there with a very minute red insect on its back, evidently intent, even at the risk of its own life, on securing the safety of its little guest. This insect, placed under a magnifying lens, turns out to be a beetle. What purpose it serves in the economy of the nest, I have never been able to make out. Attached to the branch or twigs that pass right through the nest there are little leathery caps, which contain eggs and small grubs. Of what are these the larvæ? I know not. If some one gifted with more than ordinary patience could study these 'votry' and the life of their inmates, the result would, I am sure, prove of interest.

And then there are the strange dwellings of the larvæ of beetles, moths, &c., where they await their development into a higher form of life. Attached to a twig you will occasionally see a little bag beautifully woven into rather coarse meshes of silk more bright and shining than silver, and about a couple of inches in length. On another twig there is a reddish bladder about an inch long, the insect being within a small oval bag in the centre. This bladder is full of air and has a hole at one end. You press it in, but it expands again like an indiarubber ball. It is quite a remarkable cocoon. Hanging from the underside of leaves, too, may be seen the little homes of grubs formed out of small portions of grass stems, the insects lying at full length inside. Or sometimes these little dwellings are stockaded by numerous sharp stiff projections that would be far from agreeable to the palate of any bird that might make an attempt on the dainty morsel inside.

Whatever may be said to the contrary, birds are not abundant in the forest, and of singing-birds worth listening to there are absolutely none. The shrill whistle of the black parrot is, perhaps, more frequently heard than the voice of any other bird. I have already referred to the 'Kankafotra,' a kind of cuckoo. Another cuckoo (*Coua cærulea*, L.), dressed all in blue from head to tail, may very frequently be seen (for it is not at all a shy or timid bird), hopping from twig to twig on the lower branches of the trees. This bird is a weather prophet to the natives, for rightly or wrongly they assert that if the 'Taitso' calls when the weather is fine it will be wet, and if wet it will be fine. Suspended to branches overhanging the streams may frequently be seen the nest of the 'Fodifetsy' (*Ploceus pensilis*, Gm.). It is a most ingenious structure, in shape exactly resembling a chemical retort with the bulb uppermost. It is generally fourteen or fifteen inches in length, and made of dried grass most neatly interwoven. How the bird manages to interlace the different grasses and yet preserve a perfectly circular entrance of more than a foot in length is a perfect marvel. Another nest, a thick heavy structure, may often be seen also overhanging streams. It belongs, I believe, to the 'Fodiala' (*Oxylabes madagascariensis*, Briss.). The nest is entered by a hole in the side, always facing the stream, over which hole is a porch, perhaps to throw off the rain. There can be no doubt that these two birds build their nests in the position they do as a means of preservation from their enemies, and probably from the lemurs especially.

With regard to the forest birds, I have two or three times witnessed a phenomenon of some interest. The birds are not often seen except in flocks. A little twittering is first heard, one or two birds are seen, and then in a few minutes one is surrounded by a large number appearing as if by magic. The same thing has been noticed by others. But the strange thing about it is that birds not of a feather flock together. I have seen as many as twenty or thirty birds, of six or seven different species, all travelling in the same company. Can this be for mutual defence? I find that Mr. Bates, in his 'Naturalist on the Amazon,' noticed the same thing in the forests of Brazil, and attributes it to this cause.

How powerless one feels when one attempts to describe the wonderfully varied and almost endless forms of vegetable life that pass their days in the great eastern forest of Madagascar! I have heard the forest spoken of as monotonous. Nothing could be further from the truth. An English wood, consisting entirely of oak or fir trees, might be called monotonous, but the term can surely not be applied to a forest in which you rarely meet with two adjoining trees or shrubs of the same species. If one thinks merely of tree trunks and green leaves in the abstract, then perhaps it may be called monotonous, but even in this monotony there is infinite variety. Why, no two leaves are alike;

they are of all possible shapes, sizes, and tints; and as for the tree trunks, they all differ one from another in girth, height, and in the guests which partake of their hospitality. Look at that big fellow there, which, supported and buttressed by its own offshoots, stoutly maintains its own against all the blasts that blow; it is a perfect world in itself. Its own foliage is spread out in the sunlight far above, but in its generosity it offers itself as a refuge and a home for its less fortunate brothers—for those who, from inherent inability to cope with their kind in the great struggle for existence, or from an unmanly desire to live with as little trouble as possible, mere parasites and hangers-on, have determined to live at the expense of their big neighbour, for there is a good deal of human nature even in plants. And what a variety of them on that one trunk, a complete little flora in itself! I once counted as many as seventeen different species on one tree, belonging to widely separated genera, even orders. There is the *Pothos Chapelieri*, with its curious paddle-shaped leaves, climbing apparently to the utmost height of the tree. Then there are the ferns, species of *Polypodium* especially, some of which, with undivided leaves, form a ring, often a series of rings, right round the tree. High up in the branches, and clinging close to the trunk, its hemispherical and deeply wrinkled cabbage-like leaves lying one within the other, appears a strange fern as round and as large as a football. Very delicate and graceful little ferns belonging to the genus *Hymenophyllum* cluster together and help to hide the nakedness of their big protector. Of ferns that live on the trunks of trees I know at least fifty different species, and even this, of course, does not exhaust the list. Of orchids there are probably a greater number even than of ferns. Very frequently there may be seen a shrub growing out of a tree trunk, which seems to form part and parcel of the tree itself; but when its leaves are examined they are found to be quite different from those of its host. It is a *Loranthus*, of which there are about a dozen species, or a *Viscum*, of which there are probably more. It is a veritable parasite, having pushed its roots right into the tree for the purpose of sucking its juices, and thus flourishes at the expense of its neighbour. A species of lichen, the 'Old Man's Beard,' hangs very abundantly from many of the trees. Other lichens, too, of various hues, fungi, and delicate little mosses, the life of each one of which would be an interesting study in itself, also play a prominent part in this heterogeneous community.

Outwardly, at least, concord and mutual helpfulness seem to prevail among the numerous vegetable forms in the forest. Plants of the most diverse character, and belonging to the most widely separated families, are found in harmonious company. Here a beautiful tree-fern finds shelter beneath a forest giant, the tree-fern in its turn spreading its green umbrella over a number of herbs, some of which have become so familiar as to twine themselves around its knotted stem. Beneath these, again, some soft tender moss, or a minute brilliant red fungus, or a pyramid-shaped *Lycopodium*, for all the world like a miniature Christmas-tree, with its fructification dangling from its branches as so many ornaments, finds its home. No space is lost. The germs of vegetable life are ever ready to seize upon unoccupied spots. There is scarcely a crevice or a cranny anywhere without an occupant. But, alas! all this harmony and brotherly kindness is illusory. Every individual has secured its position by its own unaided energy, and the apparent harmony we see is but the complex result of individual enterprise. There is constant rivalry and competition going on, and as in the human, so in the plant world, certain families—or, rather, certain members of families—have, through some unknown powers of their own, or advantageous outward circumstances, been more successful than their rivals and have gained the day. For instance, we may see in some parts of the forest that bamboos, or the cardamom plant, or small palms, have almost wholly monopolised the ground.

No one can be long in the forest without observing that the plants range themselves, roughly speaking, into three tiers. There are, first of all, the trees—long, gaunt things, that have been obliged to stretch themselves upwards to get their leaves and flowers to the light. Viewed from some elevated point outside, it is these that seem to form the forest, but within they are merely the canopy of the forest proper. It is often difficult to know what these trees really are, for to get at the flowers and leaves they must be either climbed or cut down, neither of which proceedings is always practicable. Then come the shrubs, which have to be content with such light as they can get. Below these there is an entangled mass of herbs, ferns in profusion, grasses, mosses, prickly blackberries, and what not, pushing and elbowing one another for dear life. Try to make a way through them, and you will soon be convinced what a dense, prickly, complex entanglement it is.

Although there is no part of the year to which the flowering season is confined, there is nevertheless a much greater number of plants in bloom from the beginning of October to the end of February than at any other period. A few odd plants are in flower all the year round. The quantity of striking or beautiful flowering plants in the Malagasy forests is a feature often remarked on by travellers, although the fact is by no means remarkable, as it is pretty much the same in the tropics all the world over. There are a good many, however, though few in proportion to the total number of plants, which possess handsome flowers. There are, for instance, two or three species of balsam found in the damp parts of the forest, quite as attractive for floral beauty as many of our garden balsams. Several members of the acanthus family, too, possess very pretty flowers, as do also some of the orchids. Among the climbing plants may be mentioned *Tristellatsia madagascariensis*, with numerous racemes of rich yellow flowers. The trees most remarkable for their floral beauty are perhaps the various species of *Dombeya*, one or two of *Rhodolena*, and a few belonging to the order *Melastomaceæ* of the genus *Dichætanthera*.

Of edible forest fruits I know but one which can be said to be of excellent flavour. It is known by the Malagasy as 'Voantsimatra,' and the tree which yields it I believe is *Salacia dentata*. It is, however, so long since I tasted it that all I can remember of it is that it was oval, large and luscious. Then there are the 'Rotra,' from a species of *Eugenia*, and the 'Voramontsina,' from one or two shrubs belonging to the genus *Vaccinium*, yielding a fruit allied to the cranberry. Besides these I know no others worth mentioning.

The forest products of economic value are numerous, and investigation would undoubtedly bring many others to light which are as yet unknown. Timber of many varieties and of excellent quality occurs in abundance; but as this, with the exception of ebony, bears no English names, it may here be omitted. Among the products of the eastern forest is indiarubber. This is obtained from a species, or probably two or three species, of *Landolphia*, lianas found abundantly in certain parts of the forest. The Malagasy obtain the rubber by cutting the stem into short lengths, crushing it, and collecting the juice into vessels. A little acid and water is added, and then it is made into balls and taken for sale. One of the tricks of the trade practised by the natives is occasionally to put a stone into the centre of the balls, so that the buyers have to be careful they do not pay for cobbles.

Various barks, some of known, some of unknown value, are to be found in the forest. There is, for instance, the bark of the 'Nato,' so largely used by the natives as a red dye. Other barks they use in the manufacture of rum, especially that of the tree known as 'Fatray.' Another bark has a taste similar to cinnamon, and a fourth is as bitter as quinine.

One or two climbing plants yield cubebs pepper, and are used by the natives as a medicine.

There are also various gums and resins. These are the produce of various trees, but chiefly those belonging to the genus *Symphonia.* The quality of these gums and resins is, I believe, as yet quite unknown.

Frequently in travelling in the forest one may see fixed in the top of a tree a large rude box, or rather a portion of a tree-trunk hollowed out. These are beehives, and the owner of the box, with comparatively little trouble, obtains in this way a large quantity of honey. The honey-maker is the small bee (*Apis unicolor*) so common in the forests. The honey is not equal to English honey in quality, though it is not very much inferior. A whole hive full may be had for a mere trifle. The wax is kept and sold to traders.

Several edible forest yams with large tubers are eaten by the natives. They belong to various species of climbing plants (*Dioscorea*). One may frequently see a large hole several feet deep at the foot of a tree, where the natives have dug out one of these immense tubers. In taste they are somewhat similar to the 'Taro.'

To know something of the products of the forest, at any rate such products as are employed by the natives, one must examine a Malagasy hut in the neighbourhood. The walls are probably built of bamboo beaten out flat (or occasionally of long flattened Pandanus leaves) the floor being of the same material; the roof most probably consists of the large banana-like leaves of the traveller's tree overlapping one another; the whole being fixed to a framework of round poles and fastened together with the stem of some tough climbing plant. The very water-pot is not a pot at all, but a long bamboo five or six feet in length and four or five inches in diameter, with all the partitions except the bottom one knocked out. In a corner of the hut may probably be seen a quantity of honey in a portion of a tree trunk hollowed out. The mortar in which the rice is pounded is also part of a trunk similarly hollowed out. Hanging from the roof is the anchor-shaped 'Mahatia,' part of a small forked branch of. a tree an inch or two in thickness, with the side branches cut off within three or four inches of the stem at the end, and hung so that the prongs point upwards. This is used instead of pegs on which to hang various articles. Perhaps the good lady of the house is engaged in threading large seeds, those of the physic nut (*Jatropha curcas*) containing much oil, on a stiff stem of grass. When the night comes on, one end of this is lit, and it takes the place of a candle. The good lady's snuff-box even (for tastes and fashions are not the same all the world over) is the fruit of the 'Rofia' palm, or a beautifully polished piece of bamboo; and the thread with which her 'Lamba' (the chief garment) is sewed together is not improbably a vegetable fibre, if indeed the very 'Lamba' itself is not the pounded and flattened bark of a tree. It may be (and in all this I speak from what I have seen) that she has anointed her hair not with lard, the common unguent, but with the oil from a forest fruit, and not only her hair but her face, neck and shoulders. She takes also an occasional beverage in the way of toddy, a liquid obtained from some palm tree, which is said to be 'very refreshing.' And so the house, the furniture, the garments, the food, the drink, the light, and even the cosmetics are mostly forest products.

It is not at all surprising that the forest should be regarded by the superstitious natives with a certain amount of dread. It is so dense, so dark, so uncanny, so mysterious and bewildering, that it requires a certain amount of nerve to travel in it alone; hence the Malagasy proverb says, 'Two of us entering the forest; you must trust in me, and I'll trust in you.' Nor is it surprising that their childish imagination, uncurbed by reason, should people the forest with strange mythical monsters. Of these the 'Songomby' is perhaps the best known and most widely believed in. It is said to be a nocturnal animal about the size of a horse, able to run with great speed, and to live in caves. I was told on one occasion that in order to secure a 'Songomby' one must get a child, put it in a pot with holes in, so that it may be able to breathe freely, put the cover on, and place it near a trap made at the mouth of the 'Songomby's' den. When the child cries, the 'Songomby' will come out to devour it, but as the child is in a covered pot, the monster cannot harm it, and in its attempt to get at it the beast is entrapped and secured. It is to the present day a very common mode of terrifying children into good behaviour to say to them, 'I'll give you to the Songomby.' There are those among the natives who affirm that they have seen the animal, and who actually believe they have, not being aware that what they saw was the creature of their own fear.

Another fabulous animal is the 'Tokandia.' It is somewhat smaller than the 'Songomby,' and although it only possesses one leg in front and one behind, it is said to be much more fleet of foot than any other animal, overtaking even the swiftest with ease. It is reported to be a man-eater, roaming about at night in search of food.

The 'Roatry' is another mythical creature, which, I believe, is supposed to inhabit the forest. It is said to be like a long-mouthed ox with the tail of a donkey.

Superstitious notions in regard to various forest animals, not fabulous, are also held by the Malagasy. The lemur known as 'Hainandro,' a nocturnal animal, is said to be king of the lemurs, and all the other species are subject to it and supply it with food. To the 'Babakoto' (*Lichanotus brevicaudatus*) the natives attribute remarkable sagacity, for when wounded these creatures, I have been told, gather a handful of leaves which they chew and apply to the wound. In some parts of the country the natives venerate this animal and are unwilling either to shoot or entrap it, because, they say, it is the progenitor of man! There are, of course, various versions of these stories.

The Aye-aye is held in special dread, and various stories are told in regard to it. One of these, which was once related to me, is as follows. When a person sleeps in the forest, the Aye-aye occasionally brings a pillow for him: if a pillow for the head, the person will become rich; if for the feet, he will be bewitched.

Then there is the 'Ramilaheloka,' a small kind of chameleon. Of this creature the natives assert that any one stepping on it accidentally or otherwise, or seizing it, will be taken ill, but that the illness need not be fatal, as it may be charmed away by a native doctor.

There are also the 'Kalanoro,' or wild men of the woods. In one account these are represented as very short of stature, covered with hair, with flowing beard in the case of the male, and with an amiable weakness for the warmth of a fire. An eye-witness relates that once, when spending a night in the heart of the forest, he lay awake watching the fire, which had died down to red embers, when suddenly he became aware of a figure answering to the above description warming himself at the fire, and apparently enjoying it immensely. According to his story, he put a summary end to the gentleman's enjoyment by stealing down his hand, grasping a stick, and sending a shower of red-hot embers on to his unclothed visitor, who immediately and most naturally fled with a shriek. Another tells how, on a similar occasion, the male appeared first, and after inspecting the premises and finding, as well as a fire, some rice left in the pot, summoned his better half; the pair squatted in front of the fire and—touching picture of conjugal affection—proceeded to feed one another.

'One must confess that the creature described looks suspiciously like one of the larger sorts of lemur; but in a village near Mahanoro, on the verge of the forest, the inhabitants say they very frequently see these wild people come foraging their houses for remnants of food, and may be heard calling to one another in the streets.'

However fabulous the above may be, it is stated on pretty good authority that actual wild men of the woods have been occasionally met with in the thick parts of the forest in the north-east of the island, and the stories told of them are pretty much the same as the descriptions of the wild men that have been occasionally found in the forests of Europe.

Such are some of the objects of forest interest in the great eastern forest of Madagascar, and some of the superstitious stories connected with a few of its real or supposed inhabitants. The subject, however, is endless.

In conclusion, let me express a hope that the present wholesale destruction of the forest by the natives may be soon effectually stopped by the Government, and that its valuable resources may be speedily utilised. If this does not take place, in a few more generations there will be no forest left to expatiate upon, and as many of its trees are found nowhere else in the world, they will have become extinct.

WITH EDGED TOOLS.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A SLOW RECOVERY.

'We dare not let our tears flow, lest, in truth,
They fall upon our work which must be done.'

'THEY was just in time,' said Joseph pleasantly to Marie that same evening, when Jack Meredith had been made comfortable for the night and there was time to spare for supper.

'Ah!' replied the woman, who was busy with the supper-table.

Joseph glanced at her keenly. The exclamation not only displayed a due interest, but contained many questions. He stretched out his legs and wagged his head sapiently.

'And no mistake!' he said. 'They timed it almost to the minute. We had sort of beaten them back for the time bein'. Mr. Meredith had woke up sudden, as I told you, and came into the thick of the melée, as we say in the service. Then we heard the firin' in the distance and the "splat" of Mr. Oscard's express rifle. I just turns, like this 'ere, my head over me shoulder, quite confidential, and I says, "Good Lord, I thank yer." I'm no hand at tracts and Bible-readin's, but I'm not such a blamed fool, Mistress Marie, as to think that this 'ere rum-go of a world made itself. No, not quite. So I just put in a word, quiet-like, to the Creator.'

Marie was setting before him such luxuries as she could command. She nodded encouragingly.

'Go on,' she said. 'Tell me!'

'Cheddar cheese,' he said parenthetically, with an appreciative sniff. 'Hav'n't seen a bit o' that for a long time! Well, then, up comes Mr. Oscard as cool as a cowcumber, and Mr. Meredith he gives a sort of little laugh and says, "Open that gate." Quite quiet, yer know. No high falutin' and potry and that. A few minutes before he had been fightin' and cussin' and shoutin', just like any Johnny in the ranks. Then he calms down and wipes the blood off'n his hand on the side of his pants, and says, "Open that gate." That's a nice piece of butter you've got there, mistress. Lord! it's strange I never missed all them things.'

'Bring your chair to the table,' said Marie, 'and begin. You are hungry—yes?'

'Hungry ain't quite the word.'

'You will have some mutton—yes? And Mr. Durnovo, where was he?'

Joseph bent over his plate, with elbows well out, wielding his knife and fork with a more obvious sense of enjoyment than usually obtains in the politer circles.

'Mr. Durnovo,' he said, with one quick glance towards her. 'Oh, he was just behind Mr. Oscard. And he follows 'im, and we all shakes hands just as if we was meeting in the Row, except that most of our hands was a bit grimy and sticky-like with blood and the grease off'n the cartridges.'

'And,' said Marie, in an indirectly interrogative way, as she helped him to a piece of sweet potato, 'you were glad to see them, Mr. Oscard and Mr. Durnovo—yes?'

'Glad ain't quite the word,' replied Joseph with his mouth full.

'And they were not hurt or—ill?'

'Oh, no!' returned Joseph with another quick glance. 'They were all right. But I don't like sitting here and eatin' while you don't take bit or sup yourself. Won't you chip in, Mistress Marie? Come now, do.'

With her deep, patient smile she obeyed him, eating little and carelessly, like a woman in some distress.

'When will they come down to Loango?' she asked suddenly, without looking at him.

'Ah! that I can't tell you. We left quite in a hurry, as one may say, with nothin' arranged. Truth is I think we all feared that the guv'nor had got his route. He looked very like peggin' out, and that's the truth. Howsomever, I hope for the best now.'

Marie said nothing, merely contenting herself with attending to his wants, which were numerous and frequent.

'That God-forsaken place, Msala,' said Joseph presently, 'has been rather crumbled up by the enemy.'

'They have destroyed it—yes?'

'That is so. You're right, they *'ave* destroyed it.'

Marie gave a quick little sigh—one of those sighs which the worldly-wise recognise at once.

'You don't seem over-pleased,' said Joseph.

'I was very happy there,' she answered.

Joseph leant back in his chair, fingering reflectively his beer-glass.

'I'm afraid, mistress,' he said half-shyly, 'that your life can't have been a very happy one. There's some folk that *is* like that—through no fault of their own, too, so far as our mortal vision, so to speak, can reckon it up.'

'I have my troubles, like other people,' she answered softly.

Joseph inclined his head to one side and collected his bread-crumbs thoughtfully.

'Always seems to me,' he said, 'that your married life can't have been so happy-like as—well, as one might say you deserved, missis. But then you've got them clever little kids. I *do* like them little kids wonderful. Not bein' a marrying man myself, I don't know much of such matters. But I've always understood that little 'uns—especially cunning little souls like yours—go a long way towards makin' up a woman's happiness.'

'Yes,' she murmured, with her slow smile.

'Been dead long—their pa?'

'He is not dead.'

'Oh—beg pardon.'

And Joseph drowned a very proper confusion in bitter beer.

'He has only ceased to care about me—or his children,' explained Marie.

Joseph shook his head; but whether denial of such a possibility was intended, or an expression of sympathy, he did not explain.

'I hope,' he said, with a somewhat laboured change of manner, 'that the little ones are in good health.'

'Yes, thank you.'

Joseph pushed back his chair with considerable vigour, and passed the back of his hand convivially across his moustache.

'A square meal I call that,' he said, with a pleasant laugh, 'and I thank you kindly.'

With a tact which is sometimes found wanting inside a better coat than he possessed, Joseph never again referred to that part of Marie's life which seemed to hang like a shadow over her being. Instead, he set himself the task of driving away the dull sense of care which was hers, and he succeeded so well that Jack Meredith, lying between sleep and death in his bedroom, sometimes heard a new strange laugh.

By daybreak next morning Joseph was at sea again, steaming south in a coasting-boat towards St. Paul de Loanda. He sent off a telegram to Maurice Gordon in England, announcing the success of the Relief Expedition, and then proceeded to secure the entire services of a medical man. With this youthful disciple of Æsculapius he returned forthwith to Loango, and settled down with characteristic energy to nurse his master.

Meredith's progress was lamentably slow, but still it was progress, and in the right direction. The doctor, who was wise in the strange maladies of the West Coast, stayed for two days, and promised to return once a week. He left full instructions, and particularly impressed upon the two nurses the fact that the recovery would necessarily be so slow that their unpractised eyes could hardly expect to trace its progress.

It is just possible that Meredith could at this time have had no better nurse than Joseph. There was a military discipline about the man's method which was worth more than much feminine persuasion.

'Beef tea, sir,' he would announce with a face of wood, for the sixth time in one day.

'What, again? No, hang it! I can't.'

'Them's my orders, sir,' was Joseph's invariable reply, and he was usually in a position to produce documentary confirmation of his statement. The two men—master and servant—had grown so accustomed to the military discipline of a besieged garrison that it did not seem to occur to them to question the doctor's orders.

Nestorius—small, stout, and silent—was a frequenter of the sick-room, by desire of the invalid. After laboriously toiling up the shallow stairs—a work entailing huge effort of limbs and chin—he would stump gravely into the room without any form of salutation. There are some great minds above such trifles. His examination of the patient was a matter of some minutes. Then he would say, 'Bad case,' with the peculiar mechanical diction that was his—the words that Meredith had taught him on the evening of his arrival. After making his diagnosis Nestorius usually proceeded to entertain the patient with a display of his treasures for the time being. These were not in themselves of great value: sundry pebbles, a trouser-button, two shells, and a glass stopper formed, as it were, the basis of his collection, which was increased or diminished according to circumstances. Some of these he named; others were exhibited with a single adjective, uttered curtly, as between men who required no great tale of words wherewith to understand each other. A few were considered to be of sufficient value and importance to tell their own story and make their way in the world thereupon. He held these out with a face of grave and contemplative patronage.

'Never, Nestorius,' Meredith would say gravely, 'in the course of a long and varied experience, have I seen a Worcester-sauce stopper of such transcendent beauty.'

Sometimes Nestorius clambered on to the bed, when the mosquito curtains were up, and rested from his labours—a small, curled-up form, looking very comfortable. And then, when his mother's soft voice called him, he was wont to gather up his belongings and take his departure. On the threshold he always paused, finger in mouth, to utter a valedictory 'Bad case' before making his way downstairs with a shadowy, mystic smile.

Kind neighbours called, and well-meaning but mistaken dissenting missionaries left religious works of a morbid nature, eminently suitable to the sick-bed; but Joseph, Marie, and Nestorius were the only three who had free access to the quiet room.

And all the while the rain fell—night and day, morning, noon, and evening—as if the flood-gates had been left open by mistake.

'Sloobrious, no doubt,' said Joseph, 'but blamed depressing.'

And he shook his head at the lowering sky with a tolerant smile, which was his way of taking Providence to task.

'Do y' know what I would like, missis?' he asked briskly of Marie one evening.

'No.'

'Well, I'd like to clap my eyes on Miss Gordon, just a stepping in at that open door—that's what we want. That sawbones faller is right when he says the progress will be slow. Slow! Slow ain't quite the word. No more ain't progress the word—that's my opinion. He just lies on that bed, and the most he can do is to skylark a bit with Nestorius. He don't take no interest in nothin', least of all in his victuals—and a man's in a bad way when he takes no interest in his victuals. Yes, I'll take another pancake, thankin' you kindly. You've got a rare light hand for pancakes. Rare—rare ain't quite the word.'

'But what could Miss Gordon do?' asked Marie.

'Well, she could kinder interest him in things—don't you see? Him and I we ain't got much in common—except his clothes and that confounded beef-tea and slushin's. And then there's Mr. Gordon. He's a good hearty sort, he is. Comes galamphin' into the room, kickin' a couple of footstools and upsettin' things promiscuous. It cheers a invalid up, that sort o' thing.'

Marie laughed in an awkward, unwonted way.

'But it do, missis,' pursued Joseph, 'wonderful; and I can't do it myself. I tried the other day, and master only thought I'd been drinkin'.'

'You are impatient,' said Marie. 'He is better, I know. I can see it. You see it yourself—yes?'

'A bit—just a bit. But he wants some one of his own station in life, without offence, Mistress Marie. Some one as will talk with him about books and evenin' parties and things. And——' he paused reflectively, 'and Miss Gordon would do that.'

There was a little silence, during which another pancake met its fate.

'You know,' said Joseph, with sudden confidence, 'he's goin' to marry a young lady at home, in London; a young lady of fashion, as they say—one of them that's got one smile for men and another for women. Not his sort, as I should have thought myself, knowin' him as I do.'

'Then why does he marry her?' asked Marie.

'Ah!' Joseph rose, and stretched out his arms with a freedom from restraint learnt in the barrack-room. 'There you're asking me more than I can tell you. I suppose—it's the old story—I suppose he thinks that she is his sort.'

CHAPTER XXIX.

A CHANCE ACQUAINTANCE.

'The pride that prompts the bitter jest.'

A SPACE had with some difficulty been cleared at the upper end of an aristocratic London drawing-room, and with considerable enthusiasm Miss Fitzmannering pranced into the middle of it. Miss Fitzmannering had kindly allowed herself to be persuaded to do 'only a few steps' of her celebrated skirt dance. Miss Eline Fitzmannering officiated at the piano, and later on, while they were brushing their hair, they quarrelled because she took the time too quickly.

The aristocratic assembly looked on with mixed feelings, and faces suitable to the same. The girls who could not skirt-dance yawned behind their fans—gauze preferred, because the Fitzmannerings could see through gauze if they could not see through anything else.. The gifted products of fashionable Brighton schools, who could in their own way make exhibitions of themselves also, wondered who on earth had taught Miss Fitzmannering; and the servants at the door felt ashamed of themselves without knowing why.

Miss Fitzmannering had practised that skirt-dance—those few steps—religiously for the last month. She had been taught those same contortions by a young lady in *the* profession, whom even Billy Fitzmannering raised his eyebrows at. And every one knows that Billy is not particular. The performance was not graceful, and the gentlemen present who knew more about dancing—skirt or otherwise—than they cared to admit, pursed up the corners of their mouths and looked straight in front of them—afraid to meet the eye of some person or persons undefined.

But the best face there was that of Sir John Meredith. He was not bored, as were many of his juniors—at least, he did not look it. He was neither shocked nor disgusted, as apparently were some of his contemporaries—at least, his face betrayed neither of those emotions. He was keenly interested—suavely attentive. He followed each spasmodic movement with imperturbably pleasant eyes.

'My dear young lady,' he said, with one of his courtliest bows, when at last Miss Fitzmannering had had enough of it, 'you have given us a great treat—you have, indeed.'

'A most unique performance,' he continued, turning gravely to Lady Cantourne, by whose side he had been standing; and, strange to say, her ladyship made a reproving little movement of the lips, and tapped his elbow surreptitiously, as if he were misbehaving himself.

He offered his arm with a murmur of refreshments, and she accepted.

'Well,' he said, when they were alone or nearly so, 'do you not admit that it was a most unique performance?'

'Hush!' replied the lady, either because she was a woman or because she was a woman of the world. 'The poor girl cannot help it. She is forced into it by the exigencies of society, and her mother. It is not entirely her fault.'

'It will be entirely my fault,' replied Sir John, 'if I see her do it again.'

'It does not matter about a man,' said Lady Cantourne, after a little pause; 'but a woman cannot afford to make a fool of herself. She ought never to run the risk of being laughed at. And yet I am told that they teach that elegant accomplishment at fashionable schools.'

'Which proves that the schoolmistress is a knave as well as——the other thing.'

They passed down the long room together—a pattern, to the younger generation, of politeness and mutual respect. And that which one or other did not see was not worth comprehension.

'Who,' asked Sir John, when they had passed into the other room, 'who is the tall fair girl who was sitting near the fireplace?'

He did not seem to think it necessary to ask Lady Cantourne whether she had noticed the object of his curiosity.

'I was just wondering,' replied Lady Cantourne, stirring her tea comfortably. 'I will find out. She interests me. She is different from the rest.'

'And she does not let it be seen—that is what I like,' said Sir John. 'The great secret of success in the world is to be different from other people and conceal the fact.' He stood his full height, and looked round with blinking, cynical eyes. 'They are all very like each other, and they fail to conceal that.'

'I dislike a person,' said Lady Cantourne in her tolerant way, 'who looks out of place anywhere. That girl would never look so.'

Sir John was still looking round, seeing all that there was to be seen, and much that was not intended for that purpose.

'Some of them,' he said, 'will look self-conscious in heaven.'

'I hope so,' said Lady Cantourne quietly; 'that is the least one may expect.'

'I trust that there will be no skirt——.' Sir John broke off suddenly with a quick smile.

'I was about to be profane,' he said, taking her cup. 'But I know you do not like it.'

She looked up at him with a wan little smile. She was wondering whether he remembered as well as she did that half an ordinary lifetime lay between that moment and the occasion when she had reproved his profanity.

'Come,' she said, rising, 'take me back to the drawing-room, and I will make somebody introduce me to the girl.'

Jocelyn Gordon, sitting near the fire, talking to a white-moustached explorer, and listening good-naturedly to a graphic account of travels which had been put in the background by more recent wanderers, was somewhat astounded when the hostess came up to her a few minutes later, and introduced a stout little lady with twinkling, kindly eyes by the name of Lady Cantourne. She had heard vaguely of Lady Cantourne as a society leader of the old school, but had no clue to this obviously intentional introduction.

'You are wondering,' said Lady Cantourne, when she had sent the explorer on his travels elsewhere in order that she might have his seat—'you are wondering why I asked to know you.'

She looked into the girl's face with bright, searching eyes.

'I am afraid I was,' admitted Jocelyn.

'I have two reasons: one vulgar—the other sentimental. The vulgar reason was curiosity. I like to know people whose appearance prepossesses me. I am an old woman—no, you need not shake your head, my dear! not with me—I am almost a *very* old woman, but not quite; and all my life I have trusted in appearances. And,' she paused, studying the lace of her fan, 'I suppose I have not made more mistakes than other people. I have always made a point of trying to get to know people whose appearance I like. That is my vulgar reason. You do not mind my saying so—do you?'

Jocelyn laughed with slightly heightened colour, which Lady Cantourne noted with an appreciative little nod.

'My other reason is that, years ago at school, I knew a girl who was very like you. I loved her intensely—for a short time—as girls do at school, you know. Her name was Treseaton—the Honourable Julia Treseaton.'

'My mother!' said Jocelyn eagerly.

'I thought so. I did not think so at first, but when you spoke I was certain of it. She had a way with her lips. I am afraid she is dead.'

'Yes; she died nearly twenty-five years ago in Africa.'

'Africa—whereabouts in Africa?'

Then suddenly Jocelyn remembered where she had heard

Lady Cantourne's name. It had only been mentioned to her once. And this was the aunt with whom Millicent Chyne lived. This cheery little lady knew Jack Meredith and Guy Oscard; and Millicent Chyne's daily life was part of her existence.

'The West Coast,' she answered vaguely. She wanted time to think—to arrange things in her mind. She was afraid of the mention of Jack's name in the presence of this woman of the world. She did not mind Maurice or Guy Oscard—but it was different with a woman. She could hardly have said a better thing, because it took Lady Cantourne some seconds to work out in her mind where the West Coast of Africa was.

'That is the unhealthy coast, is it not?' asked her ladyship.

'Yes.'

Jocelyn hardly heard the question. She was looking round with a sudden breathless eagerness. It was probable that Millicent Chyne was in the rooms; and she never doubted that she would know her face.

'And I suppose you know that part of the world very well?' said Lady Cantourne, who had detected a change in her companion's manner.

'Oh, yes.'

'Have you ever heard of a place called Loango?'

'Oh, yes. I live there.'

'Indeed, how very interesting! I am very much interested in Loango just now, I must tell you. But I did not know that anybody lived there.'

'No one does by choice,' explained Jocelyn. 'My father was a judge on the Coast, and since his death my brother Maurice has held an appointment at Loango. We are obliged to live there for eight months in the twelve.'

She knew it was coming. But, as chance would have it, it was easier than she could have hoped. For some reason Lady Cantourne looked straight in front of her when she asked the question.

'Then you have, no doubt, met a friend of mine, Mr. Meredith? Indeed, two friends; for I understand that Guy Oscard is associated with him in this wonderful discovery.'

'Oh, yes,' replied Jocelyn, with a carefully modulated interest. 'I have met them both. Mr. Oscard lunched with us shortly before we left Africa.'

'Ah, that was when he disappeared so suddenly. We never got quite to the base of that affair. He left at a moment's notice on receipt of a telegram or something, only leaving a short and somewhat vague note for my—for us. He wrote from Africa, I believe, but I never heard the details. I imagine Jack Meredith was in some difficulty. But it is a wonderful scheme this, is it not? They are certain to make a fortune, I understand.'

'So people say,' replied Jocelyn. It was a choice to tell all—to tell as much as she herself knew—or nothing. So she told nothing. She could not say that she had been forced by a sudden breakdown of her brother's health to leave Loango while Jack Meredith's fate was still wrapped in doubt. She could not tell Lady Cantourne that all her world was in Africa—that she was counting the days until she could go back thither. She could not lift for a second the veil that hid the aching, restless anxiety in her heart, the life-absorbing desire to know whether Guy Oscard had reached the Plateau in time. Her heart was so sore that she could not even speak of Jack Meredith's danger.

'How strange,' said Lady Cantourne, 'to think that you are actually living in Loango, and that you are the last person who has spoken to Jack Meredith! There are two people in this house to-night who would like to ask you questions from now till morning, but neither of them will do it. Did you see me go through the room just now with a tall gentleman—rather old?'

'Yes,' answered Jocelyn.

'That was Sir John Meredith, Jack's father,' said Lady Cantourne in a lowered voice. 'They have quarrelled, you know. People say that Sir John does not care—that he is heartless, and all that sort of thing. The world never says the other sort of thing, one finds. But—but I think I know to the contrary. He feels it very deeply. He would give worlds to hear some news of Jack; but he won't ask it, you know.'

'Yes,' said Jocelyn, 'I understand.'

She saw what was coming, and she desired it intensely, while still feeling afraid—as if they were walking on some sacred ground and might at any moment make a false step.

'I should like Sir John to meet you,' said Lady Cantourne pleasantly. 'Will you come to tea some afternoon? Strange to say, he asked who you were not half an hour ago. It almost seems like instinct, does it not? I do not believe in mystic things about spirits and souls going out to each other, and all that nonsense; but I believe in instinct. Will you come to-morrow? You are here to-night with Mrs. Sander, are you not? I know her. She will let you come alone. Five o'clock. You will see my niece, Millicent. She is engaged to be married to Jack Meredith, you know. That is why they quarrelled—the father and son. You will find a little difficulty with her too. She is a difficult girl. But I dare say you will manage to tell her what she wants to know.'

'Yes,' said Jocelyn quietly—almost too quietly, 'I shall manage.'

Lady Cantourne rose, and so did Jocelyn.

'You know,' she said, looking up into the girl's face, 'it is a good action. That is why I ask you to do it. It is not often that one has the opportunity of doing a good action, to which even one's dearest friend cannot attribute an ulterior motive. Who is that man over there?'

'That is my brother.'

'I should like to know him; but do not bring him to-morrow. We women are better alone—you understand?'

With a confidential little nod, the great lady went away to attend to other affairs; possibly to carry through some more good actions of a safe nature.

It was plain to Jocelyn that Maurice was looking for some one. He had just come, and was making his way through the crowd. Presently she managed to touch his elbow.

'Oh, there you are!' he exclaimed; 'I want you. Come out of this room.'

He offered her his arm, and together they made their way out of the crowded room into a smaller apartment where an amateur reciter was hovering disconsolately, awaiting an audience.

'Here,' said Maurice, when they were alone, 'I have just had this telegram.'

He handed her the thin white submarine telegraph-form with its streaks of adhesive text.

'Relief entirely successful. Meredith Joseph returned Loango. Meredith bad health.'

Jocelyn drew a deep breath.

'So that's all right—eh?' said Maurice heartily.

'Yes,' answered Jocelyn, 'that is all right.'

CHAPTER XXX.

OLD BIRDS.

‘Angels call it heavenly joy;
Infernal tortures the devils say;
And men? They call it—Love.’

‘BY the way, dear,’ said Lady Cantourne to her niece the next afternoon, ‘I have asked a Miss Gordon to come to tea this afternoon. I met her last night at the FitzMannerings. She lives in Loango and knows Jack. I thought you might like to know her. She is exceptionally ladylike and rather pretty.’

And straightway Miss Millicent Chyne went upstairs to put on her best dress.

We men cannot expect to understand these small matters—these exigencies, as it were, of female life. But we may be permitted to note feebly *en passant* through existence that there are occasions when women put on their best clothes without the desire to please. And, while Millicent Chyne was actually attiring herself, Jocelyn Gordon, in another house not so far away, was busy with that beautiful hair of hers, patting here, drawing out there, pinning, poking, pressing with all the cunning that her fingers possessed.

When they met a little later in Lady Cantourne’s uncompromisingly solid and old-fashioned drawing-room, one may be certain that nothing was lost.

‘My aunt tells me,’ began Millicent at once with that *dégagé* treatment of certain topics hitherto held sacred which obtains among young folks to-day, ‘that you know Loango.’

‘Oh, yes—I live there.’

‘And you know Mr. Meredith?’

‘Yes, and Mr. Oscard also.’

There was a little pause while two politely smiling pairs of eyes probed each other.

‘She knows something—how much?’ was behind one pair of eyes.

‘She cannot find out—I am not afraid of her,’ behind the other.

And Lady Cantourne, the proverbial looker-on, slowly rubbed her white hands one over the other.

'Ah, yes,' said Millicent unblushingly—that was her strong point, blushing in the right place, but not in the wrong—'Mr. Oscard; he is associated with Mr. Meredith, is he not, in this harebrained scheme?'

'I believe they are together in it—the Simiacine, you mean?' said Jocelyn.

'What else could she mean?' reflected the looker-on.

'Yes—the Simiacine. Such a singular name, is it not? I always say they will ruin themselves suddenly. People always do, don't they? But what do you think of it? I *should* like to know.'

'I think they certainly will make a fortune,' replied Jocelyn—and she noted the light in Millicent's eyes with a sudden feeling of dislike—'unless the risks prove too great and they are forced to abandon it.'

'What risks?' asked Millicent, quite forgetting to modulate her voice.

'Well, of course, the Ogowe river is most horribly unhealthy, and there are other risks. The natives in the plains surrounding the Simiacine Plateau are antagonistic. Indeed, the Plateau was surrounded and quite besieged when we left Africa.'

It may have hurt Millicent, but it hurt Jocelyn more—for the smile had left her hearer's face. She was off her guard, as she had been once before when Sir John was near, and Millicent's face betrayed something which Jocelyn saw at once with a sick heart—something that Sir John knew from the morning when he had seen Millicent open two letters—something that Lady Cantourne had known all along.

'And was Mr. Meredith on the Plateau when it was besieged?' asked Millicent with a drawn, crooked smile.

'Yes,' answered Jocelyn. She could not help seizing the poor little satisfaction of this punishment; but she felt all the while that it was nothing to the punishment she was bearing and would bear all her life. There are few more contradictory things than the heart of a woman who really loves. For one man it is very tender; for the rest of the world it is the hardest heart on earth if it is called upon to defend the object of its love or the love itself.

'But,' cried Millicent, 'of course something was done. They could never leave Mr. Meredith unprotected.'

'Yes,' answered Jocelyn quietly, 'Mr. Oscard went up and rescued him. My brother heard yesterday that the relief had been effected.'

Millicent smiled again in her light-hearted way.

'That is all right,' she said. 'What a good thing we did not know! Just think, auntie dear, what a lot of anxiety we have been spared!'

'In the height of the season, too!' said Jocelyn.

'Ye—es,' replied Millicent rather doubtfully.

Lady Cantourne was puzzled. There was something going on which she did not understand. Within the sound of the pleasant conversation there was the *cliquetis* of the foil; behind the polite smile there was the gleam of steel. She was rather relieved to turn at this moment and see Sir John Meredith entering the room with his usual courtly bow. He always entered her drawing-room like that. Ah! that little secret of a mutual respect. Some people who are young now will wish, before they have grown old, that they had known it.

He shook hands with Lady Cantourne and with Millicent. Then he stood with a deferential half-bow, waiting for the introduction to the girl who was young enough to be his daughter—almost to be his granddaughter. There was something pathetic and yet proud in this old man's uncompromising adherence to the lessons of his youth.

'Sir John Meredith—Miss Gordon.'

The beginning—the thin end of the wedge, as the homely saying has it—the end which we introduce almost every day of our lives, little suspecting to what it may broaden out.

'I had the pleasure of seeing you last night,' said Sir John at once, 'at Lady FitzMannering's evening party, or "At Home," I believe we call them nowadays. Some of the guests read the invitation too much *au pied de la lettre* for my taste. They were so much at home that I, fearing to intrude, left rather early.'

'I believe the skirt-dancing frightened you away, Sir John,' said Millicent merrily.

'Even old birds, my dear young lady, may sometimes be alarmed by a scarecrow.'

'I missed you quite early in the evening,' put in Lady Cantourne, sternly refusing to laugh. She had not had an opportunity of seeing him since her conversation with Jocelyn, and the dangers of the situation were fully appreciated by such an experienced woman of the world.

'They began to clear the upper end of the room,' he explained, 'and I assisted them in the most practical manner in my power.'

He was beginning to wonder why he had been invited—nay, almost commanded—to come, by an imperious little note. And of late, whenever Sir John began to wonder he began also to feel old. His fingers strayed towards his unsteady lips as if he were about to make one of those little movements of senile helplessness to which he sometimes gave way.

For a moment Lady Cantourne hesitated between two strokes of social diplomacy—but only for a moment. She had heard the bell ring, and trusted that at the other end of the wire there might be one of those fatuous young men who nibbled at that wire like foolish fish round a gilt spoon-bait. Her ladyship decided to carry on the social farce a few minutes longer, instead of offering the explanation which all were awaiting.

'We women,' she said, 'were not so early deterred from our social duties.'

At this moment the door opened, and there entered a complex odour of hairwash and perfumery—a collar which must have been nearly related to a cuff, and a pair of tight patent-leather boots, all attached to and somewhat overpowering a young man.

'Ah, my dear Mr. Grubb,' said Lady Cantourne, 'how good of you to call so soon! You will have some tea. Millicent, give Mr. Grubb some tea.'

'Not too strong,' added Sir John, apparently to himself, under the cover of Mr. Grubb's somewhat scrappy greeting.

Then Lady Cantourne went to the conservatory and left Sir John and Jocelyn at the end of the long room together. There is nothing like a woman's instinct. Jocelyn spoke at once.

'Lady Cantourne,' she said, 'kindly asked me to meet you to-day on purpose. I live at Loango; I know your son, Mr. Meredith, and we thought you might like to hear about him and about Loango.'

She knew that with a man like Sir John any indirect approach to the subject would be courting failure. His veiled old eyes suddenly lighted up, and he turned to glance over his shoulder.

'Yes,' he said, with a strange hesitation, 'yes—you are kind. Of course I am interested. I wonder,' he went on with a sudden change of manner, 'I wonder how much you know.'

His unsteady hand was resting on her gloved fingers, and he blinked at it as if wondering how it got there.

Jocelyn did not seem to notice.

'I know,' she answered, 'that you have had a difference of opinion—but no one else knows! You must not think that Mr. Meredith has spoken of his private affairs to any one else. The circumstances were exceptional, and Mr. Meredith thought that it was due to me to give me an explanation.'

Sir John looked a little puzzled, and Jocelyn went on rather hastily to explain:

'My brother and Mr. Meredith were at Eton together. They met somewhere up the Coast, and my brother asked Mr. Meredith to come and stay. It happened that Maurice was away when Mr. Meredith arrived, and I did not know who he was, so he explained.'

'I see,' said Sir John. 'And you and your brother have been kind to my boy.'

Somehow he seemed to have forgotten to be cynical. He had never known what it is to have a daughter, and she was ignorant of the pleasant everyday amenities of a father's love. As there is undoubtedly such a thing as love at first sight, so must there be sympathy at first sight. For Jocelyn it was comprehensible—nay, it was most natural. This was Jack's father. In his manner, in everything about him, there were suggestions of Jack. This seemed to be a creature hewn, as it were, from the same material, moulded on the same lines with slightly divergent tools. And for him—who can tell? The love that was in her heart may have reached out to meet almost as great a love locked up in his proud soul. It may have shown itself to him, openly, fearlessly, recklessly, as love sometimes does when it is strong and pure.

He had carefully selected a seat within the shadow of the curtains; but Jocelyn saw quite suddenly that he was an older man than she had taken him to be the evening before. She saw through the deception of the piteous wig—the whole art that strove to conceal the sure decay of the body, despite the desperate effort of a mind still fresh and vigorous.

'And I dare say,' he said, with a somewhat lame attempt at cynicism, 'that you have heard no good of me?'

But Jocelyn would have none of that. She was no child to be abashed by sarcasm; but a woman, completed and perfected by her love.

'Excuse me,' she said sharply; 'but that is not the truth, and you know it. You know as well as I do that your son would never say a word against you.'

Sir John looked hastily round. Lady Cantourne had come into the room and was talking to the two young people. Millicent was glancing uneasily over Mr. Grubb's brainless cranium towards them. Sir John's stiff, unsteady fingers fumbled for a moment round his lips.

'Yes,' he said, 'I was wrong.'

'He has always spoken of you with the greatest love and respect,' said Jocelyn. 'More than that, with admiration. But he very rarely spoke of you at all, which I think means more.'

Sir John blinked, and suddenly pulled himself together with a backward jerk of the arms which was habitual with him. It almost seemed as if he said to himself, as he squared his shoulders, 'Come, no giving way to old age!'

'Has his health been good?' he asked rather formally.

'I believe so, until quite lately. My brother heard yesterday by telegram that he was at Loango in broken health,' replied Jocelyn.

Sir John was looking at her keenly—his hard blue eyes like steel between the lidless lashes.

'You disquiet me,' he said. 'I have a sort of feeling that you have bad news to tell me.'

'No,' she answered, 'not exactly. But it seems to me that no one realises what he is doing out in Africa—what risks he is running.'

'Tell me,' he said, drawing in his chair. 'I will not interrupt you. Tell me all you know from beginning to end. I am naturally—somewhat interested.'

So Jocelyn told him. And what she said was only a recapitulation of facts known to such as have followed these pages to this point. But the story did not sound quite the same as that related to Millicent. It was fuller, and there were certain details touched upon lightly which had before been emphasised—details of dangers run and risks incurred. Also was it listened to in a different spirit, without shallow comment, with a deeper insight. Suddenly he broke into the narrative. He saw—keen old worldling that he was—a discrepancy.

'But,' he said, 'there was no one in Loango connected with the scheme who'—he paused, touching her sleeve with a bony finger—'Who sent the telegram home to young Oscard—the telegram calling him out to Jack's relief?'

'Oh,' she explained lightly, 'I did. My brother was away, so there was no one else to do it, you see!'

'Yes—I see.'

And perhaps he did.

Lady Cantourne helped them skilfully. But there came a time when Millicent would stand it no longer, and the amiable Grubb wriggled out of the room, crushed by a too obvious dismissal.

Sir John rose at once, and when Millicent reached them they were talking of the previous evening's entertainment.

Sir John took his leave. He bowed over Jocelyn's hand, and Millicent, watching them keenly, could see nothing—no gleam of a mutual understanding in the politely smiling eyes.

'Perhaps,' he said, 'I may have the pleasure of meeting you again?'

'I am afraid it is doubtful,' she answered, with something that sounded singularly like exultation in her voice. 'We are going back to Africa almost at once.'

And she, also, took her leave of Lady Cantourne.

CHAPTER XXXI.

SEED-TIME.

What Fate does, let Fate answer for.

One afternoon Joseph had his wish. Moreover, he had it given to him even as he desired, which does not usually happen. We are given a part, or the whole, so distorted that we fail to recognise it.

Joseph looked up from his work and saw Jocelyn coming into the bungalow garden.

He went out to meet her, putting on his coat as he went.

'How is Mr. Meredith?' she asked at once. Her eyes were very bright, and there was a sort of breathlessness in her manner which Joseph did not understand.

'He is a bit better, miss, thank you kindly. But he don't make the progress I should like. It's the weakness that follows the malarial attack that the doctor has to fight against.'

'Where is he?' asked Jocelyn.

'Well, miss, at the moment he is in the drawing-room. We bring him down there for the change of air in the afternoon. Likely as not, he's asleep.'

And presently Jack Meredith, lying comfortably somnolent on the outskirts of life, heard light footsteps, but hardly heeded them. He knew that some one came into the room and stood silently by his couch for some seconds. He lazily unclosed his eyelids for a moment, not in order to see who was there, but with a view of intimating that he was not asleep. But he was not wholly conscious. To men accustomed to an active, energetic life, a long illness is nothing but a period of complete rest. In his more active moments Jack Meredith sometimes thought that this rest of his was extending into a dangerously long period, but he was too weak to feel anxiety about anything.

Jocelyn moved away and busied herself noiselessly with one or two of those small duties of the sick-room which women see and men ignore. But she could not keep away. She came back and stood over him with a silent sense of possession which made that moment one of the happiest of her life. She remembered it in after years, and the complex feelings of utter happiness and complete misery that filled it.

At last a fluttering moth gave the excuse her heart longed for, and her fingers rested for a moment, light as the moth itself, on his hair. There was something in the touch which made him open his eyes—uncomprehending at first, and then filled with a sudden life.

'Ah!' he said, 'you—you at last!'

He took her hand in both of his. He was weakened by illness and a great fatigue. Perhaps he was off his guard, or only half awake.

'I never should have got better if you had not come,' he said. Then, suddenly, he seemed to recall himself, and rose with an effort from his recumbent position.

'I do not know,' he said with a return of his old half-humorous manner, 'whether to thank you first for your hospitality or to beg your pardon for making such unscrupulous use of it.'

She was looking at him closely as he stood before her, and all her knowledge of human ills as explored on the West Coast of Africa, all her experience, all her powers of observation, were on the alert. He did not look very ill. The brown of a year's sunburn such as he had gone through on the summit of an equatorial mountain, where there was but little atmosphere between earth and sun, does not bleach off in a couple of months. Physically regarded, he was stronger, broader, heavier-limbed, more robust than when she had last seen him—but her knowledge went deeper than complexion, or the passing effort of a strong will.

'Sit down,' she said quietly. 'You are not strong enough to stand about.'

He obeyed her with a little laugh.

'You do not know,' he said, 'how pleasant it is to see you—fresh and English-looking. It is like a tonic. Where is Maurice?'

'He will be here soon,' she replied; 'he is attending to the landing of the stores. We will soon make you strong and well; for we have come laden with cases of delicacies for your special delectation. Your father chose them himself at Fortnum and Mason's.'

He winced at the mention of his father's name, and drew in his legs in a peculiar, decisive way.

'Then you knew I was ill?' he said, almost suspiciously.

'Yes, Joseph telegraphed.'

'To whom?' sharply.

'To Maurice.'

Jack Meredith nodded his head. It was perhaps just as well that the communicative Joseph was not there at that moment.

'We did not expect you for another ten days,' said Meredith after a little pause, as if anxious to change the subject. 'Marie said that your brother's leave was not up until the week after next.'

Jocelyn turned away, apparently to close the window. She hesitated. She could not tell him what had brought them back sooner—what had demanded of Maurice Gordon the sacrifice of ten days of his holiday.

'We do not always take our full term,' she said vaguely.

And he never saw it. The vanity of man is a strange thing. It makes him see intentions that were never conceived; and without vanity to guide his perception man is as blind a creature as walks upon this earth.

'However,' he said, as if to prove his own density, 'I am selfishly very glad that you had to come back sooner. Not only on account of the delicacies—I must ask you to believe that. Did my eye brighten at the mention of Fortnum and Mason? I am afraid it did.'

She laughed softly. She did not pause to think that it was to be her daily task to tend him and help to make him stronger in order that he might go away without delay. She only knew that every moment of the next few weeks was going to be full of a greater happiness than she had ever tasted. As we get deeper into the slough of life most of us learn to be thankful that the future is hidden—some of us recognise the wisdom and the mercy which decree that even the present be only partly revealed.

'As a matter of fact,' she said lightly, 'I suppose that you loathe all food?'

'Loathe it,' he replied. He was still looking at her, as if in enjoyment of the Englishness and freshness of which he had spoken. 'Simply loathe it. All Joseph's tact and patience are required to make me eat even eleven meals in the day. He would like thirteen.'

At this moment Maurice came in—Maurice—hearty, eager, full of life. He blustered in almost as Joseph had prophesied, kicking the furniture, throwing his own vitality into the atmosphere. Jocelyn knew that he liked Jack Meredith—and she knew more. She knew, namely, that Maurice Gordon was a different man when Jack Meredith was in Loango. From Meredith's presence he seemed to gather a sense of security and comfort even as she did—a sense which in herself she understood (for women analyse love), but which in her brother puzzled her.

'Well, old chap,' said Maurice, 'glad to see you. I *am* glad to see you. Thank heaven you were bowled over by that confounded malaria, for otherwise we should have missed you.'

'That is one way of looking at it,' answered Meredith. But he did not go so far as to say that it was a way which had not previously suggested itself to him.

'Of course it is. The best way, I take it. Well—how do you feel? Come, you don't look so bad.'

'Oh—much better, thanks. I have got on splendidly the last week, and better still the last five minutes! The worst of it is that I shall be getting well too soon and shall have to be off.'

'Home?' inquired Maurice significantly.

Jocelyn moved uneasily.

'Yes, home.'

'We don't often hear people say that they are sorry to leave Loango,' said Maurice.

'*I* will oblige you whenever you are taken with the desire,' answered Jack lightly; 'Loango has been a very good friend to me. But I am afraid there is no choice. The doctor speaks very plain words about it. Besides, I am bound to go home.'

'To sell the Simiacine?' inquired Maurice.

'Yes.'

'Have you the second crop with you?'

'Yes.'

'And the trees have improved under cultivation?'

'Yes,' answered Jack rather wonderingly. 'You seem to know a lot about it.'

'Of course I do,' replied Maurice boisterously.

'From Durnovo?'

'Yes, he even offered to take me into partnership.'

Jack turned on him in a flash.

'Did he indeed? On what conditions?'

And then, when it was too late, Maurice saw his mistake. It was not the first time that the exuberance of his nature had got him into a difficulty.

'Oh, I don't know,' he replied vaguely. 'It's a long story. I'll tell you about it some day.'

Jack would have left it there for the moment. Maurice Gordon had made his meaning quite clear by glancing significantly towards his sister. Her presence, he intimated, debarred further explanation.

But Jocelyn would not have it thus. She shrewdly suspected the nature of the bargain proposed by Durnovo, and a sudden desire possessed her to have it all out—to drag this skeleton forth and flaunt it in Jack Meredith's face. The shame of it all would have a certain sweetness behind its bitterness; because, forsooth, Jack Meredith alone was to witness the shame. She did not pause to define the feeling that rose suddenly in her heart. She did not know that it was merely the pride of her love—the desire that Jack Meredith, though he would never love her, should know once for all that such a man as Victor Durnovo could be nothing but repugnant to her.

'If you mean,' she said, 'that you cannot tell Mr. Meredith because I am here, you need not hesitate on that account.'

Maurice laughed awkwardly, and muttered something about matters of business. He was not good at this sort of thing. Besides, there was the initial handicapping knowledge that Jocelyn was so much cleverer than himself.

'Whether it is a matter of business or not,' she cried with glittering eyes, 'I want you to tell Mr. Meredith now. He has a right to know. Tell him upon what condition Mr. Durnovo proposed to admit you into the Simiacine.'

Maurice still hesitated, bewildered, at a loss—such as men are when a seemingly secure secret is suddenly discovered to the world. He would still have tried to fend it off; but Jack Meredith, with his keener perception, saw that Jocelyn was determined—that further delay would only make the matter worse.

'If your sister wants it,' he said, 'you had better tell me. I am not the sort of man to act rashly—on the impulse of the moment.'

Still Maurice tried to find some means of evasion.

'Then,' cried Jocelyn with flaming cheeks, '*I* will tell you. You were to be admitted into the Simiacine scheme by Mr. Durnovo if you could persuade or force me to marry him.'

None of them had foreseen this. It had come about so strangely, and yet so easily, in the midst of their first greetings.

'Yes,' admitted Maurice, 'that was it.'

'And what answer did you give?' asked Jocelyn.

'Oh, I told him to go and hang himself—or words to that effect,' was the reply, delivered with a deprecating laugh.

'Was that your final answer?' pursued Jocelyn, inexorable. Her persistence surprised Jack. Perhaps it surprised herself.

'Yes, I think so.'

'Are you sure?'

'Well, he cut up rough and threatened to make things disagreeable; so I think I said that it was no good his asking me to do anything in the matter, as I didn't know your feelings.'

'Well, you can tell him,' cried Jocelyn hotly, 'that never, under any circumstances whatever, would I dream even of the possibility of marrying him.'

And the two men were alone.

Maurice Gordon gazed blankly at the closed door.

'How was I to know she'd take it like that?' he asked helplessly.

And for once the polished gentleman of the world forgot himself—carried away by a sudden unreasoning anger which surprised him almost as much as it did Maurice Gordon.

'Why, you damned fool,' said Jack, 'any idiot would have known that she would take it like that. How could she do otherwise? You, her brother, ought to know that to a girl like

Miss Gordon the idea of marrying such a low brute as Durnovo could only be repugnant. Durnovo—why, he is not good enough to sweep the floor that she has stood upon! He's not fit to speak to her; and you go on letting him come to the house, sickening her with his beastly attentions! You're not capable of looking after a lady! I would have kicked Durnovo through that very window myself, only—' he paused, recalling himself with a little laugh—'only it was not my business.'

Maurice Gordon sat down forlornly. He tapped his boot with his cane.

'Oh, it's very well for you,' he answered; 'but I'm not a free agent. *I* can't afford to make an enemy of Durnovo.'

'You need not have made an enemy of him,' said Jack, and he saved Maurice Gordon by speaking quickly—saved him from making a confession which could hardly have failed to alter both their lives.

'It will not be very difficult,' he went on; 'all she wants is your passive resistance. She does not want you to help *him*—do you see? She can do the rest. Girls can manage these things better than we think, if they want to. The difficulty usually arises from the fact that they are not always quite sure that they do want to. Go and beg her pardon. It will be all right.'

So Maurice Gordon went away also, leaving Jack Meredith alone in the drawing-room with his own thoughts.

(*To be continued.*)

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MATTHEW AUSTIN.[1]

BY W. E. NORRIS.

CHAPTER IX.

UNFORESEEN PERIL.

It falls to the lot of doctors and parsons to see many strange things, and they are, or ought to be, much less easily astonished than the rest of us. Anglican clerics, it is true, learn remarkably little, as a rule, considering what their opportunities are, because they lack that preliminary training which is of so much value to their brethren of the Romish communion; but the average English doctor knows a good deal and may be relied upon to exercise the average English common sense in dealing with the facts before him. Matthew Austin, therefore, ascribed no more importance than it deserved to an episode which might have had uncomfortable results for Miss Frere, if not for himself, nor did he think it incumbent upon him to go out of his way in order to call at Hayes Park and ascertain whether she had effected her midnight entry without detection. Hearing nothing in the course of the next few days, he assumed—and was quite correct in assuming—that she and the nurse had managed matters successfully between them.

For the rest, he was a little disinclined to seek further occasions of private parley with Anne, fearing lest she might insist upon hearing more about her brother than it was desirable that she should hear. Colonel Egerton's confidential report respecting the latter had, in truth, been somewhat disquieting, although from a strictly professional point of view it had been satisfactory

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enough. The letter which had been handed over to Matthew by the official personage at the War Office was brief and frank.

'Personally, I like the man,' the Colonel wrote. 'I think he would make a first-rate officer, and I have had one or two talks with him and given him some good advice. But whether he will keep straight or not I can't say. I don't believe he drinks; only it is always one of two things, you know, and in his case I suspect that it's the other thing. He is too good-looking and too much given to swagger. Of course all the women here—the so-called ladies, I mean—have found out that he is a gentleman, and it would not surprise me to hear at any moment that he had got himself into a scrape. I only say this in order that you may breathe a word of warning to his friends. I can't very well speak to him upon the subject, except in general terms.'

That was tantamount to saying that an advance from the general to the particular might be made without indiscretion by Sergeant Frere's friends, and Matthew, after some hesitation, had decided to address a few lines to his unknown *protégé*, quoting Colonel Egerton's remarks and venturing to add a few comments of his own thereupon. No answer had reached him, nor in fact had he expected any; but he had his own misgivings, grounded upon some previous acquaintance with good-looking, swaggering and ostentatiously reckless young men.

Meanwhile, he was forced to recognise regretfully that his attempt to bring about an intimacy between Anne Frere and Lilian Murray had been a failure. Lilian, when casually interrogated upon the subject, confessed candidly that she did not like Miss Frere.

'I went to tea with her yesterday,' the girl said, 'and I should have yawned my head off if I hadn't been particularly cautioned by mamma to mind my manners. Besides, as she is such a friend of yours, I thought I would try my very best to be amiable. But she frightened and froze me. I suppose she never makes you feel inclined to swear at her, does she?'

'I can't say that she has produced that effect upon me as yet,' answered Matthew, laughing.

'Well, she produces that effect upon *me*. Oh, not because of anything that she says or does; only because one can't help wondering what the consequences would be. I see you don't understand and I can't explain. You like people because they are good.'

'One might have a worse reason for liking them.'

'Yes; but it's a reason for disliking them when one isn't over and above good one's self, and when they *are* over and above good. You are as good as gold; but then you have a different way of showing your goodness.'

All this was so manifestly unfair that Matthew could only hold his peace and reflect that fairness towards one another is not the common attribute of women. He might have gone a little further and remembered that jealousy is their universal attribute, had he not been determined to look upon Lilian Murray as a mere child. To suppose that her jealousy could have been aroused by his frequently expressed admiration for Anne Frere would, according to his view, have been a little too ridiculous.

He now ceased, however, to express that admiration with so much frequency; because praise of the absent was never yet known to overcome prejudice. It was a pity that two ladies so charming in their respective fashions could not hit it off together; but since they could not, there was no more to be said. Lilian, too—so he was informed when he paid his hurried daily visits to her mother—was in less urgent need of companionship than she had been. Wilverton was filling rapidly; the gouty and rheumatic arrivals included, as might have been anticipated, a few acquaintances of Lady Sara's, and these had brought with them relatives who were not yet of an age to understand the meaning of stiff joints. Lilian was no longer forced to rely solely upon her own resources for killing time, while Lady Sara herself was enlivened by remote contact with the outer world.

The unfortunate thing was that this natural craving for contact with the outer world was apt to bring her into contact with the outer air more often than her medical adviser could think prudent. He did not like to forbid drives with friends who had a comfortable carriage at her service and whose society was good for her spirits; but he feared that these well-meaning people were not quite as careful as they should have been to avoid exposing her to raw cold, and, dropping in at Prospect Place late one evening, he found, sure enough, that she had at last caught the chill which he had dreaded. He packed her off to bed at once, prescribed remedies and hoped for the best; but it was no surprise to him to be called back, a few hours later, and to discover that his patient was undoubtedly in for an attack of bronchitis.

'We have taken it in time and we ought to be able to stave off serious mischief,' he told the alarmed Lilian. 'We won't meet trouble half-way, anyhow. I have given full instructions to the nurse, but if it would be a comfort to you to see me, you must not scruple to send for me at any hour of the day or night.'

She would not, in any case, have been likely to be troubled with scruples on that score, for she had implicit faith in Matthew's powers and probably did not think that other patients of his might be as much in want of him as her mother was; but poor Lady Sara soon became so ill that there was every excuse for the imploring message which reached him before he was up on the following morning. He hastened to Prospect Place as soon as he had put on his clothes, and could not disguise either from himself or from those about her that the sick woman was in a bad way. Complications which he had dreaded, but had preferred not to anticipate, had set in with unexpected suddenness, and whether he would be able to pull her through or not was a very doubtful question indeed.

In emergencies of that crucial kind Matthew always instinctively assumed his professional manner; so that Lilian was rather overawed by the concise, peremptory orders issued to her, and hardly ventured to inquire what was the matter. She would not have understood if she had been told, and indeed he told her no more than that they had now pleurisy as well as bronchitis to contend against; but later in the day he thought it his duty to ask whether she would like to have a second opinion and to offer, in that case, to telegraph to London for her.

'I don't know,' she answered, catching her breath; 'how can I tell? Won't you advise me about what I ought to do?'

Matthew considered for a minute or two. 'Well,' he replied at length, 'I am willing to take the entire responsibility upon myself. I say this, knowing that you may blame me hereafter, and I would not say it unless I were absolutely certain that the whole College of Physicians could give me no real help in the present instance.'

'Do you mean that there is no hope, then?' asked the girl, with quivering lips.

'No; I only mean that I have not the slightest doubt as to the method of treatment. More than that I must not say: it is for you to choose.' She chose instantly and unhesitatingly—not, of course, understanding that Matthew had risked a severe blow to his reputation in order to spare her pocket.

'If you can't save mamma's life, nobody can,' she cried. 'And,' she added, after a moment, 'whatever happens, you may be sure that I shall never be such a wretch as to blame you.'

Well, he was glad that she had decided to trust him. He could but do his best, and he knew that no eminent London colleague could do more than he was doing; but during the week that ensued he had a very anxious time of it. Sometimes he felt almost sanguine, but more often he despaired. The odds against the patient's recovery were too formidable to be overcome by skill; her only chance lay in a stock of vitality with which he had no reasonable ground for crediting her.

Nevertheless, skill counts for something, and a day came at length when he was able to say that he had gained the victory which he had set himself to gain. Lady Sara, exhausted and barely conscious, might or might not sink in the course of the next twenty-four hours; but her disease, or rather diseases, had been beaten. This was what he told Lilian, whose courage and self-command had won his enthusiastic admiration during the trying time through which she had passed, and to whom he now knew that he might venture to speak in plain language. She, on her side, had learnt to regard him with that species of unquestioning adoration which women usually reserve for priests. Perhaps she did not realise—not knowing how busy he was—the extent to which he had sacrificed hours which should have been devoted to rest and food in order that he might be as constantly as possible in attendance upon her mother; but she did know that it was he who had enabled her to endure the long ordeal of watching and nursing and that his unflagging cheerfulness alone had preserved her from giving way to despair. Already she had begun to wonder what would become of her when the blow which seemed to be almost inevitable should have fallen and when there would be no further need for a doctor's services in that house.

'If only it were to-morrow morning!' she sighed wistfully.

'Do you think you will be able to come quite early?'

'Oh, I'm only going away for about an hour,' he answered. 'There are two people whom I *must* see; but I have arranged with Dr. Jennings about the others and I mean to stay the night here. That will enable you to go to bed, which it is absolutely necessary that you should do. You may depend upon me to have you called, in case of any change.'

She had become so docile that it no more occurred to her to dispute his commands than to protest against his sitting up all night. She only ejaculated, 'Oh, what a mercy! I feel as if nothing very bad could happen while you are here. But must I undress? I am so dead tired that I could sleep quite soundly on the sofa in the sitting-room.'

Matthew, after a moment's consideration, made the concession required of him. 'It isn't the same thing,' he said, 'and I can't have you falling ill upon my hands through sheer over-fatigue. Still, for this one night, you may keep your clothes on. Afterwards you will have to remember that it is indispensable for you to husband your forces.'

'But will there be an afterwards?'

'Well, well! At all events, you must sleep, and I see by your eyes that sleep will come, whether you wish for it or not. Now it is time for me to be off. I won't be absent for more than an hour and a half, at the outside.'

He was not absent quite so long as that. The 'arrangement' which he had concluded with Dr. Jennings was simply the handing over of certain patients to that bland practitioner, who had pointed out, with equal courtesy and firmness, that it would be not only improper but impossible for him to enter into anything which might have the appearance of a partnership with Mr. Austin. Matthew, therefore, was free for twelve hours to come, and congratulated himself upon his freedom. Only the nurse was in Lady Sara's room when he returned. Lilian, as he had anticipated, had succumbed to irresistible physical weariness and was sleeping heavily upon the sofa in the sitting-room, the nurse said.

He gave orders that she was on no account to be disturbed, dismissed the nurse to take an hour or two of the rest which she also urgently required and seated himself by the bedside. There for a long time he remained, watching the semi-conscious sufferer, whose ceaseless movements gave him little encouragement, and deftly administering nourishment to her every now and again. She was going to die; he was almost sure of that now; and mingled with his professional sense of disappointment and failure was an intense pity for the helpless girl whom she was about to leave behind her. It was so easy to foresee what would happen!—the period of dependence upon annoyed relations, the hastily-arranged *mariage de convenance*, the results which, in most cases, follow such unions as a matter of course. And all this because the age of miracles is said to be past, because Providence no longer interferes with the process of Nature, because dying women cannot be kept alive in order that mundane affairs may run more smoothly!

'Are we punished for our want of faith, or are we only meant to understand that our responsibilities are greater than we have chosen to assume?' Matthew wondered.

But soon after midnight something took place which lifted the burden of immediate responsibility off his shoulders and which may have been an answer to his half-formulated prayers. He had not expected it; for a few seconds he scarcely dared to believe in it; but presently he satisfied himself that he had made no mistake and that his patient was at last quietly slumbering. The nurse had by this time returned, and he whispered to her that he was going to impart the good news to Miss Murray, whom he could hear stirring in the adjoining room.

'I believe we shall pull this case through, after all,' he murmured hopefully.

To which the woman replied, 'It's thanks to you, sir, if we do.'

Well, that might or might not be so; but thanks which, if a little premature, were wholly irrepressible, at all events awaited him. Lilian, hardly yet awake, was standing, with dazed, wide-open eyes beside the sofa when he entered, and at his first words her self-control, which she had maintained with so much difficulty during many anxious days and nights, forsook her altogether. She burst suddenly into hysterical weeping, she seized Matthew's hand and kissed it, passionate words and sentences, intended to express the gratitude which was perhaps his due, and attributable, as every reasonable man must have perceived, merely to her overstrung condition, broke from her lips. Matthew, who was nothing if not reasonable, soothed her to the best of his ability and tried not to listen more than he could help to what she was saying. One doesn't, of course, listen more than one can help to the delirious ravings of those who, for the time being, have ceased to be sane fellow-creatures. But where does sanity end and insanity begin? If that question could be answered, a good deal of trouble might be averted.

Anyhow, it was by no means certain yet that the great trouble which threatened Lilian Murray could be averted, and this was what Matthew strove to explain to her as soon as she had in some degree recovered her composure. Her mother, he assured her, was still very dangerously ill. There had been a turn for the better, and he had hopes now which he had not entertained a few hours earlier: more than that he could not feel justified in saying. But Lilian would have none of these stereotyped phrases.

'As if I could not see by your face that you have saved her!' she exclaimed, half laughing through her tears. 'Oh, and you have saved me too!—if you only knew! It is horrible to be so selfish and to think of anything or anybody except her; but I couldn't help it. All this time I have felt certain that I should lose her, and there isn't another creature in the world who cares a pin for me. It is what she has always dreaded—dying before I married—we have often talked about it. You see, ours has been a rather unfortunate family, and she was afraid—when one is obliged to find a home somewhere, one can't pick and choose——'

These incoherent avowals were intelligible enough to Matthew, who was unable to respond to them in his customary quasi-paternal tone. He was unable, in fact, to respond to them otherwise than a little gruffly; for it had dawned upon him all of a sudden that the regard which he felt for Lilian Murray was not paternal at all and that it behoved him to take very great care what he said. That, notwithstanding the warm language which she had employed just now, she could entertain any sentiment towards a country doctor save one of somewhat exaggerated gratitude was, of course, as much out of the question as it would have been for him to abuse the position of trust in which he was placed; yet, in the event of a not improbable contingency, might she not do worse than become the wife even of a country doctor, who loved her?

But this latter query was one which merely flitted across Matthew's brain while he was regaining his hold over himself and making the girl swallow a few drops of sal volatile. If his own nervous system had been temporarily shaken almost as much as hers, he had had far more practice in reducing it to submission, and he soon recovered his natural voice and manner. On quitting her, however, to return to Lady Sara's room, he inwardly determined not to see her again before the morning. The nurse should be sent to her, he promised, when her mother woke.

CHAPTER X.

AN UPSET.

Of all the triumphs that fall to the share of the fortunate among mankind how many are due to desert and how many to simple good fortune? Modest Field-Marshals, Prime Ministers, patentees of epoch-making inventions, renowned jockeys and other shining lights—it must be said for these heroes that most of them are quite modest—are wont to ascribe their several exalted positions to the latter rather than to the former cause. Still nothing succeeds like success, and, when all deductions have been made, the rough-and-ready rule of judging by results remains the only safe one open to us. Possibly Lady Sara Murray recovered from her dangerous illness, not because she had an excellent and most attentive doctor, but because her constitution was a tougher one than it appeared to be; but this did not prevent Mr. Austin from reaping immense credit for having snatched a patient out of the very jaws of death, nor, to tell the truth, did it prevent him from triumphing in a quiet way when nobody was looking on.

He stood at his dining-room window, one morning after breakfast, gazing out at the brown, empty flower-beds and the evergreen shrubs, illumined by pale rays of winter sunshine, and said to himself that this sort of thing was worth living for. A week had elapsed since that critical night when he had all but made up his mind that Lilian Murray was to be left an orphan, and he was now able to affirm that immediate risk of that catastrophe was at an end. Whether through his skill alone or only through his skill, supplemented by favourable circumstances, Lady Sara was about to enter upon the convalescent stage, and, after all, the labourer is worthy of his hire. It was a legitimate triumph, which he was fully entitled to enjoy.

But what—beyond the enhanced reputation to which he attached no more value than it merited—was his hire? And why was he in such exuberant spirits as to be unable to help ejaculating aloud that life was worth living? He was not greatly given to introspection, or he might have felt it his duty to take himself to task somewhat severely upon these points. There is surely no great cause for exultation in having fallen desperately in love with a girl of little more than half your own age and considerably more than double your own social importance. A man who allows himself to behave in that way is no better than an ass, while, if he were to contemplate taking advantage of a family physician's opportunities for the furtherance of projects upon which lovers are usually intent, he would be rather worse than an ass. But Matthew was troubled with no such unpleasant reflections. It was perfectly obvious to him that Lilian Murray was, for all practical purposes, as far removed from his reach as a royal princess; he no more dreamt of declaring his love than of asking himself whether, by any wild possibility, it could be returned; he was simply satisfied with seeing her every day, with knowing that, for the time being, he had made her happy and with noticing how her face lighted up the moment that his own came within her view. There exist, amongst the endless varieties of human beings, a few of his sort: men and women who are genuinely—constitutionally, it may be—unselfish and who, without any figure of speech, are fonder of their fellow-mortals than they are of themselves.

From one point of view it was doubtless fortunate both for Matthew and for Lilian that they were ignorant of the reports which were being industriously circulated about them by Mrs. Jennings and other unemployed old ladies; for, had they been aware of these, their intercourse must necessarily have become less unembarrassed than it was. But one of them, when he went his daily rounds, was in too great a hurry to listen to gossip, while the other heard nothing and saw nobody. A certain number of professedly anxious inquirers did, indeed, get as far as the door of the house in Prospect Place, but no farther. Lilian sent reports of her mother's condition down to them, but steadily declined to receive them, alleging that she did not feel fit to do so. She would not even see Mrs. Frere, who brought flowers and grapes, and who was goodnaturedly desirous of cheering the poor girl up. It was Matthew who encountered that kind-hearted lady just as she was upon the point of driving away one day, and who was beckoned to and questioned by her.

'Can't we be of any use?' Mrs. Frere wanted to know. 'One doesn't wish to be a nuisance; only one would like to do what one could, and it makes me wretched to think of poor little Miss Murray without a single friend to speak to in her trouble. Oh, I know she has you, and you have been quite indefatigable, they tell me; still you are a man, you see, and men, with the best will in the world, can't understand exactly how to deal with girls.'

If a delicate hint was intended to be conveyed by this remark, it was lost upon Matthew, who thought he knew quite well how to deal with Miss Murray and who had no suspicion that the gossips were busy with his name and hers. What caused him a moment's self-reproach, when Mrs. Frere had left him, was that he had forgotten to inquire after Anne—had, indeed, for some little time past almost forgotten Anne's existence. To be sure, as he reflected, half commiserating, half laughing at himself, there had been excuses for him. Who doesn't forget his friends when he has been goose enough to fall in love?

The danger that lay before him no doubt was that he might forget, not only people, but certain things which it was very necessary for his peace of mind to remember. Associating, as he did, with Lilian and her mother upon terms of equality, he might insensibly drift into a false estimate of their respective stations, might even allow himself to cherish hopes which were palpably absurd. Lady Sara, sitting up in bed, and being now permitted to talk as much as she liked, administered an anticipatory corrective, one day, which was all the more effective because it was evidently dictated by no *arrière-pensée.*

'I can't deny that it is pleasant to feel one's health returning,' said she; 'still I am ever so much more indebted to you on Lilian's account than I am on my own. If you can patch me up enough to enable me to get through one London season, I shall be ready to sing *Nunc dimittis* and expire, blessing you. Of course she is young, and one would gladly have waited a year or two; but I must not think of that—there isn't time. With her face, and with the connections I have managed to keep up, a husband of the requisite rank and means ought to be discovered for her without much difficulty.'

'Is it so certain that rank and wealth are essential to happiness?' Matthew inquired.

'Oh, yes, I think so. At any rate, wealth is. You see, my dear Mr. Austin, I am not in a state to maintain pretty fictions—even if anybody did maintain them nowadays. Grim realities stare me in the face, and I have seen a good deal of the world in my time. I wish it were what poets and romance-writers try to make it out; but unfortunately it isn't. Lilian is like a thousand other girls and will be like a thousand other women; she may miss the very best that is attainable, but I hope to provide her at least with the second best. And I suppose we all know what that is.'

Matthew supposed that we did. With a rather heavy heart he went down to the door, where his dog-cart was waiting to take him several miles out into the country. He had an outlying patient to visit, and as he drove at his usual rapid pace through the raw, moist air and along the muddy roads, he meditated upon what the second best was likely to mean in Lilian's case. Some horrible old Marquis of Carrabas, perhaps, or some recently ennobled plutocrat, either of whom would weary of her charms and neglect her sooner or later. Well, then there would remain the consolations of jewels, dresses and an abundance of creature comforts—possibly also the more legitimate consolation of maternity. It is useless to pretend that these things do not console; one must needs look truth in the face. But there are moments when Truth seems to wear so ugly a face that one would fain leave her at the bottom of her well and shut down the lid.

Matthew was precluded by the honesty of his nature from having recourse to that measure; so his spirits gradually sank lower and lower, as the shades of evening fell, although he knew no more now than he had known from the first. He had seen his patient and was returning towards Wilverton when a young man on a bicycle shot noiselessly past him, splashing some mud into his face and starting the mare into a gallop. Matthew had one of his wheels half-way up a bank before he knew where he was; but his customary good luck preserved him from an upset, and presently he succeeded in checking the mare, while James, the groom, delivered himself of some forcible remarks upon cyclists in general and upon the young man who had so nearly caused an accident in particular.

'I wish he'd break his dratted neck, that I do!' ejaculated the irate James; 'such fellers ain't fit to live!'

'Upon my word, James, I believe you have got your wish!' exclaimed Matthew, as the sound of a crashing fall some distance ahead caught his ear. 'He is down, anyhow, and had a nasty cropper, I suspect. This comes of tearing downhill a hundred miles an hour.'

It was the work of little more than a minute to overtake the reckless cyclist, who was discovered prostrate beside the heap of stones which had brought about his disaster, his broken and twisted machine lying near him. He was not unconscious, but he had cut himself a good deal about the face and seemed to be somewhat dazed, as well as very angry. After Matthew had rendered him some preliminary services, he relieved his feelings by objurgating bicycles with a vehemence which would have done credit to James himself. Then he remarked:

'I don't know how many bones I've broken, but I can't move either of my arms without swearing. If you happen to know of any local Pill-box residing in the neighbourhood, it would be an act of charity to drive on and tell him that he'll find me by the wayside. You might just mention that my name is Jerome and that I'm staying with my uncle Mr. Litton at the Grange. I dare say he'll know my uncle.'

'I myself happen to be a local Pill-box,' answered Matthew good-humouredly, 'and if you will let me hoist you into my cart, I will drive you to the Grange without jolting you more than I can help. You have broken your right arm—I am not sure about the left—and I will set it for you as soon as I get you home. That is, unless your uncle, who is not one of my patients, prefers to send for somebody else.'

The stranger accepted this offer with many thanks, and apologised for having inadvertently spoken of the Good Samaritan who had come to his aid as a Pill-box. Of course, he remarked, he wouldn't have done it if he had known. It was no easy matter to lift him over the wheel and place him in a semi-recumbent attitude upon the front seat, for he was a very tall and rather heavy young man; but with the help of James the feat was accomplished, and Matthew, resuming the reins, started the mare at a gentle pace towards Wilverton Grange, a large modern mansion with the whereabouts of which he was well acquainted.

His neighbour, at whom he glanced from time to time, was a handsome, as well as a powerfully built fellow, with black hair, dark-blue eyes and regular features. He had no hair about his face, and could afford to follow the modern custom of shaving clean, since there was no fault to be found with the shape of his mouth. Just now his countenance was adorned with sundry cuts and bruises, and he was evidently in a good deal of pain; but this he bore uncomplainingly. What vexed him, it appeared, was that he should have been the victim of a bicycle accident.

'I shouldn't so much have minded coming to grief out hunting or in a steeplechase,' he observed ruefully; 'that would at least have been respectable. But to be smashed up by an idiotic machine like that!—well, it will be a lesson to me. After this, I do hope my uncle will see how inhuman it is to ask a fellow down here for a fortnight and never offer to put up his horses. The very least he can do now is to pay the coach-builder in Wilverton from whom I hired that brute of a thing. I expect he'll have the additional pleasure of entertaining me for another month, eh? How long does it generally take to get over this sort of business?'

Matthew replied that he could not possibly give an opinion without knowing what the extent of the injuries was. He was inclined to suspect that the young man was rather badly hurt; but of course he did not say so, and he made for Wilverton Grange as quickly as circumstances would permit. Of the wealthy and eccentric bachelor to whom that establishment belonged he had heard something from Mrs. Jennings, but, not being inquisitive, had forgotten the greater part of what the well-informed lady had told him. The place had been built many years before by Mr. Litton, who had likewise purchased by degrees a vast extent of adjoining property, and had consequently become, in a certain sense, the great man of the neighbourhood. He was in the habit of contributing munificently to local charities and public works, he lived all by himself, he never called upon anybody, and he was reported to have an uncommonly nasty temper. That was all that Matthew could remember about him.

What most people would have remembered, as a more or less interesting detail, was that he had a nephew—the shattered bicyclist, in fact—to whom it was generally assumed that he would some day leave the whole of his possessions; but that, it is true, was none of Matthew's business. His business was to ascertain what was the matter, and he proceeded to do so with all possible celerity after halting beneath the imposing Grecian portico of the Grange and hastily informing the butler and the footman of the accident which had occurred. Mr. Jerome was silently and swiftly taken upstairs—the servants being evidently anxious above all things to avoid alarming or disturbing their master—and, at the end of a careful and prolonged examination, Matthew had the satisfaction of announcing that a pair of broken arms practically constituted the sum of the mischief done.

'Not that that isn't enough,' he remarked, looking down compassionately upon the victim; 'only it might have been much worse. As it is, I am afraid you will have to resign yourself to a little immediate pain and some weeks of helplessness. I have done as much as I can for the present; but I will despatch my groom for the things that I want and stay with you until he comes back, if you like. Subject, of course, to your uncle's approval. Very likely he would rather send for his own doctor.'

'Oh, he be hanged!' returned the young man. 'My body is my own, if my soul isn't, and I suppose I am entitled to choose who shall put it into plaster of Paris for me. If you'll be good enough to undertake my case, I shall be only too grateful. I can see that you have light hands and that you know what you're about. All I beg of you is that you won't let the old man come in here, if you can help it. He is apt to be exasperating, and I don't feel quite fit to be exasperated just now.'

The speaker had by this time been put to bed, and was being attended to by his valet, who seemed to be a quiet and capable sort of man. Presently Matthew went away to give the requisite instructions to James, and was returning towards his patient's bedroom when he was intercepted at the top of the staircase by a little old gentleman, leaning upon a stick, who said, in a thin, sharp voice:

'Mr. Austin, I presume?'

Richard Litton was a man at whom nobody could look once without looking a second time, although his appearance could scarcely be described as prepossessing. Bent, undersized and wearing a short grey beard, while his upper lip was shaved, he did not impress the beholder as being either handsome, amiable or well-bred, and his pinched features, shaggy eyebrows and piercing grey eyes conveyed the idea that they might belong to a miser. Avarice, however, was by no means one of his somewhat numerous defects, nor was his heart as hard as his forbidding manner suggested. Moreover, there was a certain indescribable aspect of power about his countenance which commanded attention, if not respect. He said he had been told by the butler of what had happened, put a few quick, pertinent questions, and ended by remarking:

'Well, I have always employed Dr. Jennings, and I shall continue to employ him when I am ill: I wish that to be clearly understood, please. But you are a younger man, and I dare say Leonard is better off with you. I am told that he is anxious to be left under your care. After all, it is only right that you should mend his bones, for I suppose you began by upsetting him and breaking them. I have heard that you are notorious for careless driving.'

'That may be,' answered Matthew; 'but it was not I who upset your nephew. On the contrary, he very nearly upset me; after which he proceeded to upset himself.'

'Indeed? Well, Mr. Austin, I am obliged to you for the trouble that you have taken, and so ought he to be. But he is an ungrateful fellow, you will find.'

'Oh, there hasn't been any trouble,' answered Matthew, laughing a little. 'Except, indeed, in hoisting him into the dog-cart. That, I must admit, was a troublesome job, for he is no light weight.'

'I understood you to say that he had broken his arms,' observed Mr. Litton; 'I don't see why that should make it necessary to lift him. At least, I am not aware that he is in the habit of walking upon his hands.'

'No; but if you will try to get into a dog-cart with your arms tied behind your back, you will find that your legs are not of as much service to you as usual.'

Matthew was rather surprised at perceiving that this rejoinder, which had not been meant to give offence, was taken in very ill part. He had not noticed that his interlocutor was slightly deformed, having one leg shorter than the other, and it was not until some time afterwards that he learnt how morbidly sensitive Mr. Litton was upon the subject. The old man drew his shaggy brows together and said, in cold, polite accents which contrasted with the half-good-humoured brusquerie of his previous utterances:

'You will, no doubt, be detained for some little time longer, Mr. Austin, and I hope you will do me the honour to eat your dinner here. I must ask you to excuse me from entertaining you personally, as I seldom take my meals in the dining-room, but I can trust my butler to take care that your comfort is not neglected. I have received an intimation that my nephew does not desire to be troubled with me; so I will not intrude upon him to-night. I wish you good-evening, sir.'

He moved away very slowly—so slowly that his lameness was barely perceptible—until he reached a certain doorway, through which he disappeared.

'Temper soured by prosperity and solitude and the consciousness of expectant heirs,' thought Matthew. 'Health probably indifferent, too; for his chest is contracted and there is a look of suffering about that hard, firm mouth of his. Men of his sort are very much to be pitied; still, all things considered, I am rather glad that he is not my uncle.'

CHAPTER XI.

THE CANTANKEROUS UNCLE.

If Matthew was not much prepossessed in favour of the uncle, he soon formed a high opinion of the nephew. There are people whose virtues demand patient excavation, while there are other and more fortunate folk whose fine qualities lie upon the surface for every eye to see and take pleasure in. Leonard Jerome's great popularity was probably due to the fact that he belonged to the latter class, and indeed his worst enemies—supposing that he had had any enemies at all—could hardly have refused him credit for courage and good-humour. Matthew had to give him considerable pain, and he neither winced nor protested under it; nor did he grumble more than was natural and pardonable at the prospect of a prolonged period of helplessness to which he was told that he must make up his mind. It is by no means everybody who is so cheerful or so reasonable as that, and Matthew, on concluding operations, felt impelled to say:

'I wish all my patients had your pluck!'

'When one doesn't like the inevitable, there is nothing to be done but to lump it,' observed Mr. Jerome philosophically. 'The really disgusting thing is to be punished in this way for an ignominious mishap which one will never be able to mention to one's friends without being sniggered at. That, and being laid up in Uncle Richard's house, of all places in the world! I suppose he is in a thundering rage, isn't he?'

'He did not appear to be so,' Matthew replied. 'I think he was a little bit afraid that I might seize this opportunity of representing myself as his medical attendant, and he wanted to make out that it was I who had caused your accident; but he was kind enough to offer me dinner.'

'Well, you'll get a good dinner, anyhow. And by the way, you must be about ready for it. Please go down and refresh yourself, and don't bother any more about me. I shall be all right with my man to look after me. He knows my little ways and won't quarrel with me for cursing him, as I dare say I shall, every time he moves me. What a mercy it is that I have brought him with me! I was within an ace of leaving him in London, because Uncle Richard hates having strange servants in the house, and a more cantankerous old beggar than my dear uncle I have never yet met. It is the chief aim and object of my life to keep friends with Uncle Richard, but I haven't made a bright success of it so far. Now go and get your dinner. Very many thanks to you for your clever treatment of me.'

Matthew's surgical treatment was always clever; but this particular case had afforded him no scope for doing more than any ordinary country practitioner could have done. Still it is never disagreeable to be thanked, and he went downstairs very well pleased with his new acquaintance. As for the dinner which was presently set before him, and which was deftly and silently served by the butler, it was beyond all praise. Now, Matthew, as has already been hinted, was not indifferent to creature comforts, while he loved small refinements. The spacious, well-warmed dining-room, the excellence of the subdued taste displayed in its furniture, the few admirable modern paintings which adorned its walls—all these things appealed to him; nor did he fail to take note of the thoughtfulness which had spared him the annoying and superfluous presence of several domestics. Mr. Litton, it was evident, was not only blessed with a first-rate *chef*, but with a delicate appreciation of the manner in which solitary guests ought to be entertained.

'Cantankerous he may be,' Matthew mused, after he had been left by the butler with cigarettes and a cup of coffee; 'but he can't be altogether selfish, or it never would have occurred to him to let me smoke in his dining-room. He himself doesn't look at all like a smoker. Still there's no knowing. If that nephew of his doesn't please him, he must be hard to please, one would think.'

That was exactly what the majority of Leonard Jerome's friends, some of whom likewise enjoyed the privilege of a slight acquaintance with Mr. Litton, did think. A man who couldn't get on with Jerome must be an ill-conditioned sort of old fellow, these sagacious persons were wont to observe, and it was really very hard lines on poor Jerome that he should be compelled by considerations of ordinary prudence to visit his uncle three or four times in the course of every year. The only consolation for them and for him—especially for him—lay in the thought that he would doubtless reap his reward ere long, Mr. Litton being over seventy years of age and visibly breaking up.

Meanwhile, Leonard Jerome was not so badly off but that he could very well afford to wait for a year or two. He had a property of his own in the far north of England, upon which, it is true, his income did not enable him to reside; but as he had not the slightest wish to reside there, this could hardly be regarded in the light of a privation. His place was let, and he received a rent for it which, together with the interest of the personal property which he had inherited from his late father, sufficed to provide him with the means of leading a gay bachelor existence. And his existence, so far, had been gay enough to render those occasional duty-visits to Wilverton Grange quite endurable, by way of an alterative. What with his good looks, his well-known expectations, his proficiency in games and field-sports, and a certain vague, yet not wholly undeserved, reputation that he enjoyed for being cleverer than his neighbours, he was in immense request, and always had more invitations of one kind and another than he could possibly accept. Of ready money he had, if not quite as much as he wanted, at least as much as he had any business to want. He could hunt and shoot and yacht and give excellent little dinners to those whose hospitality he felt disposed or bound to return. There were many ladies who were of opinion that he could also marry; but he had not as yet felt either bound or disposed to do that. So, upon the whole, he was a very enviable young man, and it was scarcely wonderful that he should be a very amiable young man into the bargain. If amiability be not the outcome of an excellent digestion, a comfortable pecuniary position and freedom from worry, physiologists must know much less about us than they pretend to know.

To whatever causes it may be due, and whatever excuses may be urged on behalf of those who do not possess it, amiability remains an attractive quality, and Matthew Austin's liking for this spoilt child of Fortune ripened into friendship all the more rapidly because it was reciprocated. It was, perhaps, not absolutely necessary that he should drive out to Wilverton Grange every day during the week that followed; but he found time to do so, and his visits were hailed with such joy that he was tempted to prolong them to the last available moment. Indeed, it was impossible to help liking and sympathising with an unfortunate fellow who, after the first day or two, felt perfectly well, yet was condemned to absolute dependence upon others and kept his temper through it all.

'There is this to be said for your comfort,' Matthew remarked, one afternoon, 'that you will be out and about again a good deal sooner than most men would, because you don't fuss and fret.'

'Oh, I daren't,' returned the other, laughing; 'I'm like the blind, who are always supposed to be such nice, cheery sort of people. They know very well that it would be as much as their place was worth to be anything else. If only I had the free use of my arms, my language would be something awful; but, as it is, I'm bound to be polite to a charitable man like you or I should lose the only jolly hour out of the twenty-four. Just you wait until I cease to be a mummy, and see if I don't punch your head for you!'

'It will be some little time before your arms are strong enough to do that, you will find,' observed Matthew.

'Will it? Then perhaps I'll let you off. More especially as I am under some slight obligations to you. I'll tell you what it is, Austin: you may not be aware of it, and I don't suppose you are, but you are one of the very best fellows that ever stepped.'

'Because I sit and talk to you when I can?'

'Well, that is one sign; but you have betrayed yourself in other ways. You will never make your fortune, my dear Austin—it is easy to foresee that—but you will always have just as many friends as patients. Which is probably what you would prefer.'

The two men had become intimate and had learnt a good deal about one another during those daily hours of companionship, which had not once been intruded upon by the master of the house. Of that eccentric recluse Matthew had seen nothing more, while he understood that his patient had seen very little; but on this occasion, just after the doctor had risen to depart, there came a smart rap upon the door from a stick, followed by the entrance of Mr. Litton.

The old man advanced towards the fire, held out a small, wasted hand to Matthew, and then, turning to his nephew, said, rather coldly: 'I hope you are better to-day.'

'Oh, I'm getting on, thanks,' answered Leonard.

'I am glad to hear it. This will put a stop to your hunting for the remainder of the season, I presume.'

'Well, I suppose so. It can't be helped.'

'It might have been helped; but that, to be sure, is your affair rather than mine. You will now, I should think, have had enough of balancing yourself on the top of a wheel, in emulation of shop-boys on Saturday afternoons; so that you are, perhaps, to be congratulated on your experience. It is a pity that you should be deprived of hunting, though. Hunting is not an intellectual amusement, but it is certainly preferable to gambling at Monte Carlo, which is the only alternative I know of open to a man of your tastes during the latter part of the winter.'

'What a charming way you have of putting things! As a mere matter of detail, I have only once been to Monte Carlo in my life, and on that occasion I lost the large sum of ten pounds.

Still, if it makes you any happier to call me a gambler, pray do so. Any stick is good enough to beat a dog with.'

'I believe I am correct in saying that you do gamble. Whether at public or at private tables is not very much to the point.'

'All right; I'm a gambler. Now can't we think of something a little more pleasant to talk about?'

But Mr. Litton evidently did not wish to be pleasant. He had—as Matthew divined at the time, and afterwards ascertained for certain—that querulous temperament which is more common amongst women than amongst men, which sometimes goes with physical deformity, and which seeks quarrels rather in the hope of a subsequent reconciliation than out of any ill-will towards the person quarrelled with. Such a man was naturally incomprehensible to a robust young athlete like Leonard Jerome, who saw no fun in snapping and snarling, and who, if his uncle had been poor, instead of rich, would doubtless have turned his back finally upon that cross-grained relative long ago.

There was more snapping and snarling in the course of the next five minutes than could be listened to with comfort. Of course young people resent injustice—not having yet had time to learn that injustice must be accepted, with a shrug, as one of the unavoidable accompaniments of terrestrial existence—and although Mr. Litton deserved the disrespectful retorts that he received, it was rather painful to notice how he winced under them. Matthew, being fond of young Jerome, wanted to get away, and took the first opportunity of making his escape. But hardly had he closed the door behind him when it was reopened to give egress to Mr. Litton, who struck his stick sharply upon the floor to attract the retreating doctor's attention and then beckoned him back.

'Are you in a hurry?' the old man asked. 'If not, I should be glad to have a word or two with you. Did you, by chance, read last week's *Lancet*?'

Matthew had read it, and had also perused an article upon which, to his surprise, Mr. Litton began to talk with evident knowledge of his subject. The article in question had dealt with the treatment of a rare and obscure malady, and Mr. Litton gave reasons for differing from the writer which, if not altogether novel, were entitled to consideration.

'Why, you are almost as well posted up as I am!' Matthew exclaimed, in astonishment. 'When did you study medicine?'

'In my spare moments, which are only too numerous. The greater part of my long life has been made up of spare moments, and I have studied many arts and sciences—to very little purpose. A few months of practical experience outweigh years of laborious reading. That is why I wanted to ask you whether, in any of the London hospitals, you had come across a case of the kind described. You used, I know, to do a good deal of hospital work before you got that nasty scratch which so nearly put a stop to your investigations for good and all.'

Nevertheless, it was not for the sake of adding to his store of medical erudition that Mr. Litton was detaining the young doctor, with whose history and present mode of life he incidentally displayed a somewhat startling familiarity. Matthew divined that much after professional topics had been dropped and he had been conducted into his host's picture-gallery, where there were some fine examples of the early Italian and Flemish schools. He was likewise acute enough to guess what was coming; and it came when Mr. Litton had proved himself as well acquainted with the technicalities of the pictorial art as with several other subjects which had cropped up in the course of his monologue.

'I see,' the old gentleman remarked at length, 'that you have a receptive mind. You don't know much about art, but you would like to know more, and you recognise that our bodies are not the most important part of us—though a physician might be excused, if anybody could, for thinking so. I wish you could manage to impart a few germs of infection to that nephew of mine!'

'Oh, he is young yet,' answered Matthew. 'His mind won't serve him any the worse in years to come because he is sensible enough to keep his body in good condition now. He will do, Mr. Litton.'

'No, he won't,' returned the other sharply. 'At least, I doubt very much whether he will. Do you imagine that he is one of those brainless, good-tempered, muscular youths who sow their wild oats in due course and settle down into useful, steady-going country gentlemen? If you do, you are a worse judge of character than I should have taken you for. No, Mr. Austin; Leonard Jerome is no fool, and it follows that he can't fool away his youth with impunity. I don't mind telling you another thing: he won't be allowed to fool away my money after I am gone, much as he would enjoy doing so.'

'But is he fooling away his youth?' Matthew asked.

'That is a matter of opinion. I call it folly, and worse than folly, to live only for self-indulgence and for so-called sport. I grant you that an ass may do that without particularly suffering from it; but Leonard has talents, and if he doesn't choose to use them, he will assuredly end by misusing them. Nemesis is not a mythical goddess—or rather, her existence rests upon the truth which is the foundation of all myths. Why isn't he in Parliament? He might be, if he cared to take the necessary steps and go through the necessary preliminary training. But I need not ask you why, since I know. It is because he is too lazy and too selfish.'

'I think you are rather hard upon him,' Matthew said.

'You won't think so when you know him better. I can see that you and Leonard are going to be friends, Mr. Austin, which is my reason for speaking to you in this way. You may have some influence over him, and you may advance his worldly prospects by exercising it judiciously. I need scarcely tell you that he is only here with a view to the advancement of his worldly prospects. My poor house would not often have the privilege of sheltering him if he thought that I intended to bequeath all I possess to public institutions and charities—a thing which I may very possibly do, by the way.'

'It is a great pity,' Matthew observed musingly, 'to be so suspicious. Suspicions of that kind have a tendency to bring about their own justification—just as a man may make himself genuinely ill by morbid fears of illness. You ought to fight against them, instead of nursing them.'

Mr. Litton stared. He was quite unaccustomed to being addressed with so much freedom, and he was not sure that he liked it. He ended, however, by breaking into a short laugh and remarking: 'You are not greatly in awe of me, Mr. Austin, it seems.'

'Why should I be?' Matthew asked, with a pleasant smile.

'Ah, that I can't tell you; only most people are. Even my nephew is afraid of me; though there isn't much reverence connected with his fear, I suspect. No doubt he has told you in well-chosen language how profoundly he dislikes me and how he wishes that I would die and have done with it.'

This was a rather awkward question to answer, backed up as it was by the steady gaze of a pair of penetrating grey eyes; but Matthew could reply truthfully: 'He has never expressed any wish for your death in my presence. I believe he is under the impression that you have a profound dislike for him, and it isn't very surprising that he should be under that impression, is it?'

'Possibly not. Well, Mr. Austin, I won't keep you any longer. Will you permit me—as an old man, who may claim the privilege of taking certain liberties—to say that, whether I like or dislike my nephew, I like you? I shall always be glad to see you, and my library contains a number of medical works which you might perchance care to consult at one time or another. As to Leonard, I dare say you will not forget what I have said about the probable effect of your influence upon him.'

Matthew went away half amused and half touched. Neither his influence nor anybody else's could ever reconcile two natures so antagonistic as those of Mr. Litton and Leonard Jerome; but the simplicity with which the lonely old man had disclosed his craving for an affection which was certain to be denied him was pathetic enough, and it seemed at least possible that some *modus vivendi* might be brought about which would enable him to sign, with a clear conscience, the will that he so evidently desired to execute. Meanwhile, the confidences of the uncle and the nephew gave a fresh interest in life to one whose solicitude about the affairs of other people had become slightly diminished of late by an unwonted difficulty in forgetting his own.

CHAPTER XII.

PHILOSOPHY AND PERVERSITY.

It stood to reason—or, at all events, Matthew Austin thought it did—that such a girl as Lilian Murray could by no possibility fall in love with a man of his age, pursuits and social position. Even supposing that, by some miracle or other, she should come to imagine herself in love with him, it would be out of the question for him to take advantage of a childish illusion. Nothing could be more obvious than that, before making up her mind, she must see the world and its inhabitants, make acquaintance with young men who belonged to her own small section of the community and realise—as no doubt she would—that she had hitherto lived in blank ignorance of certain indisputable facts.

But he had to repeat these reflections to himself with great frequency and insistence; because Lilian's demeanour towards him was not at all unlike what it might have been if she had suspected his feelings and had returned them. During those weeks when he had good-naturedly devoted all the time that he could spare to chatting with Leonard Jerome, he had not, of course, neglected Lady Sara, whose progress towards recovery, though well maintained, had been somewhat slow, and, as a natural consequence, his interviews with Lady Sara's daughter had been of daily occurrence. In after years he looked back upon those interviews with a queer sort of wonder and sense of unreality. It is trite enough moralising to say that we change as we grow older, and that, although we continue to bear the same name and carry about with us a body which is more or less the same, we are no longer the same men and women that we were five or ten years ago. Yet nobody quite believes this, and everybody is apt to be startled when the fact is abruptly brought under his or her notice—which, to be sure, very seldom happens.

Anyhow, that was a happy time for Matthew, notwithstanding the misgivings which he was quite right to entertain and even the occasional moments of self-reproach which would have been more of a trouble to him had he been less free from personal vanity. Doctors and clerics are accustomed to being adored by women. They make mental deductions, unless they are downright fools, and know, or ought to know, pretty well what such adoration is worth. Probably, however, it is not altogether disagreeable while it lasts.

Now, by way of changing a subject which, if persisted with too long, became a little trying to his modesty, Matthew was wont to talk to these ladies about such of his patients as he thought likely to interest them, and chief among the number was, as may be supposed, the luckless Mr. Jerome, with whom Lady Sara in particular manifested much sympathy, not unmingled with curiosity.

'You really must introduce him to me as soon as he and I are in a state to be introduced to one another,' she said. 'From what you tell me, I am sure he is just the sort of young man I should like.' She added, with a slight laugh, 'Perhaps—who knows?—he may also be the sort of young man whom Lilian would like. And when he succeeds his uncle, he will be rich, will he not?'

Matthew did not wince. He had been inured to speculations of that kind by many previous speeches of a similar nature, and he only replied: 'Well, as I have told you, it isn't certain yet that he will succeed his uncle. I haven't a doubt that you will both like him, though, and I will try to arrange a meeting by-and-by. Would you, when you are able to leave the house, care to come and look at my azaleas some day? If so, I might exhibit Jerome at the same time.'

Lady Sara said that would be delightful, while Lilian, on being subsequently informed of the treat in store for her, remarked that there would be no harm in having a fourth person.

'He will do to amuse mamma while you and I poke about the house and the garden,' said she. 'I am dying to see your house. I know it will be charming, like everything else about you.'

Matthew laughed and replied that the house really was charming, although nobody had told him before that everything else about him was. 'But it will be more in accordance with the fitness of things that I should entertain your mother,' he continued. 'You and Jerome will have my full leave to poke about the premises to your heart's content.'

'If you dare to treat me in that way,' the girl returned, quite as much in earnest as in joke, 'I will never forgive you! I *hate* young men! They always think it their duty to talk nonsense to young women, even when they could talk sense if they chose. And that isn't always.'

'You won't find them so hateful when you have seen a little more of them,' Matthew observed tranquilly.

Nevertheless, he could not help being glad that Lilian was not consumed with anxiety to meet this particular young man, and he left the house in one of those elated moods to which he had become subject, despite his conviction that there was nothing to be elated about. A more reasonable cause for satisfaction awaited him, on his return home, in the shape of a letter from his brother, who had apparently developed a patronising sort of interest in Spencer Frere, and who wrote to say that very encouraging reports had reached him with reference to that scapegrace. Sir Godfrey had good reason to believe—so he stated—that in six months' time, or possibly even sooner, the wished-for commission would be made out. He thought the young man's friends might be glad to hear of this.

One of them, no doubt, would; and Matthew was a little ashamed of himself when he remembered how long it was since he had held any communication, direct or indirect, with her. Because repeated refusals to dine with her parents could scarcely be counted as even indirect communications with Miss Frere. He had been obliged to decline those invitations, which had included an entreaty that he would spend a part of Christmas Day with his hospitable friends; his time had been so fully occupied that it had been out of the question for him to eat his meals at regular hours—much more so to eat them in other people's houses. But the real truth was that he had almost forgotten Anne Frere; and that was why he now took himself to task, wondering what excuse he could trump up to secure a few minutes of private conversation with her.

His good luck and poor Mr. Frere's misfortune solved that problem for him nearly as soon as he had begun to debate it. A heated groom from Hayes Park brought him a note, adorned and emphasised by many italics, in which Mrs. Frere besought him to come to her aid without delay. 'George has got one of his *very* bad fits of gout,' the distressed lady wrote, 'and is literally *roaring* with it! I don't suppose you can do much, for I know by experience that nobody can, but I think it would relieve him a little to swear at you, and I am *sure* you won't mind if he does. I have entreated him to swear at me, but he seems to doubt whether that would be right—which of course it wouldn't. Besides, it is just possible, after all, that you may be able to recommend something. So do, *please*, come as soon as you can.'

Matthew responded to this pathetic appeal with all possible despatch; and if he was not actually sworn at by the prostrate sufferer, he was given to understand in so many words that he and all the other members of an honourable profession were no better than a pack of charlatans.

'God bless my soul!' Mr. Frere exclaimed, 'I don't want to be told that I must have patience. As if I didn't know that! Why, I'm a monument of patience—an overturned monument—ask my wife if I ain't! What I want is something to relieve me of this infernal agony, and there isn't one of you who understands his trade well enough to give me what I want. Well, there!—I didn't mean that, my dear Austin; you mustn't mind me. I dare say you understand, at all events, that a man isn't responsible for his language when he is being tortured as I am now.'

'Oh, but we are not quite so incompetent as you make us out,' Matthew answered, cheerfully. 'I can promise you relief in a very short time, and when this bout is over—as it soon will be—you will feel all the better for it.'

The terrible ladies who, a few years ago, used to be so fond of grabbing reluctant acquaintances by the wrist and, after a solemn scrutiny of palm and fingers, announcing what his or her proclivities were, professed in a great many instances to have discovered the existence of a 'healing hand.' Perhaps not a large number of the persons to whom this mysterious virtue was ascribed really possessed it; but Matthew Austin ought certainly to have been included in that select band. It was always said of him in his hospital days that his touch seemed to soothe where that of his colleagues necessarily gave pain; and Mr. Frere wonderingly admitted as much after the medicated wool in which his foot was swathed had been removed and replaced.

'I don't know how on earth you manage it, Austin,' the old gentleman said, 'but you have positively made me easier, instead of hurting me. Even Anne can't do what you did just now without hurting me like the devil, and Anne is the only person in the house who is fit to come near a gouty patient.'

'Is it she who nurses you?' Matthew inquired, hoping that, in that case, it would not be long before she made her appearance.

'She does little things for me; I'm not quite reduced to the necessity of having a nurse yet,' answered Mr. Frere, who was still rather cross and ready to take offence, though less disposed to execrate the whole race of doctors than he had been a few minutes before. 'But I must say for Anne that she tries her best with everything that she undertakes. You may have noticed that.'

'Yes, I have noticed that. She has strong affections, too; I should say.'

'Oh, all women have strong affections: the trouble is that they are apt to bestow them unworthily. Anne herself—but I dare say you have heard something, and I don't care to talk about it. Only I know rather more than she imagines.'

Matthew, thinking that he saw his opportunity, ventured to begin: 'If you are alluding to your son——'

'Ah,' interrupted Mr. Frere, speaking in a quiet, decided voice, very unlike that which was habitual to him, 'I suspected that she had mentioned her brother to you. That is why I introduced the subject. Now, I want you to understand, Austin, once for all, that it's a forbidden subject. Anne knows that; but I am afraid she thinks I may be got at in roundabout ways—which is quite a mistake. I have my reasons for acting as I have done, and if you and others set me down as a hard-hearted old brute, I can't help it. Now we'll say no more about the matter, please.'

Thus it is that human nature is wont to turn its back upon itself and perplex the painstaking student. Mr. Frere's words were words of wisdom, but really they should not by rights have proceeded out of the mouth of a choleric old gentleman whose head ought to have been as soft as the heart which he had proclaimed his willingness to hear called hard. In any case, Matthew could but bow to his request and say no more. He remained by the bedside as long as there was any excuse for remaining; but since Anne neither showed herself nor was, apparently, expected to do so, he had to take his leave at length.

'I'll swallow your stuff, though I don't suppose it will do me one atom of good,' was Mr. Frere's valedictory remark. 'If you come across my daughter on your way out, you might just mention that I haven't been able to read the *Times* yet, because of the infernal crackling that it makes when I try to hold it up to the light.'

As a matter of fact, Matthew did come across one of Mr. Frere's daughters before he had advanced very far along the corridor; only unfortunately it was not the right one. Maggie bounced out from the ambush where she had been patiently lying in wait and, catching him by the arm, implored him to come to the schoolroom with her just for five minutes.

'Backfisch is away for her Christmas holidays,' she explained, 'and we have been having a dog-wash. You ought to see them all before they get dirty again. Anne has just finished brushing Snap, and you can't think how funny he looks after he has been brushed!—you won't know his head from his tail. Besides, Anne particularly wants to see you.'

This latter statement may or may not have been true, and was, at all events, quite unauthorised; but it had the desired effect. Matthew gladly consented to be led off to the schoolroom, where there was no light save that of a roaring fire, in front of which Anne, on her knees and with her sleeves rolled up above her elbows, was putting the finishing touches to the toilet of Snap, the Skye terrier. Other dogs of various breeds, who had already been subjected to the same painful process of dressing, were grouped round her and were listening, with cocked ears and saturnine amusement, to the snarls and protests of the victim. They all with one consent turned and flew at him on his entrance, while Snap hastened to seek shelter under the nearest bookcase.

'I ought to apologise for this intrusion,' Matthew said, as soon as he could make himself heard above the din, and when Maggie, by dint of vigorous flips with a wet towel, had dispersed her excited pack of pets, 'but I was dragged here by main force, whether I would or not.'

Anne had scrambled to her feet and was hastily pulling down her sleeves. She wore a long brown-holland apron, her fair hair was disarranged, her cheeks were slightly flushed, and Matthew could not help noticing how handsome she looked, although at that time he had practically no eyes for more than one variety of feminine beauty or more than one possessor of it. But if Anne looked handsome, she certainly did not look as if she particularly wanted to see him, nor was her reply of a nature to bear out her sister's assertion.

'Maggie can't realise that what is a treat to her isn't necessarily a treat to other people,' she said, with an annoyed, constrained laugh. 'I am sorry that she has forced you behind the scenes against your will. However——'

'Oh, but indeed it wasn't at all against my will,' interrupted Matthew eagerly, before the discourteous intimation which was evidently upon the tip of Anne's tongue could find articulate expression. 'On the contrary, I was looking out for you to give you a message from your father. I was to say that he can't read the newspaper for himself, on account of the rustling of the leaves, which gets upon his nerves, and——'

'Oh, very well,' answered Anne, interrupting in her turn. 'Thank you for telling me. I will go to him at once.' And she made straight for the door.

But Matthew could not let her escape him in that way. He hastened after her, pacifying the loudly protesting Maggie by the promise of a speedy return, and, catching up the fugitive in the passage, said: 'Please don't run away until I have read you an extract from Godfrey's last letter about your brother. I thought you would like to hear what he says.'

She was, of course, glad to be made acquainted with the hopeful terms of which Sir Godfrey had made use, and she said as much when Matthew had folded up the letter again; but she spoke so coldly and curtly that he ventured to inquire, with a faint intonation of reproach:

'Is anything the matter? Have I offended you in any way?'

'Oh, dear, no!' she returned, with the same vexed, unmirthful laugh which had jarred upon his ear a few minutes before; 'how could you have offended me when I haven't even seen you for weeks? *Vous tombez mal*—that is all. I am in what Maggie calls one of my beastly moods, and I couldn't be civil to the Queen herself while they last.'

'I am sorry for that,' said Matthew, 'because I suppose a beastly mood means an unsociable mood, and I was just going to beg you to do something sociable.'

'What—again! I should have thought that the striking success that I made of it last time would have convinced you of my hopeless unsociability. Were you about to invite me to meet Lady Sara Murray and her daughter at tea?'

'There is no use in denying that I was,' answered Matthew, with a deprecating laugh. 'I wish you liked them; but as you don't, it can't be helped; and, after all, it was not so much them whom I wanted you to meet as a young fellow named Jerome, whom I have been attending since he smashed himself up a short time ago. I am almost sure you would like him, because I don't see how anybody could help liking him.'

He gave a brief account of Leonard's mishap and of his consequent intimacy with the sufferer, to which Miss Frere listened rather inattentively. She knew quite well who Mr. Jerome was, it appeared, but she had as yet had no opportunity of making his personal acquaintance, and she gave much the same reason as Lilian Murray had done for declining that held out to her.

'I don't like young men, and they don't like me,' she said; 'we never by any chance get on together. So please don't think me rude for begging to be excused. I should only be a wet blanket and spoil your party if I joined it. As it is, you will be four—which is quite the right number. For I hear that you have snatched Lady Sara back from the brink of the grave to act as chaperon a little longer. By the way, I ought to have congratulated you upon that achievement of yours: everybody is talking about it.'

'Matthew glanced half-wonderingly, half-resentfully at the speaker; he had supposed that Anne Frere was above the petty spitefulness which is commonly attributed to all women.

'I don't want to be congratulated in that tone of voice,' he said. 'It *was* an achievement, and I am proud of it; but I really didn't do what in me lay to keep Lady Sara Murray alive for the purpose that you mention.'

'Did I not tell you that I am incapable of civility to-day! You had much better go away before I commit some further solecism in good manners; and I am sure you ought to be grateful to me for resisting the temptation to make a fifth at your tea-party. Probably you are.'

Perhaps he was. At all events, he was more hurt and provoked than a philosopher should have been, and for the moment he felt that he decidedly preferred the society of Maggie and the dogs to that of a young woman who seemed bent upon saying disagreeable things out of sheer perversity.

(*To be continued.*)

THE ROMAN 'INDEX.'

As it has always been the concern of governments to protect the bodies and property of the members of their community from physical violence, so it has often been considered not without their province to fence their fellow-citizens against the intellectual attacks of the written or printed offspring of the human brain. Books are, indeed, as Milton said, 'not absolutely dead things;' yet it would seem to have been usually forgotten that to kill the body is not to extinguish the soul, and that the prohibition or destruction of particular books has not the effect of putting an end to their peculiar ability to 'contain a progeny of life in them to be as active as that soul whose progeny they are.'

A glance at the history of books which have from time to time been prohibited will show the antiquity of such efforts. In 411 B.C. the Athenians 'called in the books of Protagoras by the voice of the public crier and burned them in the market-place,' because he had ventured to doubt the existence of the gods. At Rome during the Second Punic War a *senatus consultum* ordered that all books containing soothsaying, or prayers, or treatises on the art of sacrifice should be given up to the Prætor on a certain day. This edict was prompted by fear of the growth of foreign superstitions. Augustus, again, in his capacity of Pontifex Maximus, consigned to the flames over two thousand volumes of the writings of seers. He even did not scruple to destroy in the same way the works of political opponents such as Labienus. In later days, it is hard to say whether Jews and heathens were the more severe in the suppression of Christian books, or Christians in banning heathen works. At all events, the Council of Carthage, 400 A.D., prohibited the use of all Pagan books, and Gregory I. is said to have issued a Bull to the same effect. On the other hand, St. Jerome approved of the moderate use of the classics, and tradition relates that he suffered, in a dream, a terrible whipping at the hands of the Devil for reading Cicero—which proves that much good is to be derived from the study of that author. Another story runs that St. Chrysostom was so fond of the works of Aristophanes that he used to sleep with a volume of them under his pillow. Cassian makes Germanus the monk ground his advice to abstain from even the more innocent of heathen authors on the 'distractions that arise during prayers from images suggested by poetry and history.'

The first General Council to order the burning of books was that assembled at Constantinople in 681 A.D., when the Monothelite letters of Honorius were thus destroyed. The works of Arius met a similar fate at the hands of Constantine, in accordance with the decision of the Council of Nicæa, and all who harboured them were threatened with death. Again, all Christians were forbidden by the Church of the thirteenth century to read Aristotle. It is well known with what opposition the early versions of the Bible were met. In the twelfth century the Waldenses had possessed themselves of the New Testament in their vernacular, but Innocent III. commanded the books to be burnt. The appearance of Wyclif's translation was no better received in England. A bill for the suppression of the work was discussed in the House of Lords in 1380. John of Gaunt, however, said 'he would maintain our having this law in our own tongue, whoever they should be that brought in the Bill;' and the matter dropped for the while. Subsequently, it was made a capital crime to read or possess such a version. For a long time, indeed, *Tolle ure, tolle ure*, rather than the well-known words in the legend of St. Augustine, might have been the motto of the Church.

Nevertheless in all these prohibitions, though absolute and at times rabid enough, there was no system. It remained for the Inquisition and the Pope to organise deliberate campaigns against books at large. Their efforts resulted in the promulgation of the *Index Librorum Prohibitorum*, with which is incorporated the *Index Librorum Expurgandorum*. From the latter title the publication obtained its more popular but less correct name of *Index Expurgatorius*. The volume now contains considerably over five thousand books recited by name, besides whole classes of writings. Yet its beginning was small. From very early days Bishops had exercised the right of excommunicating those who read or wrote books of which they disapproved, and, partly for their guidance, a list was drawn up at the end of the fifth or the beginning of the sixth century. At least, the earliest *Notitia* is attributed to Gelasius in 494 or Hermisdas in 514 A.D. Not improbably, however, it does not date back beyond the eighth century. In this list all Apocryphal and pseudo-Apostolic books are entirely prohibited, while in some other cases a qualification is made. For instance, with regard to 'new narratives of the

Invention of the Cross and the Invention of the Head of John the Baptist,' it is directed, 'when they come into the hands of Catholics, let the sayings of the blessed Paul the Apostle go before: Prove all things: hold fast that which is good.' Or, again, the inquirer is referred—*e.g.* touching the works of Rufinus or Origen—to the judgment and advice of St. Jerome. Though this list may certainly be considered the original ancestor of the Roman *Index*, it was many years before the lineage of its descendants was well established.

In the meantime, Popes and Bishops did their best by Bulls and charges to stem the rising tide of independent thought. Book censors were established. The earliest known instance of the creation of such an officer is afforded by the mandate of Berthold, Archbishop of Metz, in 1486, which forbade the translation of Greek or Latin into the vulgar tongue, or the sale of such translations without leave given, after careful examination, by certain Doctors and Masters of the University of Erfurt. Similar powers were also exercised over religious books in various places by universities and bishops, and even, in some cases, by civil magistrates. Moreover, the Master of the Sacred Palace at Rome possessed very wide and searching authority in these matters. Yet all these efforts did not suffice to cope with the new condition of things produced by the spread of printing. So dangerous a means of dissemination seemed to lie in this newly-discovered art that the Council of Lateran, in its tenth session, held during the year 1515, issued a decree that no book was to be printed and published until it had been examined and approved by some high ecclesiastical authority. Contravention of this rule entailed sentence of excommunication, as well as confiscation and destruction of the book. In a similar spirit, though with a more particular object, Leo X., in 1520, promulgated a Bull demanding the surrender of all the writings of 'one M. Luther,' upon pain of the greater excommunication. This Bull was executed in England, with considerable reluctance, by Cardinal Wolsey, and proved to be very nearly the last successful exercise of Papal authority in this country; for, by the year 1535, Henry VIII. had broken away in the opposite direction, and was directing all his energies against Rome. Indeed, Protestantism, when established in England, proved no less intolerant than the creed it superseded; and it was—to anticipate a little—the attempt to set up a censorship of the press during the latter years of Charles I. that drew from Milton the greatest of his prose works—to wit, the *Areopagitica.* In this pamphlet he brings all his powers of argument, sarcasm, and exhortation into play for the purpose of dissuading the English authorities from adopting the 'inquisiturient' practice of the Romanists, who acted 'as if St. Peter had bequeathed them the keys of the Press as well as of Paradise.'

Returning from this digression, we find ourselves at the very birthday of the *Index.* In the year 1539 the zealous Charles V. of Spain, supported by a Bull of Paul III., charged the University of Louvain with the task of drawing up a list of pernicious books. The result of their labours was the publication in 1546 of *The Catalogues or Inventories of Bad Books Prohibited, and of other Good Ones to be taught Young Scholars according to the advice of the University of Louvain, with an Edict of His Imperial Majesty.* In the same year an order went forth from the Council of Trent that no anonymous religious books were to be permitted, unapproved, among good Christians. A second edition of the *Catalogue* was produced in 1550. Meanwhile the Popes had not been idle. Paul III. had issued a Bull in 1536 excommunicating and anathematising Luther and all other heretics, and those who should read, print, defend, or harbour any of their works. This is the Bull *In Cœna Domini* which is quoted in the first Roman *Index,* soon to be noticed, and has never been repealed. At one time it used to be read every Holy Thursday at Rome, and, except for considerations of policy, might to this day be republished at any moment.

Again, in 1542 the same Pope, by a Constitution beginning '*Licet ab initio,*' instituted the *Congregatio Sacri Officii seu Inquisitionis*—a committee of about twelve persons selected from the body of Cardinals, meeting in the Holy City, and nominally presided over *ex officio* by the Pope. His object was to combat more successfully by weighty and authoritative pronouncements the doctrines of Luther. Not content with this work alone, the Congregation prepared and published in 1559, under the auspices of Paul IV., the first Roman *Index.* The entries occupy thirty-six leaves, and are divided into three classes, of which the first comprises the entire works of certain authors; the second, particular books; and the third, all books published anonymously since the year 1519. In the first and second classes the *Notitia* of Gelasius is practically reproduced, with additions. A list of sixty-two printers is appended for condemnation, and, in addition, the writings of all heretics are utterly prohibited *donec expurgentur vel corrigantur*. This is the seedling from which have since sprung all those 'catalogues and expurging indexes that rake through the entrails of many an old good author, with a violation worse than any could be offered to his tomb,' to quote Milton's words. To this date must be assigned the birth of those constant obstacles which it has been the complaint of so many great writers that Rome has put in the way of the progress and intellectual growth of the world. During the sixteenth century the *Index* was an engine for the suppression of Protestantism; since then it has been used to stigmatise every manner of original thought as heterodoxy and an abomination.

In a very few years a further advance was made. The Council of Trent took the matter up, and, after discussing it during their eighteenth session, appointed Fathers to examine books at various times censured. These delegates produced on March 24, 1564, an enlarged edition of the *Index*, usually known as the Tridentine Edition. In this the list of books was preceded by a Bull of Pius V., a preface by the secretary to the Congregation, and also by ten rules setting forth the principles upon which books were condemned. They are briefly as follows: (1) All books prohibited before the year 1515 are hereby condemned. (2) Books written by heretics are condemned *in toto* if on religion; if on other subjects, until they have been expurgated and approved. (3) Translations of the Old Testament are allowed to learned and pious men at the discretion of the Bishop; translations of the New Testament by authors coming under Rule 1 to no one. Notes on the Bible must first be expurgated. (4) Versions of the Bible in the vulgar tongue allowed only by special permission of the Bishops. (5) Compilations by heretics to be first corrected. (6) Controversies between Catholics and heretics forbidden. Books of Catholics previously prohibited allowed after correction. (7) Lascivious or obscene books forbidden. Classical authors allowed because of the elegance and propriety of their language, but young persons are not to read them. (8) Books of generally good tendency to be rid of all passages tending to heresy and of references to heretical authors. (9) Books on sorcery, astronomy, the science of poisons, &c., prohibited, except when in aid of navigation, agriculture, or medicine. (10) The old restrictions on printing renewed and confirmed. Finally, the rules are clinched by the sentence, 'If any man read or keep any books composed by heretics, or the writings of any authors suspected of heresy or false doctrine, he shall instantly incur the sentence of excommunication; and those who read or keep works interdicted on another account, besides the mortal sin committed, shall be severely punished at the will of the Bishops.' These rules still guide the preparation of the *Index*. The list of condemned Bibles and printers included in the first *Index* are here omitted. There is also another curious difference between the two publications: in the former, certain works of Æneas Sylvius are condemned wholesale; in the latter the entry runs, 'Those parts of the works of Æneas Sylvius are prohibited which he himself in his Bull of retractation has condemned.' It was probably considered inexpedient that the works of a Pope should be thus under a ban; and he is reported to have said himself 'when he was raised higher he saw things more clearly.' The entry in the first *Index* must have been either an oversight or else prompted by some motive, perhaps personal, which did not actuate Pius V. The works of Machiavelli appear in the *Index*, and have retained their place ever since. Boccaccio's *Decameron* figures as the only book in this edition specially marked '*donec corrigatur*.' It was afterwards purged of its offences against the religion of Rome, but not of its obscenities. About the date of the publication of this *Index*, Pius V. built a special place for the deliberations of the Congregation of the Inquisition, and also founded the *Congregatio Indicis*, a co-ordinate body for the purpose of cataloguing books prohibited, pending correction, by the other Congregation, and of registering on its own account a preliminary *nota* against books of which it disapproved.

Sixtus V. was preparing an enlarged edition of the *Index* when he was interrupted by death in 1590. His work was suppressed; but Clement VIII. enjoyed the fruit of his labours, and produced in 1596 an *Index* which with supplements at intervals has since been practically the standard edition. Of subsequent issues, that put forth by Clement XI. in 1711 is chiefly remarkable on account of its frontispiece, which represents the Apostles Peter and Paul, 'into whose breasts the Holy Spirit sends fire and His rays, so that they leap forth upon books beneath and kindle a great flame and destroy them.' In most other volumes, continuing to the present time, the frontispiece consists of a picture illustrating the nineteenth verse of the nineteenth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles. Those who are responsible for this decoration seem unconscious of the satire involved in the contrast between the voluntary action of the persons to whom the verse refers and the compulsory fate to which the *Index* would consign its victims. Benedict XIV., in 1758, published one of the most important of the Indices. He made sundry alterations, notably in the matter of versions of the Bible in the vulgar tongue. Clement VIII. had forbidden them entirely; Benedict allowed them after approval by some representative of the Apostolic See. He also insisted that all expurgated books should be announced as such in the title. Prefixed to the edition of 1758 are certain rules to be observed in the examining of books, which are still in force. They are introduced by the Pope with the admission that there was some dissatisfaction abroad because books seemed sometimes to be condemned unjustly under the influence of current public opinion. He upholds the integrity of the Congregation and its judgments, and at the same time insists that the whole of every book must be read, and that no one is to talk about the deliberations of the examiners outside their meetings. Heresies, even when stated for the purpose of refutation, are to be cut out. This direction agrees with the tenour of the Bull by which Paul IV. introduced his original *Index*, which began: 'Many of the regular clergy, who thought they could combat the Lutheran and other heresies of the day by studying their works, have so devoted themselves to this study as to have fallen themselves into the errors of the heretics.'

There is one curious publication which was suppressed as soon as possible, and has never been repeated. This is a veritable *Index Expurgatorius*, of which one volume was issued in 1608 by Brasichellen, the Master of the Sacred Palace. In this work the author essays to expurgate, and gives reasons for so doing, all works which in former Indices were condemned to that fate. The matter, however, was too controversial and full of difficulties to be allowed, and the second volume did not appear.

About forty editions have been published since the *Index* of 1596, and the first of the small periodical volumes, which continue to appear at the present day, came out in 1670. The last is dated 1888, and additions have been made since that date, the last author to be gibbeted up to the present time being Professor St. George Mivart, in consequence of his articles on 'The Happiness in Hell' a few months ago in the *Nineteenth Century* magazine. He has since retracted those writings, and finds consolation in the fact that one of the half-dozen or more reasons for which books may be put on the roll of the condemned is that of inopportuneness. Perhaps, therefore, his name will not appear on future lists. But he would have found himself in good company. Owing to the indiscriminate way in which the names of authors and works are mixed up, in the former case being often arranged under the Christian names—the largest number of entries occur under the letter J, because John is a common name—it is somewhat difficult to discover who are among the victims of Papal censure. However, a glance will disclose many well-known names. James I. and Henry VIII. appear as prohibited authors, an exception being made in favour of a tract issued by the latter king against Luther. Nearly all the English poets figure on the list, headed by Milton, Spenser, and Chaucer; Dryden forming a notable exception. Dante is there for his treatise on Monarchy, and Petrarch also. Addison, Swift, and Oliver Goldsmith are side by side with Bacon, Galileo, Robertson, and Gibbon. Philosophers are thick, from Locke downwards, including Rousseau, Hume, Kant, and John Stuart Mill. Voltaire is proscribed, and Victor Hugo appears thus: 'Hugo, Victor, N.D. de Paris, an. 1834, Dec.' However, it were weary work to count up further entries: suffice it to know that prohibition has never been able to check the vital force of genius; indeed, it may be said to have the opposite effect; as Milton points out in his *Areopagitica*, 'the punishing of wits enhances their authority, and a forbidden writing is thought to be a certain spark of truth that flies up in the faces of them who seek to tread it out.'

It is not intended here to describe in detail the method of work of the Congregations. They toil in secret, and spend much time and care. The best intellects of the Church are assisted by experts on the subject of each book under consideration, and a work has to be condemned by several successive readers and meetings before it is reported to the Pope. When that stage is at last reached, the Pope can adopt one of four courses. He can allow the Congregation to issue the condemnation on their own authority, in which case the matter may at some future time come up again for consideration. Or he can have a sentence of approval added, such as 'The above proceedings have been duly reported to our Most Holy Lord the Pope by me, the undersigned, Secretary of the Sacred Congregation: His Holiness approves the Decree, and orders it to be promulgated.' Or, thirdly, the Pope can issue the decree authenticated by a Bull, Brief, or Constitution; if he does so, the pronouncement is final, infallible, and held to command 'internal assent.' Or, fourthly, he can quash the verdict of the Congregation. Sometimes the exercise of the Pope's authority in this matter has caused trouble. For instance, in 1862, Cardinal de Andrea resigned his position as Prefect of the Congregation of the *Index* because the Pope overruled a formal sentence acquitting, after two examinations, the Professors of Theology and Philosophy at Louvain. They had been accused by the Archbishop of Bruges of heterodoxy for teaching that 'men in a state of nature are incapable of attaining, by their unaided reason, an immediate, full, and distinct knowledge of any metaphysical or transcendental truth.'

In spite of the pains bestowed on its compilation, and the weight supposed to attach to its pronouncements, the influence and use of the *Index* is very problematical. Probably very few besides students know anything of its contents, and Dr. Murray, Archbishop of Dublin, went even further in his evidence in 1825 before a Committee of the House of Commons to inquire into the state of Ireland. He said, 'The *Index Expurgatorius* has no authority whatever in Ireland: it has never been received in these countries; and I doubt very much whether there be ten people in Ireland who have ever seen it.' However, the history of this literary policy of suppression as pursued by the Church of Rome is interesting for the indication it gives of a curious survival of the old forms of paternal—not to say maternal—government, in accordance with which it was deemed the whole duty of man to attempt —in the scornful language of Milton—to 'pound up his crows by shutting his park-gate.'

FAMOUS FIRST EDITIONS.

Of the many crazes which infect book-collectors, few are, to the general public, more singular than the taste so rampant of late years for assembling first editions of favourite authors. If these first issues were invariably the best and most desirable form in which the works were given to the world, one could understand the eager haste with which the enthusiastic bibliophile rushes off to secure the prize run to earth in catalogue or auction list; but this is by no means the case as, more frequently than not, a book is improved in later editions. One great exception of course holds good, and will appeal to everyone who gives the question a moment's thought—illustrated works, in which the repeated printing of the engravings naturally lessens their freshness and brilliancy, but in other cases the Philistine may well argue *cui bono*? Yet a little reflection will convince some beyond the charmed circle of book-hunters that there is sometimes a reasonable 'method' in the 'madness' of those eccentric individuals who have a penchant for First Editions (underlined for large caps. in the catalogue). Who, for instance, can flout the sentiment which prompts a desire to possess a copy of the renowned First Folio, that volume so grandiloquently described in auctioneers' brochures as 'the keystone of an English library'? Here we have the thoughts of the mighty Shakespeare in their first collected printed form, in the case of seventeen plays in the original garb of printer's ink through which they became known to wondering mankind.

Surely a little enthusiasm is allowable here. Never was there a volume which has caused so much controversy and argument. It has been measured up by eighths of an inch, counted in lines, reckoned by page, by letter, nay, even by stops and omissions, and made the subject of thick treatises which try to prove it something different to what it is, and its author a myth. It was published at a guinea; in 1787 a copy sold at auction for ten pounds; and to-day a fine specimen would not fall for less than fifteen hundred! What a history for an unpretentious tome of old plays! But even more precious are those squat quartos which represent the absolutely first editions of many of the bard's productions. It is a little singular how few of them have survived.

Heaps upon heaps may very likely have been made food for bonfires in the stern days of the Ironsides and the strict fanatics who took away England's pleasures and gave her her liberty, yet one would expect to meet with more copies. They were issued at sixpence, most likely on somewhat the same footing as the acting plays of Mr. French in the Strand, dear to the ambitious amateur. Their money value must now in some instances be reckoned in three figures, while many are almost, if not quite, unique. Of the first quarto Hamlet, in many respects the most interesting and attractive of the immortal series, only two examples are known, both of which are defective, though the two together would make a perfect copy. The Duke of Devonshire's has the title page, but lacks the last leaf; in the Museum copy the exact reverse is the case—a curious coincidence.

Plays of this period generally are much esteemed and eagerly sought for in first edition, and all collectors are familiar with these thin quartos, often sumptuously clad by Bedford or Rivière, which represent such a high and ever-increasing money value. Whether this be an indication of growing interest in matters theatrical or, as is more probable, a recognition of their importance as factors in our literature and faithful pictures of their times, it were perhaps difficult to satisfactorily decide.

The works of that singular individual John Taylor, 'The Queen's Majesty's Water-Poet,' are favourite quarry with the hunter after Tudor rarities. The first collected edition, a thin folio, has an engraved title seldom found in genuine or perfect state, the National copy even leaving something to be desired in this respect. Taylor was an alarmingly prolific writer, whose separate pieces are in many cases of extraordinary scarcity and equally extraordinary title, as for instance: 'The Scourge of Baseness: a Kicksey Winsie or a Lerry Come Twang, wherein J. T. hath satyrically suted 750 of his bad Debtors.' 'Laugh and be Fat.' 'The Praise of cleane Linen.' 'The Needle's Excellency,' a rare tract on lace-making, and many others quite as singular in their appellation, and trashy in their contents, from which latter peculiarity one must imagine it to have been as easy to appear in print in the time of Queen Bess as in the present day of grace.

A famous first edition of a little later date is the 'Eikon Basilike' of the unfortunate Charles I. No one seems to have properly settled the question as to what identifies the original issue. Most copies are dated 1649, but those bearing 1648 are described as

'Reprinted,' so it is a little perplexing. It is possible this word may have been added to guard the publisher against the consequences of printing the work.

The Commonwealth period does not present many prizes to the collector, but there is one famous exception the mention of which makes many a mouth water—'The Compleat Angler of Mr. Izaak Walton.' This insignificant duodecimo volume, not remarkable for any especial literary merit beyond an easy, cheerful, chatty good-humour, interlarded with technical information about a strangely fascinating sport, occupies one of the topmost niches in the huge temple of British bibliographical fame. 'Worth its weight in gold' is a very inadequate expression, the number of sovereigns its value represents would overbalance many copies. Its companion volume, the second part, by Charles Cotton, was not issued from the press until twenty-three years later, and naturally increases the already stupendous price when found with the earlier work. The perennial popularity of 'Walton's Angler' is very remarkable. Seldom a year passes that does not witness its reissue in some form or another, either delicate and dear for the connoisseur's shelves, or commonplace and cheap for the traveller's pocket. There is a charm about the book which time apparently cannot destroy.

The first edition of Waller's poems is another volume to be marked 'very rare,' although its value does not approach that of honest Izaak's masterpiece.

Three editions were published in the same year, 1685, giving opportunity for discussion to any enthusiasts so minded, although priority is accorded the one 'Printed by G. W. for Humphrey Moseley.' It is one of the tantalising books of which many exist to give the ardent bibliophile anxious half-hours and even sleepless nights.

The early eighteenth century literature offers a rich and well-cultivated field to the seeker after interesting books. The array of great names is a formidable one, and reminds us of the earlier Elizabethan era. Defoe, with his interminable list of tracts, pamphlets and volumes, a list even now and ever likely to be incomplete, offers alone almost a lifetime's occupation to the admirer of first editions. Many, in fact the majority of his lesser efforts, never went beyond this initial stage, but in the case of his books there is often great difficulty in obtaining the earliest issue.

'Robinson Crusoe' and its continuation are of course the chief stars in the Defoe firmament. The two volumes were published in different years, 1719 and 1720, and the earlier is a rarity of the first water.

One small difficulty which exercises collectors' minds is the map.

The title-pages read as though each volume should possess a plan of the supposititious island whereon 'Robinson Crusoe, of York, Mariner,' passed so much of his singular existence, whereas one only is wanted. Truly the way of the book-buyer is beset with snares and pitfalls! Defoe must have lived with a pen in his hand, but his great romance will live ages after the political and controversial tediousness which flowed so freely are forgotten.

The caustic Dean of St. Patrick's is another favourite hobby of this age. His 'Tale of a Tub' and 'Gulliver' are both eagerly sought for, the former entering into the category of perplexing books owing to variations on the frontispiece which make the identity of the first edition a moot point, but in this respect a work by another 'Queen Anne man' certainly bears away the palm. The difference in the engraved titles of Pope's 'Dunciad' and 'Dunciad Variorum' are such that nothing but exclusive devotion to the subject can pretend to satisfactorily solve the question of priority, and even then much doubt remains. What the author's purpose may have been in altering his title-page in this way is perhaps as obscure as anything in literature. Possibly he had future bibliomaniacs in his eye, and enjoyed the mental prospect of their debates as to the position of the owl, the titles of the books on which that sage bird is perched, or the authenticity of the humble donkey who makes his appearance in 1729. After 1736 the frontispiece disappears from the work, and no doubt many collectors heartily wish it had never been there to perplex them. The first collected edition of Pope's works forms two quarto volumes published at an interval of eighteen years, 1717–35, but does not rank as a rarity, although some of the separately issued editions in folio are carefully cherished by fortunate possessors who, like Mr. Austin Dobson, worship at the eighteenth-century shrine.

The publications of the genial Goldsmith, few in number, but how choice of quality! have some of them attained a scarcity and value which would make poor Noll's eyes open wide in amazement could he revisit the shades of Fleet Street, in which case he might also for ever settle the question as to the Salisbury edition of 1766 being the first appearance of the immortal Vicar. Sixty pounds was his moderate honorarium for one of our most charming classics. A few weeks since a single copy reached the amazing figure of ninety pounds, at auction! This is honouring genius when too late with a vengeance.

It is somewhat singular that the first edition of so renowned a book as Boswell's 'Johnson' should be worth no more than the two or three guineas at which it can usually be purchased.

It may be that its form, two thickish quarto volumes, militates against it ranging as a 'collector's book,' for it is remarkable what a dislike even confirmed book-fanciers have to anything beyond an octavo in size, and many a work owes its popularity to its natty appearance on the shelf. There is something reasonable in this after all, for who could wax enthusiastic over an *editio princeps*, say, of Bayle's 'Dictionnaire Historique,' 5 vols. folio, or any kindred mammoth among books?

When we arrive at the nineteenth century we reach the beginning of the most singular phase of the first edition mania, the passion for collecting the works of modern authors in their original dress. True, the writers of the early years of eighteen hundred are removed from us by almost too many years to be classed as 'modern,' but the craze for collecting their productions has been the instigation of that fancy which prompts people to buy up Morris, and Lang, and Dobson, and has brought in 'limited editions' as a fresh means of stimulating the jaded appetite of the rarity seeker.

It is the poets, almost exclusively, who are favoured. Shelley, Keats, Landor, Byron: these are all names to conjure with, and some of the insignificant little volumes in shabby grey boards, or even simple brochures innocent of covering, are worth to-day sums which seem abnormal. Some of the pieces by Shelley, that erratic yet heaven-born genius, are utterly lost to us; others so rare that their pursuit is all but hopeless. What, for instance, would an example of 'Verses by Victor and Cazire,' or 'Margaret Nicholson,' fetch now? while a copy of the 'Address to the Irish People,' which fluttered from the ardent young poet's Dublin window in such profusion yet failed to accomplish its object, is literally worth its avoirdupois equivalent in bank-notes! In the same way the early productions of the gentle Keats are valued and sought for. Paltry volumes they appear, such as might easily be cast aside in looking over the twopenny box at a bookstall, should any such rarities be left now to be merged in the mass of worthlessness which passes yearly through the hands of the dealer.

The chance of finding a prize under these conditions grows feebler day by day, and there is very scanty encouragement for the collector who hopes to turn up a 'Lamia' in boards, uncut, for fewer pence than it is worth pounds.

Most of the first editions of Byron are comparatively common, but there are two exceptions, the 'Hours of Idleness' and 'The Waltz.' As all students of our great nineteenth century poet are aware, his earliest volume, published in 1806, was immediately suppressed and the copies destroyed, with the result that about two or one-and-a-half are preserved. The next issue was a very limited one for friends, and this was followed by what is generally looked upon as the first edition, published by Ridge, of Newark, in 1807. Of course to all intents and purposes this latter *is* the first edition, as the absolute original is practically unobtainable, and the reissue almost equally rare, indeed the existence of this intermediate edition is altogether unknown to a good many book-buyers.

'The Waltz, by Horace Hornem,' is a very great Byronic rarity, and a copy has realised over forty pounds at auction, but the later publications of the author of 'English Bards and Scotch Reviewers' were issued in such great quantities to meet the popular demand for the works of the hero of the hour, that there is little chance of their attaining such places of honour in the collector's eyes as are occupied by the productions of Shelley or Keats.

We have now arrived at the threshold of contemporary times, but although the list of great names in literature cannot be said to have increased of late, the passion for gathering first editions, even of living authors, has spread and intensified in a truly remarkable manner.

Among the writers of fifty, forty and thirty years since, Dickens and Thackeray, of course, usurp chief place, and theirs are the works most eagerly sought. One can appreciate the enthusiasm exhibited in the possession of a really genuine 'Pickwick' in its original pale-green covered parts, when we remember how few copies were issued of the first few numbers, and how consequently difficult it is to make up a set. There is perhaps nothing more remarkable in the annals of modern literature than the history of this book, issued at one shilling per part, and sold since for as much as thirty-two pounds!

MAJOR KINFAUN'S MARRIAGE.

'Twas a terrible nemesis that befell poor Major Kinfaun. He deserved it, no doubt—if every man had his deserts, indeed, which of us would 'scape whipping? But who that sees Kinfaun to-day, for all that, can refrain from pitying him?

He met her, when anemones bloom, at Antibes, at that charming hotel on the Cape, pushed far out into the sea, where you look one way across the Baie des Anges towards Nice and Bordighera, and the other way, across the Golfe Jouan and the Isles, towards the jagged outline of the rearing Esterel. Not that Kinfaun himself cared two straws in his heart for any of these things. Anemones and dandelions were all one to him. It was the rich young widow, or the young widow reputed to be rich, that brought the politic soldier to Antibes. For himself, he vastly preferred Cannes—that worldly Cannes, where the breath of princes hangs heavy on the air, and grand-dukes and bankers pullulate by the score upon every bristling hillside. That was the sort of atmosphere that Kinfaun loved; he drank it in, princely carbonic acid and all, with pure delight. It made him feel happier to pass a man in the street and be told he was really a small crowned head; it made him stand higher in his neat walking shoes to tread the same pavement worn smooth by the soles of so much Serene and Imperial Altitude.

But Kinfaun had always a keen nose for an heiress, and taking his walks abroad between Californie and the Croisette, he scented the young widow at Antibes afar off. For the sake of being near her, he was ready, like a thorough-going strategist that he was, to scorn the noisy delights of Cannes, and live ignoble days, through a brief courtship at least, by the water-worn cliffs and dashing breakers of the Cap d'Antibes. So he drove across with his portmanteau one March morning from the Prince de Galles, where he had been spending the winter; drove across, characteristically enough, in the young Comte de Kérouac's high dog-cart; for no man ever knew better how to make the best use of all his friends than Angus Kinfaun. The whole plan fitted in so neatly together. De Kérouac suffered severely from the fashionable *anglomanie*; he dressed himself in very loud sporting tweeds, chequered like a chess-board, and owned a dog-cart; to him, nothing could be in better form or better keeping than to have an English officer seated beside him in the machine as he drove; he regarded it as *tout ce qu'il y a de plus sportsman.* Kinfaun, on the other hand, considered that he couldn't make a better first impression on the widow's hotel than by dashing up to the door in a neat turn-out, with a Breton count in stentorian tweeds by his side, and the trimmest of trim close-shaven French grooms stuck bolt upright behind, arms crossed severely on his swelling breast, and face like a sphinx in the act of ruminating upon her own riddles. Things get about so quickly at hotels in these twaddling, gossiping winter stations. Everybody would say to the widow at *table d'hôte* that evening, 'Have you seen the new arrival who came over from Cannes by road to-day? He wears an orchid in his button-hole, and De Kérouac of the Réunion wheeled him across by the Pines in his dog-cart.'

The value of a first impression in affairs of the heart cannot be over-estimated. And Kinfaun was indeed a man to make a good impression at first sight. Tall, well-knit, with his soldierly imperial and twirled moustache just becomingly grizzled by the first snows of the forties, he looked and stood every inch a gentleman. Those keen grey eyes and that well-bred nose of his showed just enough of their owner's cynical temperament to be merely piquant. His manner was frank, yet delicately deferential: the manner of a man of the world who knows well how to please, and who has ample reasons of his own for the wish to be pleasing. If Kinfaun had made up his mind to win the widow, everybody said—why, then the widow must be hard indeed to win if she resisted Kinfaun.

Fortune favours the brave. He came upon her by accident in a lucky moment, the very first afternoon he spent at the Cape. He had wandered out after lunch to enjoy the fine aroma of his cigar in the grounds, among the scent of the pine woods, and strolled down to the little bay by the craggy promontory where the sea always dashes high, one side or the other, no matter what wind may happen to be blowing. There, in a nook of the cliffs—for they descend by natural steps in the living rock to sea-level—a vision of delight met his enraptured eye. He knew at once it was the widow; it could only be she, according to description. She was thirty-five, to be sure, but round-faced and gracious-looking; a taking smile played enticingly round the corners of her full red lips, though she was quite alone; she was fishing up sea-anemones out of a pool with her parasol as she sat: the sun shone on the sea, and the waves danced merrily. Kinfaun gazed down on her intently for a minute before she was aware of being perceived. It brought the colour into her cheek when, looking up, she saw a man stand by the edge of the cliff, gazing down upon her hard, yet with a sympathetic curve about the corners of his mouth; but she smiled once more that taking smile, and to his immense delight, being taken off her guard, spoke to him unaccosted.

'It's a beautiful spot, this,' she said, 'so quiet and retired.' She said it to cover her confusion, he knew, half out of the mere bashfulness of having been caught, alone, in that childish attitude, fishing in the pool with her parasol; but he counted it all to the good for his scheme nevertheless. For a woman to speak first to you of her own accord is the best of all possible introductions.

Kinfaun flung away his cigar at once. He flung it into the sea; not ostentatiously, yet with such a deferential little air of instinctive courtesy that the widow could hardly fail to notice the graceful action. As a rule, you may smoke when you talk to a lady; to smoke is mannish; but on first acquaintance, it looks well, nevertheless, as a matter of form, to abjure your tobacco. It shows that you value a stray moment of the lady's conversation far more than you value any ephemeral joy to be derived from the best half of a prime Havana. And besides, it's chivalrous. For the first few stages chivalry pays; after them, a certain bold and even obtrusive masculinity has the greater attraction. The veriest old maids will sometimes confess they like the smell of tobacco; it shows there's a man about the house, and to have a man about the house is eminently respectable.

'Delightful,' he answered from under that grizzled moustache, with his own most charming responsive smile, as he flung the cigar away. 'So far from all the bustle and noise of Cannes! The very kind of place for people who love calm and quiet,' for he saw at a glance what was the widow's line. 'So breezy and open, and with such lovely views too.' And he lifted his eyes from hers quite naturally for a second towards the long jagged line of that indented Esterel.

It was just as he did so that the cigar struck the water.

'Oh, I'm so sorry you've thrown it away,' Mrs. Roupell cried, watching the splash where it fell.

Kinfaun came down tentatively a couple of steps along the broken ledges towards where she sat; he felt the sacrifice of so much good tobacco entitled him at least to make that further advance in her direction. To have thrown it away was an earnest of good-will. Then he leant against his stick behind him and gazed down with peering eyes into the pool. 'What wonderful creatures one always finds in these rock-basins,' he went on abstractedly; though, to say the truth, he had never hunted them since he was a boy in knickerbockers, wading on the sands. 'And what lovely colours they take on the Mediterranean seaboard here!'

Mrs. Roupell dipped down her parasol into the fishery once more, and hooked out some sea-mats. She seemed by no means indisposed, for her part, to continue the conversation. 'You've only just come?' she said interrogatively, as she examined her find with half-affected interest.

'Drove over from Cannes this morning,' the major answered, still leaning back on his stick and gazing down intently into the shallow basin. 'I was tired of the eternal round of tea and tennis, gout and gossip, so I thought I'd come over here for the strolls and the scrambles.'

'I saw you come,' Mrs. Roupell went on, spreading out the sea-mat on the rock by her side; and Kinfaun scored one internally with joy that the dog-cart and the groom had not passed unnoted. 'You're quite right. The walks here are charming: especially in and out, in and out, round the coast. Such endless little bays and points and headlands. If scrambling's what you like, you've come to the right place for it.'

'I adore scrambling,' Kinfaun answered, with a glance at those neat walking shoes, descending just a step, and poking his stick into the pool in turn in search of anemones. 'This seems quite an ideal hotel for anyone to stop at who loves nature.'

'And you should see the flowers in the woods!' Mrs. Roupell replied with enthusiasm.

So at the end of ten minutes, by perfectly natural gradations, Kinfaun was seated on the rocks opposite the pretty widow, and deeply engaged in profound conversation on scenery, Keats, and the human affections. For Kinfaun was a clever fellow at bottom in spite of his society airs and graces; and though his knowledge of men and books was by no means deep, it was as wide as it was shallow. He could mould his talk to suit his hearer with an accommodating versatility which many abler but less shifty talkers might well have envied him.

Before they got up from the rocks that afternoon, Kinfaun had succeeded in making his impression. The pretty little widow, reputed rich, thought him a most charming and sympathetic man, and the pleasantest companion she had met since she came to Antibes.

That same evening Kinfaun found himself alone in the billiard room, over a cigar and a brandy and soda, with Marindin of the Record Office—the very man who had given him the first stray hint as to the existence of a wealthy young woman, now unattached, awaiting siege at the hotel on the promontory.

'Pretty little body enough, that Mrs. Roupell,' he remarked casually, as he knocked about the billiard-balls for pure practice (he was a first-rate player). 'Middle-aged, of course, but extremely well-preserved. I like what I've seen of her. And her smile's so pleasant.'

'Yes, we're all immensely taken with her,' Marindin answered languidly, between the long slow puffs. 'She's such a nice little thing, so kind-hearted and good-natured. She takes my little girl out driving almost every afternoon. Polly's quite in love with her.'

Kinfaun pricked up his ears at the sound. 'Driving,' he repeated. 'Then she drives a good deal, does she? Has she got a carriage?'

'Hires one from Cannes by the month,' Marindin replied laconically. 'Neat turn-out: couple of greys, coachman in livery.'

Kinfaun pretended to be profoundly absorbed in a difficult cannon he was endeavouring to pull off by a miracle of rebounds, and walked round the billiard table in the most leisurely fashion to survey the best point from which to accomplish it. 'Then she's really well off?' he said, with insinuating inquiry, as the balls kissed and glided off gently at the exact angle required.

'Oh, I s'pose so,' Marindin answered, throwing back his head and blowing out a long round stream of tobacco smoke. 'She's never told *me*. The precise amount of her income is, no doubt, a question that lies only between herself and the Commissioners of Inland Revenue. But to judge by what she spends, I should say she can't be penniless.'

To judge by what she spends indeed! What a fatuous criterion! Kinfaun totted up the total mentally. After all, it needn't mean so very much. Mrs. Roupell herself, her maid, and no children: first floor rooms, table d'hôte, and salon: say eleven pounds a week, all told, for hotel-bill. Well, she might live like that, carriage and dress and travelling expenses included—a lone lorn woman—for a trifle over seven or eight hundred a year, he fancied. It wasn't princely, but still—it was a competence. And a competence, you know, is always something. Kinfaun didn't feel sure that he cared to chuck himself away this time for so little. It was all very well, sentiment, when you were young and foolish; but when the first snows of the forties begin to grizzle your well-waxed moustache—by Jove! sir, a man begins to know his market worth, and determines to sell himself at the highest current quotation for cavalry officers.

For Kinfaun, too, had once been young, and like all the rest of us had committed a youthful indiscretion. He had married for love at three-and-twenty. His wife, to be sure, had a couple of hundred a year or so of her own in consols; but what was that to Kinfaun? A man of his tastes finds two hundred a year and one's pay mere beggary. Ah, well! poor Mrs. Kinfaun was dead and gone long since, however—died a twelvemonth ago at Cannes, where he had come for her health, for in his way he was fond of her; and now that the year of decent mourning was fairly over, and the Kinfaun moustaches were once more in the market, he hadn't the slightest intention of repeating in maturer years that one error of an otherwise blameless and strictly prudent existence.

So he surveyed the balls again, with his head on one side, deliberative of point and twist and impetus; then he remarked at last, after he had taken his stroke and scored once more, 'You've no idea what part of the world she comes from, have you?'

'Not the slightest,' Marindin answered with perfect unconcern. 'That's the oddest part of it all. She's a lady, obviously, well-bred and well-educated; but not a soul in the place knows anything of her antecedents. We only gather from casual allusions in her talk that her father was a parson somewhere down in the Midlands, that the late lamented Roupell made money in the City, and that she has a house of her own somewhere or other in England. But she seems anxious not to let one know too much. My own idea is'—and Marindin fixed his glassy eye hard upon Kinfaun—'that she wants to keep out of the clutches of fortune-hunters.'

Kinfaun's hand never faltered in the least, though this was a most difficult stroke with the cue behind one's back; but he went on quietly: 'Ah! I shouldn't be surprised. So many fellows are on the trail of money. And the other little woman, with the invalid husband—Mrs. Percival, I think they called her—what sort is she, now?'

So the talk glided off imperceptibly by gradual degrees into less important channels.

But for the next three weeks or so poor Kinfaun was sedulously engaged in playing a very distracting and disquieting double game. On the one hand, he didn't want to begin advances towards Mrs. Roupell unless he could find out whether or not she was really worth marrying; and, on the other hand, he didn't want to throw away a chance which might not again occur under such favourable circumstances. Those lonely walks and up-and-down scrambles among the cliffs and rocks, with their quiet little nooks where two human souls could sit alone together so long unperceived, seemed as if absolutely predestined by nature for the precise purposes of love-making and flirtation. But Kinfaun felt he mustn't be too precipitate. For aught he knew to the contrary, the woman might be nothing more after all than the merest adventuress. She might be living on her wits—perhaps on tick, perhaps on false pretences. One must be very cautious at these foreign watering-places and winter stations. One never knows what society one may be thrown among. So different from the pure and guileless drawing-rooms of our immaculate London!

So Kinfaun was prudent, consummately prudent. He played his hand dexterously in this dangerous double game of his. He went on getting deeper and deeper into Mrs. Roupell's confidence—picking anemones and grubbing up fern roots—while he prosecuted his researches privately into her position and history with the utmost care, and at the same time avoided too overtly committing himself to anything which couldn't be explained away at a moment's notice as the merest flirtation or botanical interest, should the result of his inquiries prove unsatisfactory to the widow's chance of meriting so great a prize in the matrimonial lottery.

But with all his caution and all his careful searching, Kinfaun after all could find out nothing. Nobody anywhere knew aught worth hearing. Hints, doubts, suspicions, exaggerations by the score, but not one ounce of solid fact or assured certainty. She was worth nothing; she was worth a hundred thousand; those were the conflicting items of evidence that baffled a poor unoffending fortune-hunter. Kinfaun almost gave up the quest in despair. He couldn't bear to let the young widow, reputed rich, slip through his fingers; but he couldn't bear, either, to commit Angus Kinfaun and all his fortunes to so profound an uncertainty.

As for Mrs. Roupell, confiding and childlike in everything else, on that point of her money value she was a perfect marvel of feminine silence. No matter how delicately Kinfaun approached the crucial question of her private means, by graceful lateral avenues or quick flank surprises, she seemed to descry from a distance whither all his gentle advances tended, and to erect at once between problem and solution some subtle impalpable stockade of womanly reticence. All he could gather, and that dimly, from her infrequent hints, was that her marriage with the late Mr. Roupell had been a marriage of convenience, arranged for her by her parents, whence it might perhaps be fairly inferred that the late Mr. Roupell was a man of substance—else why should those worthy parents have selected him as the convenience in question for their own daughter? But had the late Mr. Roupell inserted in his will any ugly clause about 'so long as my said wife shall continue to live unmarried'? That was the doubt that chiefly tortured poor Kinfaun's mind, as the widow grew every day more and more visibly and demonstrably in love with him.

For the widow *was* in love; of that there could be no question. A gentle, shrinking, womanly little woman, who seemed as though her heart had been too long repressed, she accepted Kinfaun frankly as just the man he put himself forward to be (anemones and all) and gave him her confidence (in all other matters) as freely as he asked for it. And since love is catching, even with men of Kinfaun's temperament, that middle-aged cynic began before long to avow to himself, somewhat shamefacedly indeed, yet none the less candidly, that he was really very fond of that pretty simple little smiling woman.

One wild hope he clung to, as he floundered deeper and deeper in the slough of entanglement with a person of unascertained wealth and indeterminate position; surely so sweet a little soul, who was so unaffectedly in love with him, could never dream of deceiving him about her worldly prospects! And though she implied nothing else, she always implied she had enough to live upon, which left a vague sense in the background of infinite possibilities unspecified and unhinted.

Once, on the rocks, as he sat alone behind a jutting point, Kinfaun overheard her saying to Mrs. Marindin, 'Oh, yes, indeed; if ever I married again, I should like to feel my husband married me for no other reason than because he loved me.'

Then she must be rich; rich enough to attract the attention of fortune-hunters!

So at last that very afternoon, ten minutes later, Kinfaun felt a crisis had arisen where he must madly plunge or give up the widow for ever. Nothing venture, nothing have; and he decided on plunging. Brave soldier that he was, he took his life in his hand, and asked the little widow for her hand and heart, not only gracefully, but even poetically.

As he spoke, Mrs. Roupell blushed rosy red, like a girl of fifteen, and her bosom heaved and fell; but she turned to him with all a true woman's confidingness, and she answered him 'Yes,' like one whose life-dream has at last come true after many long days of watching and waiting.

And before Kinfaun knew how things would turn out, it was all arranged for, almost without his willing it—a consular marriage, and that day fortnight.

He had plunged indeed, and the next two weeks were weeks, for him, of suspense and torture.

For as soon as everybody knew how all was arranged, everybody began to indulge in shrugs and hints and sinister suggestions which nearly threw poor Kinfaun's mind clear off its balance. Or, what was still worse, they asked him questions—inconvenient questions that he couldn't answer. Where was Mrs. Roupell's place? Who was Mrs. Roupell's first husband? What was Mrs. Roupell herself worth? and other equally rude and impertinent inquiries. Kinfaun kept his temper under these inflictions as well as he could; or, what was still better policy, pretended to lose it with becoming dignity. But in his heart how he wished he could only answer them!

So the fortnight drifted away, and on the very day before the one that was fixed for the marriage, Kinfaun as yet had found out nothing worth speaking of about his future wife.

In his anxiety to secure the rich young widow, as she was reputed to be, he had pushed matters forward a little too hurriedly, and now he was beginning to regret his precipitancy.

That day, to get over the tedium of waiting, he went into the Réunion at Cannes for half an hour. On the tennis-lawn he met Sir Richard Goldwin, fresh arrived from London, and new to the gossip and scandal of the Riviera. They foregathered awhile about various acquaintances, but before Kinfaun had time modestly to break the news of his own approaching matrimonial projects, Sir Richard remarked in a dubious tone, 'At Antibes, are you? Dear me, why little Mrs. Roupell is there. Have you made her acquaintance?'

He asked the question with so strange a smile that Kinfaun drew himself up and answered stiffly, yet full of curiosity, 'I have, Sir Richard. Do you know anything about her?'

The baronet smiled again and again mysteriously. 'Why, rather,' he answered, with an amused air. 'Last autumn in town I met her at the Fitzgibbons'. She calls herself the widow of some man Roupell, who was something in the City. But who the dickens Roupell was, or whether there ever was a Roupell at all, or how or why she became a Mrs., nobody seems to know. And where the money comes from, I always wonder: but heaven only can tell whether there's any money in the case at all, or whether the good lady lives by her wits and that pretty smile of hers. It's my belief she's the very same woman who did that famous diamond swindle at Pau last season.'

'What famous diamond swindle?' Kinfaun asked faintly, without having the courage to cut him short. And then Goldwin told him in brief outline that whole long story, so famous at the clubs in the year of its occurrence.

As soon as he'd finished, Kinfaun drew himself up and walked away with just a cold 'good-bye.' He was either too proud or too great a coward to tell the whole truth and shame Sir Richard, so he sneaked off, undecided, and went back to Antibes again.

On the way—with many throes—he had time to make up his mind. The risk was too great. He would break it all off, let it cost what it might. He couldn't afford to throw himself away like that on a woman who might turn out to be the merest adventuress.

At Antibes he went straight to Amy's room. It was Amy and Angus between them now; and he really liked her. In a sort of way he admired the woman's pluck and cleverness in so taking him in. But marry the diamond-swindler! Incredible, impossible!

He sat down, and tried to bring things gently to an explanation. But Amy Roupell looked blank into his eyes every time he tried to approach the subject gracefully, and he slank back disarmed. The tears half started to her lashes at the mere tone of his greeting. 'Oh, Angus!' she cried, as she took his hand in hers; and it thrilled through and through him. Wish as he might, he hadn't the courage so much as to hint to that beautiful, innocent, guileless child of thirty-five that some one suspected her of being the Pau diamond swindler. He sat long irresolute, while Mrs. Roupell grew sorer and sorer perplexed; then he rose, much dissatisfied at his own weakness. He went to his own rooms, and left the little widow sobbing alone in hers, and wondering to herself what on earth could ever have come over Angus.

All night long he tossed and turned, sleepless. How on earth to extricate himself from this deadly fix he couldn't imagine.

It was an awful night of vile and selfish fears—an unmanly night; but he lived through it somehow. Next morning he felt it was too late to turn back now. Let her be who she might, he couldn't help but marry Amy.

And marry her he did, in fear and trembling. He hated himself for having been so weak a fool; but marry her he did, without even a settlement. On that she remarked once or twice herself on her wedding day. She seemed to take it as a signal proof of his genuine attachment that he should marry her without making any inquiry as to settlements.

And then, as soon as they were irrevocably married, and no way out of it, it being now full May, Mrs. Kinfaun proposed they should return to England. She was anxious to take her husband down to her place in the country, she said; and Kinfaun, for his part, though tremulous for the upshot, was by no means sorry to investigate the whereabouts of that half-mythical estate, whose very existence he had more than once doubted.

On the journey Mrs. Kinfaun was perfectly happy—quietly happy, not like a person, Kinfaun thought to himself, who is just going to be unmasked in a great deception. But still, even now, her references to her place were singularly enigmatical and wanting in precision. All he could learn was that this mysterious place lay in a well-known village of Essex, some thirty or forty miles from town, and with that vague information he was fain perforce to console his mind during the long night he spent in doubt and suspense at the Métropole in London. She had money enough in hand, anyhow, he reflected with pleasure, to stop royally in good rooms at the Métropole.

Next day Kinfaun rose feverish with excitement. That morning was to set its seal upon his future fate. He would be rich or a dupe, as the event decided. Trembling with anticipations of good and evil, he took his seat in a first-class carriage at Liverpool Street, and was whirled down rapidly to the Essex village.

At the country station a porter came up to the window, all timid respect, and touched his hat to Mrs. Kinfaun with a deferential air of submissive recognition. Kinfaun breathed more freely, and handed him the black bag in even a lordlier style than usual—for he was always lordly. The porter took it, and at the same moment a footman approached with the proper degree of servility which betokens a gentleman's servant in a first-class family. Kinfaun drew a long breath, relieved, but threw his rugs and wraps across the footman's arm like one used to such attendance, and strode blindly out, following his wife, who led the way, with a certain air of half-conscious triumph, to a carriage at the exit. As they passed, the station-master bowed low before them, and the boy at the gate said 'Ticket, sir; thank you,' in that hushed voice with which our labouring class are wont to approach their pastors and masters.

Kinfaun's head reeled as he went. 'This is a very nice carriage, Amy,' he murmured feebly, as he leaned back on the cushions, too much taken aback to speak much. And Mrs. Kinfaun, with that sweet smile growing deeper as she said it, answered, like a child whose little ruse has fully succeeded, 'I'm glad you like it, Angus. I wouldn't tell you anything about the Knoll beforehand, for fear of disappointing you.'

The footman took his seat beside the coachman on the box. 'Home,' Mrs. Kinfaun said, and they rolled along smoothly on those comfortable C-springs. The horse-chestnuts were just coming into the first full leaf, and the flower buds were big almost to bursting on the scented lilacs.

'It's all very beautiful,' Kinfaun said faintly, as at a big entrance the lodge-keeper, watching, flung open wide a massive iron gate. 'I'd no idea, Amy, your place would be anything like so fine as this.'

The tears were standing in Mrs. Kinfauu's eyes, as she bent closer to his ear and whispered low, 'I wanted whoever married me, Angus, to marry me for myself. I know you never once wanted to ask me a single question—except if I loved you.'

But Kinfaun could hardly answer her yet. His heart was too full—in its sordid way. They were driving up through grounds that made his pulse bound and his breath come and go in short spasmodic jerks. Suburban, new, just fifteen years' growth—no time-honoured oaks, but money, every inch of it. Not so much land, indeed—ten acres or so at best—but laid out in perfect order, as rich men in the city lay out their pet places within easy reach of town, whither they run up daily. A couple of gardeners, with four fellows to help them, Kinfaun estimated roughly. Six thousand a year, at least, if it meant a penny. And how nearly he had been fooled by that croaker Goldwin!

His heart came up into his mouth with horror, to think of the narrow escape he had had not quite a week ago!

The carriage drew up at last in front of the house. Two more men-servants stood there awaiting it. High porch, broad staircase, suburban mansion. Not the fine old ancestral place in the country by any means—large, new-fangled, Queen Anne, red-bricky; but oh, what wealth! What outward and visible signs of it. The late Mr. Roupell must have been rolling in money! Kinfaun put up his hand to his dazed brow. His brain whirled. Everything was new, decorated, and polished throughout. The very steps and porch, with their great Vallauris tazzas and hothouse palms, seemed to reek with riches. The place was magnificent. It dazzled and appalled him.

He followed his wife, faltering, up the broad stairs and into the entrance-hall. Six thousand a year, indeed! It was nearer twenty! The late Mr. Roupell (who, as a matter of fact, had been an importer of tobacco in a well-known firm that bears an older name) had feathered his nest like a bird of Paradise. Kinfaun felt his knees sink bodily under him. The moneyed splendour of the thing, in its ostentatious Philistine way, had fairly overpowered him. He looked at his wife, who turned round to him for his applause, like a simple child that she was; then he murmured in a strangely dazed and far-away voice, 'This is a fine house. I'd no idea your house would be like this, Amy.'

With a tottering tread, he mooned from room to room; hall, ante-chamber, drawing-room, all was money, money, money. He gazed at the walls; they were hung thick with pictures, bearing well-known names, and bought, he couldn't doubt, at fancy prices. As in a dream, he strolled on into the billiard-room, all amazed. Mechanically, he touched the bell, he knew not why; a servant in knee-breeches and powdered hair came in with respectful mien, obedient to his summons. Kinfaun stammered out something about a brandy and soda; he felt faint and ill; so much grandeur took his breath away.

His wife bent over him tenderly. 'You're tired with the journey,' she said. 'Come out into the open air. That'll revive you, Angus.'

'No, no,' Kinfaun answered, rising again and rousing himself. 'It's so sudden, so unexpected.' And he nodded his head strangely. 'I didn't anticipate at all so fine a place as this is, Amy.'

He followed her out into the garden. She led him on from plot to plot, from parterre to parterre. Neat jam-tart crescents, all of them, in smooth stretches of lawn, mown close with velvety sward, in the best and most moneyed style of horticulture. His wife looked at him now and again, half tenderly, half inquiringly. Kinfaun murmured at every turn, 'This is fine, very fine! Such beautiful turf! Such well-kept gardens!'

Beyond, there were hot-houses, stables, outbuildings, the appurtenances and belongings of a great domain. Peaches blossomed on the walls; vines were leafing in the vinery. Kinfaun moved through it all, still dazed and still dreamy. From time to time, he murmured some brief word of approbation. But it was clear he was hardly more than half himself. This glamour of wealth seemed to stun and unman him.

Slowly, by devious paths, through shrubbery and garden, they returned to the house. Kinfaun sat for awhile and tried to talk, but words failed him. He could speak of nothing but the beauty of the rooms, the ground, the pictures. Mrs. Kinfaun looked pleased; she was glad in her heart dear Angus was so satisfied. Before long, it was time for him to dress for dinner. He went up to his dressing-room. Everything there was of the best, the richest, the costliest. Kinfaun looked every inch a gentleman in evening clothes. He walked down the stairs to dinner, gazing to right and left at the expensive decorations—William Morris, every scrap of them, and Morris is expensive. A Burne-Jones hung incongruously with one by its side; but what of that? Kinfaun knew they both cost money. He gave his wife his arm with stately dignity. The dinner was excellent; a first-rate cook; good clear soup; nice smelts; a capital glass of sherry. When the hock came up, Kinfaun sipped it with gusto and rolled it on his palate. 'Your wines are most choice, Amy,' he said with an effort, for he was lethargic still. 'This is exquisite Johannisberg. I never tasted better.'

Mrs. Kinfaun fairly beamed. If dear Angus was pleased, she was more than happy. He praised the sweetbreads, the asparagus, the hot-house strawberries. They were all of them excellent—and they all meant money.

After dinner, he rose, and gazed blankly at the wall. He paced round the room and examined each picture separately. Then he gazed at the plate, the furniture, the powdered footmen. His head shook strangely. He turned to his wife for support. He staggered, and stood still. She gave him her arm. He looked at her and murmured, 'This is a very fine place—a very fine place indeed. Such splendid plate! such beautiful furniture!'

He doddered as he spoke. His wife gazed at him, terrified. She led him into the drawing-room, and he sank into an easy chair.

'You're ill, Angus,' she cried.

'Oh, no,' he answered faintly, wagging his head up and down, with his mouth half-open, and his eyes staring blankly at the wall before him. 'But this is a very fine place, indeed; a beautiful place. I didn't expect at all so fine a place as this, Amy.'

He looked so strangely unhinged, so changed, as if by magic, that his wife grew alarmed. She rang the bell. 'Send for Dr. Wolcott, James,' she cried to the servant hastily. 'Major Kinfaun is ill. The journey has fatigued him.'

When Dr. Wolcott came Kinfaun looked up at him with a stupid dull look in those keen grey eyes, and hung his chin once more like a confirmed imbecile. 'This is a fine place, doctor,' he drawled out idiotically. 'I didn't expect to find it at all so fine. It must have cost a great deal of money.'

The sudden revulsion, the wild access of wealth, had thrown his intellect entirely off its balance. And to this day, if you venture into the grounds of the big square house where poor Mrs. Kinfaun, that sweet lady in black, with the sad childish face and the great red eyes, lives with her mad husband, you may chance to stumble across a slouching tall man, with grizzled moustache and open doddering mouth (accompanied by a keeper), who will stop you and, pointing to the well-kept flower-beds and the pillared porch, will murmur pathetically, 'This is a fine place—a very fine place. I didn't expect to find it so fine. My wife must be worth a terrible lot of money.'

DEFENCE NOT DEFIANCE.

When 'the great and good Linnæus' first saw gorse in blossom on Wimbledon Common, he fell on his knees, says the veracious legend, and thanked God audibly then and there for having created so glorious and unique a combination of colour and perfume. It was a bright sunny day, no doubt, in early spring, and Wimbledon Common must have been somewhat more picturesque in Linnæus's time than in its existing suburban condition; but even so, the act savours of the eighteenth century. Let us frankly admit, between ourselves, 'twas just a trifle theatrical. It reminds one of Gibbon on his own fat marrowbones. The age of the Georges loved these affected little displays of what it called 'sensibility.' The traveller fresh back from Abyssinia or New Holland was expected to go down upon all fours on Portsmouth Hard in the rapture of his return, and kiss with fervour the sacred soil of England. So Linnæus may be excused for his too obtrusive gratitude, to the damage of his small-clothes, on the ground that, after all, he just followed the fashion. A man who really meant it would have abstained, I fancy, from the overt act of falling on his knees, and if he thanked Heaven at all, would have thanked it silently.

On the main point, however, I am at one with Linnæus. Few plants on earth are more beautiful than our English furzes; and an English moor, aglow with yellow gorse and on fire with purple heather, is a lovelier sight than anything to be seen among the unvaried dark green of tropical forests. Moreover, the human race in these islands owes much to those refulgent flowers; for we all know that 'when the gorse is out of blossom, then is kissing out of fashion'; and the gorse has managed, by flowering all the year round, to prevent inconvenience to many million pairs of human lovers. Yet I cannot find that any historian of our flora has yet treated the benignant though prickly plant at proper length in any exhaustive monograph. I propose, therefore, to meet this felt want in the literature of the subject by devoting a few pages of scientific gossip to the various kinds of gorse, their origin, development, and subsequent fortunes.

The life-history of the common furze is a singular and interesting one. In its adult stage, as everybody knows who has ever attempted to pick a flowering branch of the bright golden bloom, it is conspicuously and I will even venture to say unpleasantly prickly. But as the young Nero refused with tears to sign a death-warrant, and as Robespierre declined a judgeship rather than pass capital sentence upon a fellow-creature, so the many-spined gorse, which in its maturer years sheds your blood without pity, is in its infant stage as gentle and shrinking a plant as that pet of poets, the modest violet. If you take a few little beans out of the ripe pods on a furze-bush and bury them in a flower-pot, you will find the tiny seedlings which sprout from the seeds are entirely ungorselike. They have broad and flattened trefoil leaves —in point of fact they are essentially clovers. You may observe similar trefoil leaves on adult bushes of the pretty yellow genista so commonly cultivated in conservatories and window-gardens. Young gorse-plants when they first come up are to all intents and purposes in the genista stage; it is only as they grow up and begin to realise their proper position in life as furze-bushes, that they set about developing their murderous spines and prickles.

Why is this? Well, the young plant and the young animal often recapitulate to some extent the evolutionary history of their race and species. Thus the common frog begins life as a tadpole, which is essentially a fish with gills and swimming organs; while he ends it as a frog, which is essentially a reptile, breathing by means of lungs, and hopping on all fours on terra firma. So too the human embryo in its earliest stage exhibits gill-slits like a fish's; and, later on, resembles roughly at various times the reptile, the lower mammals, and the ancestral monkey. Now the progenitors of gorse were soft and innocent shrubs with trefoil leaves, like clover or genista; but as they grew for the most part on very open stretches of down or moorland, they were exposed to be eaten down by deer and rabbits, sheep, cattle, and horses. Under these circumstances, only the prickliest and thorniest among them stood a chance of surviving; and, indeed, you may observe that almost all the vegetation on our English commons is well defended by sharp spines against the attacks of herbivores. Waste lands in Britain are overgrown with brambles, blackthorn, junipers, and furze-bushes; while even the smaller plants, like butcher's broom and carline, are offensively prickly. Nay, more: the pretty little rest-harrow, with its dainty purple pea-blossoms, which is commonly unarmed in fields and meadows, has developed on the commons of Kent and Surrey, and on continental waysides, a spiny variety for purposes of self-protection. Only the thistleloving donkey and the close-cropping goose can manage to pick up an honest living anyhow on such pungent provender.

So the infant furze-bush recapitulates for us in full the whole history of the origin and development of its species. For when the little beans begin to sprout, the first things to appear above ground are two simple round seed-leaves. These represent for us the fundamental common ancestor of the whole tribe of pea-blossoms; no matter which of them you sow, you will find the earliest stage consists invariably of these two round seed-leaves. The pea, the bean, the furze-bush, the laburnum, the wistaria (which young ladies *will* call 'westeria'), the tiny clover, and the huge American acacia or locust-tree, all alike belong to this single family, readily distinguished from all others by its butterfly-winged flowers, and all begin life, from Alaska to Australia, with the self-same pair of simple round seed-leaves. But next after the round leaves in the seedling gorse come three or four little hairy trefoils, like those of clover or laburnum on a smaller scale; and this second type of foliage is a reminiscence of the time when the ancestors of furze were simple trefoil-bearing bushes exactly resembling the greenhouse genista. Above the clover-like leaves again, the seedling begins to put forth single narrow blades, but flattened and leaf-like, not round and prickly as in the older bushes. Gradually, as the plant increases in stature and wisdom, it learns to produce stiffer and more conical leaves, which pass by degrees into thorns or prickles. In the adult state, all the branches end in a stout spine, and the leaves being also spiny, it requires the eye and the faith of a trained botanist to distinguish between them. But the seedling shoots still give us the history of gorse and its evolution in brief; they supply for us every intermediate stage from the pretty trefoil through the narrow flat leaf, growing rounder and sharper as the stem mounts upward, to the murderous prickles of the full-grown furze-bush.

Our common English broom, which I earnestly trust all readers of this Magazine can distinguish for themselves from furze or gorse, preserves for us in fuller detail certain intermediate stages in this evolutionary history. For in broom, most of the foliage is trefoil throughout; but the upper branches have often solitary leaves, flat and narrow like the intermediate form on the gorse-bush. This last is also the commonest type in most species of genistas. We may therefore say that gorse begins life as a generalised or undifferentiated pea-flower; next, passes through a condition analogous to that of the trefoil-bearing greenhouse genista; afterwards resembles its unarmed ally, the English broom; and finally develops its own characteristic and specific features as a fully armed furze-bush. Only, the stages which occupy the broom for the whole of its lifetime are telescoped, as it were, in the gorse into the first three weeks of its infant existence.

Leaves are the mouths and stomachs of plants. Their business is to drink in the floating carbonic acid of the air, and to digest it, under the influence of sunlight, so as to turn it from inorganic into organic matter. Now, if you imagine yourself a plant for a moment, you must see at once that by far the most convenient and natural form for your leaves to assume, under ordinary circumstances, is that of a flat extended blade, as in the oak, the beech, the bean, or the lily. This shape clearly allows the greatest possible development of absorptive surface; it gives plenty of room for thousands of the tiny mouths or stomata—microscopic throats, guarded by miniature lips, which open in fit weather and suck in whatever particles of carbonic acid may happen to pass their way. It also affords a broad expanse of green cells for the sunlight to fall upon, and so to effect that disintegration of the elements of carbonic acid which is the prime function of vegetable life. So obviously sensible and useful is this flat form of leaf that no plant in its right mind ever dreams of discarding it except for some good and sufficient reason.

And such good and sufficient reason the furze-bush has for rejecting and discarding it. Gorse is no fool; it knows its own business. It has found out exactly what tactics suit a north-European plant, continually exposed on open plains or hills to the attacks of browsing herbivores. Like the licensed victuallers, it takes for its motto 'Defence not Defiance.' It sacrifices the advantages of a broad flat leaf, and puts up with the discomfort of small pointed narrow ones, because it finds protection against enemies is more important for a shrub which occupies its station in life than expanded feeding-surface. Appetite would naturally lead it to have leaves like a laburnum; necessity compels it to clothe itself instead in short and stubbly prickles. You may regard it, in fact, as a sort of vegetable hedge-hog—a bristling plant-porcupine. Like the mediæval baron in his hill-top stronghold, gorse is more intent upon the problem of defence than upon the gratification of a native love for air and sunshine, food and drink in abundance.

If you look at a gorse-bush in summer or winter, you will observe at once that it is green all over. The short spiky branches are very much the same in colour and texture as the short spiky leaves which grow threateningly out from them. That is to say, the plant makes up for the want of flat and expanded foliage by utilising the branches as subsidiary digestive organs. Every part alike is engaged in drinking in the floating carbonic acid; every part alike is full of green chlorophyll—the active agent of plant digestion. Both in leaves and branches, when the sunlight falls upon them, the process of assimilation goes on uninterruptedly. Thus gorse makes up in the number and intricacy of its busy green spikes for the lack of any large and expanded drinking-surface. To put it briefly, it is mouth and stomach all over.

About its second or third year, the young furze-bush begins to blossom. Apparently, to the unobservant eye of the ordinary townsman, it proceeds to flower thenceforth all the year round without any interruption. In reality, however, it does nothing of the sort. And here I will venture to expound to you why it is that gorse is never out of blossom, and kissing accordingly never out of fashion. The fact is, there are in England two distinct species of furze, superficially indistinguishable to the unlearned eye, but quite well marked when once the difference between them has been pointed out to you. The first is the great or winter gorse, with pale yellow flowers. This is a tall and bushy shrub, very woody at the base, and covered all over with soft down or hair, especially on the bark of the larger branches. It begins to blossom in early autumn, straggles on as best it may through the winter season, puts out fresh masses of bloom on every sunny day in December and January, and continues on through spring or early summer. Indeed, one may see it in the depth of winter with hoar-frost coating its bold yellow blossoms. The second kind is the dwarf or summer gorse—a much smaller plant, less bushy and more creeping; it has fewer hairs and brighter green leaves; its flowers are smaller, of a deeper golden yellow, and it likewise differs in certain technical points about the calyx and bracts which the natural benevolence of my character prevents me from inflicting on unbotanical readers. This smaller species begins to flower in early summer, just about the time when the greater gorse leaves off, and it continues in blossom through July, August, and September, till the greater gorse is ready to start again. The one plant blooms from October till May, the other takes up the running from May till October.

Thus it comes about that gorse of one kind or another is never out of blossom. Careless observers, not distinguishing between these two allied but distinct species, have come to the conclusion that one and the same plant is perpetually in flower. This is the less to be wondered at as the two often grow together over miles of waste land on heaths and commons. But their effect when in flower is really very different: the great gorse has its pale yellow blossoms scattered irregularly in patches on the round top of the bushes; the dwarf summer gorse, on the other hand, has them arranged in close, upright spikes, very thick and regular. The larger sort makes the more effective masses on a big scale in the landscape; the smaller looks daintier and prettier on a very close view, especially when intermixed, as it often is, with ling and Scotch heather.

Confining ourselves for the present to the great winter gorse, we may notice for ourselves on any heath or common that it is a tall, stout bush, five or six feet in height, and ferociously prickly. By origin, it is entirely a west-European plant, extending from Ireland to central Germany; but it can stand neither extreme heat nor extreme cold; it hardly extends to the highlands of Scotland, and is unknown in Scandinavia—else how should we have that pretty legend of Linnæus? But on the other hand it never reaches the Mediterranean region, where its place is taken by prickly genistas and other southern pea-flowers. Heat bakes it, cold chills it; it loves the intermediate climate of Britain and Belgium. In one word, the greater gorse is a specialised form well adapted to survive on the open and defenceless moors of north-western Europe. For that world it was developed; in that world alone does it thrive and maintain itself. As usual, however, let it defend itself as it may, man has found out a plan to utilise it as fodder for his own purposes. Sheep-farmers burn it down to the ground, when its stems become too high and woody. The plant then sends up green succulent shoots from the uninjured root-stock; and these shoots, though already somewhat coarse and prickly, are eaten by sheep in default of better forage.

As autumn comes on, the great gorse prepares itself for its flowering season. If you examine the boughs in October, you will find them thickly covered with tiny brown buds in all stages of development. Some are just ready to open; others are still in the first wee pin-head stage of their existence, The plant arranges things so of set purpose. It wishes to flower from time to time through the winter season; and it graduates its buds so that some will be in a fit state to take advantage of every fine spell in the frostiest weather. Why it should choose this curious time for flowering I will point out a little later; for the present it will be enough to call attention to the fact that due provision is made beforehand for a long blossoming season. The buds, as I mentioned just now, are brown and velvety; and the brownness is due to the numerous little hairs with which the two-lipped calyx that encloses the unopened flower is thickly studded. The point of these hairs is to prevent flying insects from laying their eggs on the bud, and encouraging their young grubs to feed on the nutritious little pollen-masses within them. If you look close, indeed, you will see that the hairs cluster thickest at the top, which is just the part where such flying insects always lay their eggs on the buds of defenceless species. As usual, we see the plot and counter-plot of nature. The plant wants the pollen for its own fertilisation. The insect tries to steal it as food for its young. The plant keeps it out by a protective covering.

Till the blossom is ready to unfold on some warm winter day, the two lips of the calyx remain so tightly closed that you can separate them with difficulty. But when the right moment arrives, the bud, which has been waiting for some sunny morning, opens blithely of itself and displays a flower of the common papilionaceous or pea-blossom type. The mode of its fertilisation in the gorse-blossom, however, as in the flower of the broom and some allied bushes, is both curious and interesting. The keel or lower portion of the corolla consists of two united and soldered petals, flanked by what are technically known as the wings. At the base of this keel are two little rounded knobs or projections, one on either side, so shaped as exactly to fit the front legs of the bee as he settles upon the blossom. They afford, in point of fact, a convenient landing-stage, like the step of an omnibus. But the whole lower part of the flower is loosely hinged to the standard or upper portion; and as the bee alights on it, his weight bends it suddenly down, so that the whole keel bursts open elastically, and dusts him all over with the fertilising pollen. When he flies away again, the keel and wings do not return to their original position, but hang loosely downward. The inquiring bee, on his collecting rounds, can thus see at a glance whether any particular flower has been 'sprung' or not, as we technically call it. This saves him much time, for he doesn't have to go poking his proboscis into blossoms which may turn out to have been already rifled. It also serves the plant's purpose equally well, as it makes the bee attend strictly to business, instead of fooling about among flowers which have already shed their pollen and already been fertilised. It is a case, in short, of mutual accommodation.

If you depress the keel of a gorse-blossom with your finger, you can see for yourself how it opens elastically and puffs out a little shower of copious yellow pollen. This trick it shares with several other bushy pea-flowers. But the common little English birdsfoot trefoil, a herb of the same family, has invented and patented a still more advanced device which is a distinct improvement upon the method pursued by the brooms and furzes. In birdsfoot trefoil and the group to which it belongs, the keel, instead of being blunt as in gorse, is narrow and sharply-pointed. The stamens shed their pollen beforehand into the tip of this keel. There are a pair of knobs, as before, for the bee to alight upon; but his weight, instead of bursting open the flower with a pop, merely depresses it a little, and pumps out the pollen, which is rather viscid than powdery, against his hairy bosom. The end of the keel is purposely perforated so as to allow the pollen to ooze out under pressure of the insect's body. This is an obvious advance in structure, because it saves and utilises the whole of the pollen, whereas in the case of gorse a considerable portion of that valuable material is wastefully shed abroad to the four winds of heaven. In the single family of the pea-flowers alone, whose blossoms are all constructed on very much the same architectural model, I could tell you of a dozen such minor modifications, each intended in its way to secure more perfect and certain fertilisation. Plants are always inventing fresh Yankee notions.

But why does the greater gorse choose the winter to flower in? Why indulge in so unusual and eccentric an idiosyncrasy? Simply because it finds there is then and there an opening for it. And wherever an opening in life exists, some enterprising person or some enterprising species is sure to step in and avail himself of the vacancy. Bees come out foraging on every sunny day through our English winter. Therefore it is worth while for a few stray flowers to straggle on through the coldest months in order to utilise this off-chance of impregnation. Whenever a morning occurs in winter fit for bees to venture out on, a few hardy gorse-blossoms venture out to accommodate them. And in early spring, before there is much competition among other plants for the services of those common carriers of pollen, the gorse-bushes are afire with golden blossoms, whose bright petals and heavy scent, hanging thick upon the air, are all intended as so many bids for the kindly attention of the insect fertilisers.

Yet the flower, after all, is only the first stage in the production of the fruit and seed. It exists for no other purpose than to give rise to the germs of future generations. As soon as the blossom is fertilised, the ovary begins to swell out into tiny oblong pods, rather short and thick, but very bean-like in structure. A pod of some sort, indeed, enclosing one or more seeds, like peas or beans, is the universal form of fruit throughout the family of the pea-flowers. In gorse, the seeds number some three or four, and look like miniature kidney-beans. But inasmuch as, like all others of their tribe, they are rich in food-stuffs, the gorse-bush protects them against the attacks of insects by making its pod very thick and hairy. Against browsing animals, they are sufficiently protected by the spinelike branches. When the pods ripen, they have a curious and interesting method of dispersing the seeds. If you walk across a common on a sunny summer day, you may hear every now and then little explosive bangs resounding on every side of you as if from invisible pop-guns. These are the reports of the bursting gorse-pods. The valves are elastic, and the heat of the sun makes them roll up at last with a sudden burst, and scatter the seeds on every side around them. As most of the bushes flower in April, the pods are generally ripe in July or August. This mode of dispersion is not unlike the familiar method employed by the garden balsam. It is a dodge which both plants have hit upon independently.

The dwarf furze resembles in most points its bigger and burlier cousin. Only, it takes up the running when the greater gorse leaves off; it flowers while the other is in fruit, and ripens its pods while the other is flowering. Moreover, it is even more strictly western in type than the greater gorse; it does not cross the Rhine, which forms its scientific frontier, and it goes further north into Scotland than its bigger and less protected companion. Growing lower on the ground, it feels frost less severely. In the matter of fertilisation, it shows no originality, but follows the lead of its big relation. Being a summer plant, however, it does not need to angle for the visits of bees like its wintry friend, but takes its chance with the Scotch heather and purple ling in whose company it covers square miles of moorland.

There are only these two species of gorse in England. If any man tells you otherwise, assure him that he is a splitter. For modern biologists are divided into the two camps of the splitters and the lumpers. The first are in favour of making a species out of every petty local race or variety; the second are all for lumping unimportant minor forms into a single species. As you may gather from these remarks, I am myself a convinced and consistent lumper. I entertain conscientious objections to splitting. The late Mr. Borrer, who was the most abandoned splitter I have ever met with, endeavoured to make seventeen species out of our English dog-rose, and no less than forty out of our common blackberry-bush. Now a dog-rose, I maintain, is only a dog-rose; and the late Mr. Borrer may argue the matter till he is black in the face before he makes me believe that a common blackberry-bramble is forty distinct and separate brambles. I make these remarks 'without prejudice,' because certain splitters divide the greater gorse into two indistinguishable species, which they describe respectively as common and Irish furze; while they break up the dwarf form into two equally indistinguishable kinds, which they describe under the names of dwarf and Welsh furze respectively. To me, these distinctions appear pretty much as if we were to divide the human race in Britain into two distinct species of blue-eyed and black-eyed. To an eye which is neither black nor blue, but judiciously grey, the two supposed species seem to run into one another everywhere by imperceptible gradations.

On the other hand, I would desire to warn the innocent reader against the opposite error committed by Bentham, who considers that the dwarf furze may be 'perhaps a mere variety' of the greater gorse. This view, in my opinion, errs too much in the contrary direction of excessive lumping. I have therefore, of course, a low opinion of it. But I mention the fact merely in order to point out its exact accordance with a general principle of human nature. You will doubtless have observed that it is precisely this just mean which separates Us—not you and me in particular, but the universal and absolute subjective Us—from the inferior class known as Other People. Other People, you must have observed, rush into such wild excesses; We alone preserve a level head of moderation in all departments of human thought or action. Other People are either more conservative than We are, in which case they are regular unprogressive old Tories; or else they are more radical than We are, in which case they are downright socialists, revolutionists, and visionary Utopians. We alone occupy down to a shade of shades the precisely right medium position. No matter how far we go in either direction, the people who go further than We, or fall short of Us, are equally in error. They are silly superstitious bigots on the one hand, and wicked materialists or agnostics on the other. They are so very high church, or so very low church, or so very broad church, while we ourselves are 'just right, don't you know,' not yielding in any way to foolish fads and fancies. Therefore the true faith is obviously this—to be neither a ridiculous splitter nor an absurd lumper, but to acknowledge the plain fact that there are two kinds of gorse, neither more nor less, in these Isles of Britain. For which true faith, without a shadow of dogmatism, I will go, if need be, to the stake at Smithfield.

CHARACTER NOTE.

THE MOTHER.

L'être le plus aimé est celui par qui on aura le plus souffert.

Mrs. Tasker lets lodgings. She lives in the most remote and unknown of east coast watering places. Her modest abode is not patronised by the fashionable. She does not even pretend—there is, in fact, no pretence about Mrs. Tasker—that her sitting-room has a sea view. Neither does she deceive the impecunious hospital-nurse, the soft spinster, and the struggling lady artist, who form her *clientèle*, with promises of good cooking or any description of attendance.

Mrs. Tasker, in fact, lets lodgings, as it were, upon sufferance. She receives her guests with a cast of countenance perfectly lugubrious. She has paid no attention to her dress so as to create an agreeable impression upon them. Her normal costume of a dingy skirt, a forlorn top of a different colour, and a depressing apron is unchanged. She is on the alert to tell them at the moment of their arrival all the drawbacks they will find to herself, her rooms, her kitchen-range, and the place in general. 'Your neighbourhood is lovely, I am told,' says the lady artist with the sweetest and most propitiating of smiles.

'I've never seed as it was,' answers Mrs. Tasker gloomily. She hates the lady artist. She regards all lodgers, indeed, with a perfectly consistent animosity. Her disdain for a class of persons who require frequent incidental cups of tea, hot dinners every day, and dessert on Sundays is quite without bounds. Her sentiments towards her guests are written large upon a perfectly plain and trustworthy countenance. When she sees them sitting with their feet upon her cherished Berlin wool-worked arm-chair she bangs their door as she leaves the room with a display of feeling which nearly brings the house about their ears. When one of them ventures to ask if her landlady has such a thing as a pair of nutcrackers, the satiric scorn on Mrs. Tasker's countenance for a woman in the prime of life who cannot crack nuts with her teeth causes the guest to blush and apologise for making so unreasonable a demand.

Mrs. Tasker has, moreover, a habit of thrusting the dinner things on a tray on to the table in front of the visitor with an expression which says more plainly than words, 'If you can't arrange them for yourself, you must be a fool.'

She never panders to the Sybarite inclinations of her lodgers by bringing them hot water in the morning. When they order for dinner a little kickshaw like a mutton-chop, she says with an unmistakable note of triumph in her voice, 'Our butcher's run out of all but pork.'

She always prophesies a continuance of wet weather.

'When it do begin to rain here,' she says, 'it takes precious good care not to stop.'

But in spite of a disposition so wholly honest and discouraging, Mrs. Tasker's lodgers have a habit of coming back to her. Mrs. Tasker is indefatigably clean. She scrubs and polishes until she is purple in the face. She would scorn the idea of purloining a single tartlet belonging to the parlour. She has that vigorous honesty which is often found in company with a bad temper and a good heart.

In the back kitchen live Mr. Tasker and little Johnnie. Mr. Tasker is thick, agricultural, well-meaning, and beery. Mr. Tasker is not of much account, and Johnnie is the apple of Mrs. Tasker's eye. It is for Johnnie she lets lodgings. She and her husband could live well enough—by cutting Tasker off his beer—upon the wages of a day-labourer. But Johnnie wants warm underclothing and a doctor when he is ill, and presently a first-rate schooling. Johnnie must have nourishing food—or what Mrs. Tasker takes to be nourishing food. For his sake, therefore, the mother lets lodgings. For his sake she bears with persons who are always wanting meals and ringing the bell. For his sake she controls—in a measure, at least—a temper as rough as her homely face. For his sake she gets up very early in the morning, and creeps up-stairs to bed, with a sigh she cannot wholly stifle, very late at night. For his sake she gives up what she calls her independence, and which, after Johnnie—a very long way after, indeed—she likes better than anything she has. For Johnnie's sake she does not turn the lady artist summarily out of doors when that enthusiast ruins the parlour table-cloth with her oil paints. For the sake of a little snivelling boy, with a perpetual cold in his head and no pocket-handkerchief, she stints herself and Mr. Tasker in food and clothing and comforts. She performs, indeed, for him a thousand sacrifices of which no one knows, perhaps, the extent or the difficulty. She is a hundred times a day comparatively polite where her natural disposition inclines her to be superlatively rude. She holds her tongue—at a great cost. She is silently scornful where she wants to be abusive. And she always manages, for Johnnie's sake, to say on parting with her lodgers that she hopes they will return to her next year.

In Mrs. Tasker's love towards the child there is none of that weakness and softness which distinguish some maternities. Her love, in fact, rarely rises to her lips. It is hidden away in a heart wholly strong, honest, and faithful. The utmost demonstration of affection which she permits herself towards her boy is to occasionally rub his damp little nose vigorously with the corner of her apron, leaving that organ astonishingly red and flat. Mrs. Tasker 'don't hold' with spoiling children.

'It's a poor way of caring for 'em,' she says. And so when little Johnnie is naughty she whips him very severely, and when he is good she cuffs him occasionally, just to remind him that the maternal love and wisdom are always watching over him.

At present, and in default of better, Johnnie goes to the village school. Mrs. Tasker neatly describes the schoolmaster as a 'flat.' But would there be any master good enough to teach Johnnie? Perhaps not. He is sent off to school while the lodgers are taking their breakfast. Mrs. Tasker ties him up tightly in a very hygienic and scratchy comforter which she has made with great pains in her rare spare minutes. He is further clad in a thick coat, studded with naval buttons, which Mrs. Tasker bought in place of a jacket for herself.

Mrs. Tasker accompanies him to the gate. She watches him out of sight, and shakes her fist at him when he looks round, by way, as it were, of keeping him up to his duties. It is only when he is quite out of sight that something like a smile and tenderness comes on her harsh face, and she goes slowly back to the house.

'You think a sight on Johnnie, I suppose,' says Mr. Tasker gloomily one day, in a thick voice suggestive of agricultural mud.

'A sight more than I do on you,' answers Mrs. Tasker snappily, washing dishes.

Mrs. Tasker has a feeling which she does not explain, or try to explain, about her love for the child. It appears to her to be something sacred and secret; that one does not want to talk about; that one resents being reminded of; of which the roots are too deep down in one's heart to bear being dug up and looked at.

She is not, indeed, always actually thinking of him. She has a thousand things to occupy her attention—the lodgers' meals and the parlour tablecloth, and Mr. Tasker's tendency to inebriate himself. But the child stands by, as it were—always very close to her heart.

Everything she does is directly or indirectly for Johnnie. She eyes the clothing of other little boys with a view to copying it for Johnnie. She has quite violent dislikes towards children of Johnnie's age who are fatter and healthier than he is. There are, indeed, many such. But perhaps the maternal affection is only the stronger because Johnnie is puny, weakly, and plain—maternal affection having been so constituted by Nature, or God.

One winter, a winter when Mrs. Tasker's rooms are occupied by a soft-spoken Spinster who has generously sacrificed her youth to a slum, Johnnie is very puny and weakly indeed. The Spinster, who takes an uncommon interest in Johnnie, recommends cod-liver oil. Mr. Tasker, the mother having already denied herself everything except the bare necessaries of life, is cut off his beer-money to provide it. And the Spinster thinks this is a very cold place for your dear little boy, and I am just starting a school at Torquay, and won't you trust him to me? And the Spinster kisses Johnnie with great self-sacrifice on the tip of his red and humid little nose. Mrs. Tasker, into whose face a deep colour has come, says in an unusual voice, 'I'll think on it, mum.' That evening, when Johnnie has gone to bed, Mr. Tasker spells out the advertisement of the school from a paper the Spinster has lent him.

Mrs. Tasker sits with a hand on each knee, looking very deeply and fixedly into the fire.

''Ome comfits?' she says doubtfully. 'And what do she mean by 'ome comfits? Will they see as 'is shirt is aired and 'e don't sit in wet boots?'

'Un-lim-i-ted di-et,' continues the father with difficulty.

'If that means letting 'im stuff 'isself, it'll kill that child,' says Mrs. Tasker, pessimistically.

'What are you a-cryin' for?' inquires her husband. Mrs. Tasker replies with considerable snappishness that she is not crying, and men is all fools, drat them, with other remarks so uncomplimentary to the sex that Mr. Tasker prudently lies low behind the newspaper until the storm is over.

The Spinster's blandishments and her advertisement prevail. Johnnie goes back with her to Torquay. She is paid her fees in advance, from money slowly and hardly saved for the purpose, and mysteriously hidden away in Mrs. Tasker's bedroom. The mother is very courageous before this parting and, it must be confessed, towards Mr. Tasker particularly uncertain in temper. She initiates the Spinster into the mysteries of Johnnie's underclothing. She buys him six pocket-handkerchiefs, and instructs him how to use them without assistance. She is up very early making his preparations, and goes to bed later than ever at night. She does not spare herself at all. She is glad, perhaps, that she has no time to think. Her hard life at this period ages her very considerably. Or she is aged, perhaps, through some feelings and forebodings of which she never speaks. She is always very cheerful and practical and severe with Johnnie, who is as melancholy at this time as one can be at six years old. 'It's for your good,' she says, shaking him to emphasise her remarks. 'And you ought to know as how it is.' Then the end comes. Johnnie's sad little face is sticky with tears, and toffee which has been administered to him as a consolation, when he puts it up to be kissed. 'Mind you're a good boy,' says the mother unsteadily, and with a grip on his little arm which he understands to mean love, perhaps, better than if it were a delicate caress.

'He is going to be a dear, happy little fellow,' says the Spinster sweetly, and the cab drives away. Two tears—large, heavy, unaccustomed tears—fall down Mrs. Tasker's homely face as she watches it. And then she turns indoors, addressing herself by opprobrious names for her weakness, and cleans out the late lodger's apartments, viciously.

Six months later Mrs. Tasker receives an anonymous letter. It is very illiterate and misspelt. But it is so far comprehensible that when the mother has read it her head falls upon her folded arms on the table, with a great and exceeding bitter cry. Your son, says the letter—spelling the word as if Johnnie were the chief of heavenly bodies—'is being treated that bad as if you don't come and take him away will be the death on him. She is a Beast. She has done the same by others. Only Johnnie is delicater, and it's killing him.'

It's killing him. The fierce maternal heart beating in Mrs.

Tasker's gaunt person makes her tremble in a great passion of rage, love, and yearning. Come and take him away. It sounds so easy, and is impossible. Tasker is out of work—has been out of work for six weeks. The lodgers represent the only source of income. There may be, perhaps, five shillings in the house. But there certainly is not enough for a journey across England. If there were how could Mrs. Tasker leave the house? And what would be the use of sending a lout like Mr. Tasker (men is all fools) who has never been twenty miles from his native village in his life, a complicated cross-railway journey?

So Mrs. Tasker takes the family pen and adds a little water to the remains of the family ink, and writes to the Spinster demanding Johnnie's return. The mother has never held much with book learning. Does not know very well how to write, or at all how to express herself. 'You can keep the money,' she says. 'We don't want that. Send the boy back or we will have the law of you. Send Johnnie back sharp, and curse you, curse you, curse you!'

The curses, which she spells 'cus,' are in some sort a relief to this poor, ignorant, angry, loving soul. The coarse vigour of her ill-spelt abuse comforts her for the moment a little. It is when the letter is sealed, stamped, and posted, that her maternal tragedy begins. It is in those terrible days of waiting, when no answer is returned to the letter and Johnnie does not come home, that she lives through the worst hours of her life.

A most merciful necessity requires that she shall work as usual, that she cook the lodgers' food and clean their rooms, that she shall be perpetually busy from morning until evening. But is there any work that can make her forget Johnnie? It seems to her that his poor, pinched, white little face haunts her. That it comes always between her and what she is doing. She does not say much. What is there to be said? Mr. Tasker smokes a short clay pipe in front of the fire in stolid gloominess. He does not suggest comfort. Suggestions are not his *forte*. He is, in a dull manner, shocked when Mrs. Tasker, for the first time in her life that he can remember, refuses to eat. She pushes away the plate of untouched food and sits for a minute or two with her elbows on the table and her head resting on her hands.

'Don't give in, 'Liza, don't give in,' says Mr. Tasker almost piteously.

'It don't matter,' says Mrs. Tasker. 'I can make up at tea.'

But she does not make up at tea. Who shall say in these interminable days what terrible, foolish, impossible imaginings creep into her heart? She fancies a thousand ignorant and unlikely things which may be happening to the child.

'He was always weakly,' she says. 'It will kill him.' She has, indeed, hitherto angrily repudiated suggestions that Johnnie is less strong than other children. They recur to her now, and she cannot disbelieve them.

'He were a pore baby, weren't he?' she says, huskily, to her husband, and hoping for a contradiction.

'He were, 'Liza, he were,' answers Mr. Tasker, gloomily.

She remembers, how well! that frail little infancy. She used to compare him with other babies, and insult their mammas dreadfully by vaunting Johnnie's superiority in her rudest and bluntest manner.

'But his legs were pore little sticks,' she murmurs to herself, sorrowfully. 'And I knowed they were all along.'

And one night when she and her husband have been sitting silently on either side of the hearth, watching the embers blacken and die out, her rough, listless hands fall at her sides, and she cries out in despair, and as if she were alone—

'Oh Lord, don't be for hurting our Johnnie any more! We'd sooner he died outright.'

And the next day Johnnie comes. The balmy air of Torquay has not been sufficient to counteract the baneful effects of insufficient food and genteel cruelty. Johnnie is very ill indeed.

'Will he live?' says the mother.

'God help you!' answers the doctor, looking into her strong, homely, haggard face. 'Nothing human can save him.'

But even to this faithless and unbelieving generation there remains one great miracle-worker, whose name is Love.

AN ELIZABETHAN ZOOLOGIST.

THE student of early works upon natural history, more especially of those that deal with the branch of zoology, will be struck by the fact that our forefathers could boast of a far more curious and varied knowledge of birds, beasts, and fishes, their habits, customs, and medicinal properties, than the cautious, matter-of-fact scientists of the present day. In the middle ages zoological treatises or bestiaries were immensely popular, and no wonder. They formed the veritable fairy-tales of science, the romance of natural history. In those good old days the lion was still generous and magnanimous, morally as well as physically the king of beasts; dragons devastated whole regions with their fiery breath, and the gorgon slew her enemies with a look. The bestiaries proper were imitated by priests and lovers in their religious and love bestiaries. In the former the habits and peculiarities of animals are used to point a moral and adorn a tale. For example, the elephant, as is well known, leans against a tree to take his rest. His enemies cut through the trunk of the tree, and then replace it as before. The next time the elephant comes to take his accustomed rest the tree falls, and so does he, an emblem of our father Adam, who also owed his fall to a tree, though in his case the temptation arose from greediness instead of laziness. In the love bestiaries the despairing lover compares himself to a cricket who takes such delight in chirping that he forgets to eat, and so allows himself to be caught, while he declares that his mistress resembles the cockatrice, whose nature is such that when it finds a man it devours him, and then laments him all the days of its life.

The Elizabethan reading public seem to have had a pronounced taste for natural history. Their curiosity was constantly stimulated and their knowledge increased by marvellous stories brought home from those new countries which every traveller who knew his business managed to discover, and the more strange, the more romantic the tale, the better chance had it of meeting with acceptance and belief. The novelists and playwrights of the period drew their illustrations and similes from the lore of animals, plants, and precious stones, in the well-grounded confidence that these would be understood and appreciated by their readers. In recent times Mr. Buckland and Sir John Lubbock have done their best to popularise the study of natural history, but they could not hope to rival on his own ground that distinguished Elizabethan zoologist, the Reverend Edward Topsel, author of the 'History of Four-footed Beasts and Serpents.' Mr. Topsel possessed not only learning and research, but also imagination and faith, in which latter qualities our modern scientists are so lamentably deficient. He solemnly affirms the accuracy of all the strange and interesting information that is to be found in his work, acknowledging that the mark of a good writer is to follow truth and not deceivable fables. He revels in anecdotes, however, and in his opinion Pliny and Herodotus are almost as good authorities as Moses. For it need scarcely be said that the reverend gentleman is strictly orthodox in his views; indeed, after stating certain arguments against the theory that the serpent which tempted Eve belonged to the species with women's faces, he settles the matter by concluding: 'Besides, if it had been, Moses would have said so.'

By reason, perhaps, of the many marvellous fables that were in circulation about animals and their little ways, Mr. Topsel is inclined to apologise in his dedicatory letter to the Dean of Westminster for devoting his talents to so frivolous a subject as that of zoology. He argues, however, that a knowledge of beasts and attention to their habits may not be unprofitable to men. 'How great,' he points out, 'is the love and faithfulness of dogs, the meekness of elephants, the modesty and shame-fastness of the adulterous lioness (!), the neatness and politure of the cat and the peacock, the care of the nightingale to make her voice pleasant, the canonical voice of the cock, and, to conclude, the utility of the sheep.'

A glance at Mr. Topsel's account of certain animals which are not to be found in our zoological gardens, and which have been overlooked by nineteenth-century naturalists, may not be without interest even for the sceptical modern reader. He describes several varieties of apes which were quite unknown to Darwin, notably the satyr and the sphinx. Satyrs, he tells us, inhabit the islands of the Satyridæ, which are three in number, standing right over against India (there is a Shakespearian vagueness about his geography). They keep their meat under their chins, and from thence take it forth to eat. They are seldom taken alive, but one was caught in the woods of Saxony—rather a long way from home—which was tamed and taught to talk. There are several different kinds of satyrs, including pans, fauns, and sileni. The sphinx is a dangerous species of ape, with a woman's face and breasts. If a man first perceive the sphinx he shall be safe, but otherwise it is mortal to man. The pigmies, our author decides, belong to the simian, and not, as some have thought, to the human species, 'because they have no reason, modesty, honesty, nor justice, speak imperfectly, and, above all, have no religion, which (as Plato says) is common to all men.' Mr. Topsel has no great admiration for the ape in any of its varieties, for he holds it to be 'a subtill, ironical, ridiculous, and unprofitable beast, good only for laughter.' There is one use, however, to which he may be put; for when a lion is old or sick he recovers himself by eating an ape. The various organs of the animal, moreover, contain valuable medicinal properties when properly prepared, though they are neglected by our latter-day doctors. Still, it is as well to know that the heart of an ape, dried, and a groat's weight thereof drunk in a draught of stale honey, strengthens the heart, sharpens the understanding, and is sovereign against the falling sickness.

The gulon seems to be a curious and far from attractive animal which was unknown to the ancients, but with which Mr. Topsel and his contemporaries had some slight acquaintance. It was supposed to be a cross between a lion and a hyena, and was called the gulo on account of its gluttonous habits, since it was accustomed to stuff until its body stood out like a bell. 'It may be,' says our author, 'that God hath ordained such a creature in those countries to express the abominable habits of the noblemen who sit from noon till midnight, eating and drinking, particularly in Muscovy and Lithuania. I would to God that this gluttony had been confined to those unchristian or heretical apostatical countries, and had not spread itself over our more civil and Christian parts of the world.'

The gorgon, of which no portrait is given, is proper to Africa, and is a terrible beast, with fiery eyes which look neither forwards nor upwards, but always on the earth. It lives entirely on poisonous herbs, and when it sees an enemy it opens its mouth and sends forth a horrible breath which poisons the air over its head, so that all creatures breathing the air fall into convulsions. It is a vexed question, however, whether the poison proceeds from the creature's throat or eyes, and Mr. Topsel inclines towards the latter supposition, because some of Marius' soldiers, when invading Africa, tried to kill a gorgon which was feeding, but as soon as it raised its head and looked at them they fell down dead.

A marvellous pair of beasts, judging from their portraits and descriptions, are the lamia and the mantichora. The former has hind parts like a goat, forelegs like a bear, face and upper parts like a woman, and is scaled all over like a dragon. They are the swiftest of all earthly beasts, so as none can escape them by running, for by their celerity they compass their prey of beasts, and by their fraud they overthrow men. The mantichora, which is bred among the Indians, must be even more alarming to look upon, for he has a body like a lion, a face like a man, a tail like a scorpion, a voice like a trumpet, and is as swift as a hart. Except that, as might be imagined, it is difficult to catch and tame, but little seems to be known about its habits and customs.

Mr. Topsel is much distressed because he can give us but scanty information about the rhinoceros, which is represented in its portrait clothed in a magnificent suit of plated armour, with a little horn at the back of its neck. 'So strange an outside,' as he remarks, 'yields no doubt an answerable inside and infinite testimonies of worthy and memorable virtues comprised in it.' But the beast is never seen in our country, and he would be unwilling to write anything untrue out of his own invention. However, he compensates himself and his readers for his reticence on the subject of the rhinoceros by launching out into copious details about the unicorn. We should as easily believe, he argues, that there is a unicorn in the world as we do believe that there is an elephant, though not bred in Europe. Besides, the Scripture witnesses that there is such a beast in the 92nd Psalm. He is like a wild ass, with a long horn in the middle of his forehead. He is an untameable beast, and, as we are all aware, an enemy to lions. When a lion sees a unicorn coming along he runs to a tree for succour. Then the unicorn runs against the tree, his horn sticks fast, and the lion comes out and kills him. The unicorn's horn destroys the ill effects of poison if put into water where poison is, and is also a remedy for drunkenness if beaten to a powder and swallowed in a draught of water. Under the circumstances, it seems a pity that only about twenty unicorn's horns are to be found in all Europe. Mr. Topsel has seen one in the treasury of St. Mark's at Venice, and another at the Church of St. Denis, near Paris.

Under the heading of 'Serpents' come the dragon species, of which there are many varieties—flying and crawling, marsh and mountain. It may not be generally known that a dragon is the result of a serpent eating a serpent. The Indian mountain-dragons have precious stones for eyeballs. The Indians catch them by laying a scarlet garment, whereon is a charm in letters of gold, upon the mouth of the dragon's den, for with red and gold the eyes of the dragon are overcome, and he falleth asleep. Then the Indians kill him and take out the balls of his eyes. When the Phrygian dragons are hungry they turn themselves to the West, and, gaping wide, with the force of their breath do draw the birds that fly over their heads into their throats. If they be not satisfied they hide themselves and fall upon market people and herdsmen, and devour them. But, fortunately, as they feel the heat very much they seldom come out of their holes in the earth. In summer the only cooling drink they can get is the blood of elephants, which is the coldest thing in the whole world. The dragons preserve their health by eating wild lettuce, but it is interesting to learn that apples disagree with them because they have delicate digestions. Mr. Topsel adds testimonies from many good authorities to the fact that flying dragons really exist. Indeed, some had been seen in Germany as lately as the year 1543, and their appearance had been followed by fires and other calamities. 'And I pray to God,' he concludes, 'that we may never have better arguments to satisfy us by his corporal and lively presence in our country, lest some great evil follow thereupon.' Even the dragon, however, is not altogether without its uses, since its fat is a remedy for ulcers, cures squinting, and drives away other venomous beasts.

The cockatrice is called the king of serpents, not for his bigness, but for his stately pace and magnanimous mind. He goes half upright, wears a coronet or comb upon his head, and is supposed to be hatched from a cock's egg. When a cock grows old he lays an egg about the beginning of the dog-days, which, being sat upon by a serpent or toad, the cockatrice presently comes forth. Howbeit, in better experience it is found that the cock doth sit upon his egg himself. 'Galen only among the physicians doubteth that there be a cockatrice, whose authority in this case must not be followed, seeing it was never given to mortal man to know everything, for besides the Holy Scriptures unavoidable authority, there be many grave humane writers affirming not only that there be cockatrices, but also that they infect the air and do kill with their sight.' In Rome in the days of Leo IV. there was a cockatrice found in the vault of a church whose pestiferous breath had infected the air, whereby great mortality followed in Rome, but how the said cockatrice came thither it was never known. Our author is of opinion that it was created and sent of

God for the punishment of the city, 'which I do the more easily believe because Julius Scaliger doth affirm that the said beast was killed by the prayers of Leo IV.' Birds dare not come near the cockatrice, and other serpents avoid it; but the weasel and the cock are its triumphant victors. Hence the custom for travellers through the African deserts to take a cock with them to guard them against the cockatrice or basilisk.

We do not find much to add to our present rather extensive stock of information about the sea-serpent, except the fact that when he grows to large proportions whereby he does harm, the winds or clouds take him up suddenly into the air, and there by violent agitation shake his body to pieces. There is a thrilling representation of a sea-serpent crushing an Elizabethan frigate in its folds, and picking out the alarmed sailors as a boy might pick plums out of a pudding. When Mr. Topsel comes to deal with the hydra, his lively faith for once fails him, and though he gives a portrait of the animal with its seven men's heads surmounted by crowns, he does not vouch for the truth of its existence.

It must not be supposed that our learned zoologist devotes an undue share of his attention to rare and noxious beasts. He dilates at great length upon domestic and useful animals, writing exhaustive practical treatises upon the best methods of breeding, rearing, and doctoring horses, cows, and sheep, while he does not disdain to notice such inferior creatures as the harmless, necessary cat, or what he himself terms the 'little vulgar mouse.'

Indeed, he rises to unwonted heights of eloquence and enthusiasm when he deals with the pet cat and her little ways. Considering the period at which he lived, it is probable that Mr. Topsel was a 'celibate priest,' and the supposition that he cherished a comfortable tabby as the sole companion of his hearth and home seems plausible enough. 'It is needless,' he begins, 'to spend my time about her (the cat's) loving nature to man,' and then, after the manner of authors, he proceeds to enlarge upon this needless theme. 'How she flattereth by rubbing her skin against one's legs, how she whurleth with her voice, having as many tunes as turnes, for she hath one voice to beg and to complain, another to testify her delight and pleasure, another among her own kind by flattering, by hissing, by puffing, and by spitting. Therefore, how she beggeth, playeth, leapeth, looketh, catcheth, tosseth with her foot, riseth up to strings held over her head, sometimes creeping, sometimes lying on her back, sometimes on the belly, snatching now with mouth and anon with foot, apprehending greedily anything save the hand of man, with divers such gestical actions, it is needless to stand upon.'

Of course, the cat, in common with the mouse, the dragon, the unicorn, and nearly every other animal, contains many medicinal properties. Indeed, it seems probable that the sovereign remedies of the sixteenth century added a fresh terror to ailments and diseases. We all know how, even in these days, the evils of a cold in the head or a toothache are aggravated by the entreaties of our well-meaning friends that we should try a multiplicity of cures, all of which are vouched for as absolutely infallible. But in Elizabethan days far more dismal was the position of the sufferer, thanks to the innumerable loathsome remedies that were compounded of the organs, blood or fat of animals. Gout is bad enough in itself, but how much worse when the patient is condemned to eat 'a fat cat sod'! The toothache is cured by eating a flayed mouse twice a month, and the headache by carrying the head of a mouse in a linen cloth. The sufferer from blindness or sore eyes is ordered to 'take the head of a black cat, without a spot of colour, and burn it to powder in an earthen pot; then take this powder, and through a quill blow it thrice a day into thine eye, and if in the night any heat do thereby annoy thee, take two leaves of an oak wet in cold water and bind them to the eye, and so shall all blindness depart, although it hath oppressed thee for a whole year, and this medicine is approved by many physicians both elder and latter.'

Mr. Topsel has been ably seconded in his labour by the illustrator. As works of art the wood-cuts are admirable, though in the case of the less known animals, such as the hippopotamus and the crocodile, the portraits are not always very recognisable. It is evident that the artist has carefully read the descriptions in the letterpress, and then set to work with the firm determination to reproduce all the most salient features of each curious beast. But his imagination is apt to run away with him, and his creations are sometimes distinguished by a weirdness which is almost worthy of Albert Dürer. His portraits of domestic and indigenous animals are, however, painfully like, with a slight leaning towards caricature. This, it must be remembered, was a very general tendency in early art, the next step to the naïve style in which it was necessary to label the figures 'This is a man,' or 'This is a cow,' being representations of persons and things which, if not as large as life, were at least twice as natural.

WITH EDGED TOOLS.

CHAPTER XXXII.

AN ENVOY.

What we love perfectly
For its own sake we love. . . .
. . . That which is best for it is best for us.

'FEEL like gettin' up to breakfast, do you, sir?' said Joseph to his master a few days later. 'Well, I am glad. Glad ain't quite the word, though!'

And he proceeded to perform the duties attendant on his master's wardrobe with a wise, deep-seated shake of the head. While setting the shaving necessaries in order on the dressing-table, he went further—he winked gravely at himself in the looking-glass.

'You've made wonderful progress the last few days, sir,' he remarked. 'I always told Missis Marie that it would do you a lot of good to have Mr. Gordon to heart you up with his cheery ways—and Miss Gordon too, sir.'

'Yes, but they would not have been much good without all your care before they came. I had turned the corner a week ago—I felt it myself.'

Joseph grinned—an honest, open grin of self-satisfaction. He was not one of those persons who like their praise bestowed with subtlety.

'Wonderful!' he repeated to himself as he went to the well in the garden for his master's bath-water. 'Wonderful! but I don't understand things—not bein' a marryin' man.'

During the last few days Jack's progress had been rapid enough even to satisfy Joseph. The doctor expressed himself fully reassured, and even spoke of returning no more. But he repeated his wish that Jack should leave for England without delay.

'He is quite strong enough to be moved now,' he finished by saying. 'There is no reason for further delay.'

'No,' answered Jocelyn, to whom the order was spoken. 'No—none. We will see that he goes by the next boat.'

The doctor paused. He was a young man who took a strong—perhaps too strong a personal interest in his patients. Jocelyn had walked with him as far as the gate, with only a parasol to protect her from the evening sun. They were old friends. The doctor's wife was one of Jocelyn's closest friends on the Coast.

'Do you know anything about Meredith's future movements?' he asked. 'Does he intend to come out here again?'

'I could not tell you. I do not think they have settled yet. But I think that when he gets home he will probably stay there.'

'Best thing he can do—best thing he can do. It will never do for him to risk getting another taste of malaria—tell him so, will you? Good-bye.'

'Yes, I will tell him.'

And Jocelyn Gordon walked slowly back to tell the man she loved that he must go away from her and never come back. The last few days had been days of complete happiness. There is no doubt that women have the power of enjoying the present to a greater degree than men. They can live in the bliss of the present moment with eyes continually averted from the curtain of the near future which falls across that bliss and cuts it off. Men allow the presence of the curtain to mar the present brightness.

These days had been happier for Jocelyn than for Jack, because she was conscious of the fulness of every moment, while he was merely rejoicing in comfort after hardship, in pleasant society after loneliness. Even with the knowledge that it could not last, that beyond the near future lay a whole lifetime of complete solitude and that greatest of all miseries, the desire of an obvious impossibility—even with this she was happier than he; because she loved him and she saw him daily getting stronger; because their relative positions brought out the best and the least romantic part of a woman's love—the subtle maternity of it. There is a fine romance in carrying our lady's kerchief in an inner pocket, but there is something higher and greater and much more durable in the darning of a sock; for within the handkerchief there is chiefly gratified vanity, while within the sock there is one of those small infantile boots which have but little meaning for us.

Jocelyn entered the drawing-room with a smile.

'He is very pleased,' she said. 'He does not seem to want to see you any more, and he told me to be inhospitable.'

'As how?'

'He told me to turn you out. You are to leave by the next steamer.'

He felt a sudden unaccountable pang of disappointment at her smiling eyes.

'This is no joking matter,' he said half seriously. 'Am I really as well as that?'

'Yes.'

'The worst of it is that you seem rather pleased.'

'I am—at the thought that you are so much better.' She paused and turned quite away, busying herself with a pile of books and magazines. 'The other,' she went on too indifferently, 'was unfortunately to be foreseen. It is the necessary drawback.'

He rose suddenly and walked to the window.

'The grim old necessary drawback,' he said, without looking towards her.

There was a silence of some duration. Neither of them seemed to be able to find a method of breaking it without awkwardness. It was she who spoke at last.

'He also said,' she observed in a practical way, 'that you must not come out to Africa again.'

He turned as if he had been stung.

'Did he make use of that particular word?' he asked.

'Which particular word?'

'Must.'

Jocelyn had not foreseen the possibility that the doctor was merely repeating to her what he had told Jack on a previous visit.

'No,' she answered. 'I think he said "better not."'

'And you make it into "must."'

She laughed, with a sudden light-heartedness which remained unexplained.

'Because I know you both,' she answered. 'For him "better not" stands for "must." With you "better not" means "doesn't matter."'

'"Better not" is so weak that if one pits duty against it it collapses. I cannot leave Oscard in the lurch, especially after his prompt action in coming to my relief.'

'Yes,' she replied guardedly. 'I like Mr. Oscard's way of doing things.'

The matter of the telegram summoning Oscard had not yet been explained. She did not want to explain it at that moment; indeed, she hoped that the explanation would never be needed.

'However,' she added, 'you will see when you get home.'

He laughed.

'The least pleasant part of it is,' he said, 'your evident desire to see the last of me. Could you not disguise that a little—just for the sake of my feelings?'

'Book your passage by the next boat and I will promptly descend to the lowest depths of despair,' she replied lightly.

He shrugged his shoulders with a short laugh.

'This is hospitality indeed,' he said, moving towards the door.

Then suddenly he turned and looked at her gravely.

'I wonder,' he said slowly, 'if you are doing this for a purpose. You said that you met my father——'

'Your father is not the man to ask anyone's assistance in his own domestic affairs, and anything I attempted to do could only be looked upon as the most unwarrantable interference.'

'Yes,' said Meredith seriously. 'I beg your pardon. You are right.'

He went to his own room and summoned Joseph.

'When is the next boat home?' he asked.

'Boat on Thursday, sir.'

Meredith nodded. After a little pause he pointed to a chair.

'Just sit down,' he said. 'I want to talk over this Simiacine business with you.'

Joseph squared his shoulders, and sat down with a face indicative of the gravest attention. Sitting thus he was no longer a servant, but a partner in the Simiacine. He even indulged in a sidelong jerk of the head, as if requesting the attention of some absent friend in a humble sphere of life to this glorious state of affairs.

'You know,' said Meredith, 'Mr. Durnovo is more or less a blackguard.'

Joseph drew in his feet, having previously drawn his trousers up at the knees.

'Yes, sir,' he said, glancing up. 'A blackguard—a damned blackguard,' he added unofficially under his breath.

'He wants continual watching and a special treatment. He requires someone constantly at his heels.'

'Yes, sir,' admitted Joseph with some fervour.

'Now I am ordered home by the doctor,' went on Meredith. 'I must go by the next boat, but I don't like to go and leave Mr. Oscard in the lurch, with no one to fall back upon but Durnovo—you understand.'

Joseph's face had assumed the habitual look of servitude—he was no longer a partner, but a mere retainer, with a half-comic resignation in his eyes.

'Yes, sir,' scratching the back of his neck. 'I am afraid I understand. You want me to go back to that Platter—that God-forsaken Platter, as I may say.'

'Yes,' said Meredith. 'That is about it. I would go myself——'

'God bless you! I know you would!' burst in Joseph. 'You'd go like winkin'. There's no one knows that better nor me, sir; and what I says is—like master, like man. Game, sir—game it is! I'll go. I'm not the man to turn my back on a pal—a—a partner, sir, so to speak.'

'You see,' said Meredith, with the deep insight into men that made command so easy to him—'you see there is no one else. There is not another man in Africa who could do it.'

'That's true, sir.'

'And I think that Mr. Oscard will be looking for you.'

'And he won't need to look long, sir. But I should like to see you safe on board the boat, then I'm ready to go.'

'Right. We can both leave by Thursday's boat, and we'll get the captain to drop you and your men at Lopez. We can get things ready by then, I think.'

'Easy, sir.'

The question thus settled, there seemed to be no necessity to prolong the interview. But Joseph did not move. Meredith waited patiently.

'I'll go up, sir, to the Platter,' said the servant at length, 'and I'll place myself under Mr. Oscard's orders; but before I go I want to give you notice of resignation. I resigns my partnership in this 'ere Simiacine at six months from to-day. It's a bit too hot, sir, that's the truth. It's all very well for gentlemen like yourself and Mr. Oscard, with fortunes and fine houses, and, as sayin' goes, a wife apiece waiting for you at home—it's all very well for you to go about in this blamed country, with yer life in yer hand, and not a tight grip at that. But for a poor soldier man like myself, what has smelt the regulation powder all 'is life, and hasn't got nothing to love and no gal waiting for him at home—well, it isn't good enough. That's what I say, sir, with respects.'

He added the last two words by away of apology for having banged a very solid fist on the table.

Meredith smiled.

'So you've had enough of it?' he said.

'Enough ain't quite the word, sir. Why, I'm wore to a shadow with the trouble and anxiety of getting you down here.'

'Fairly substantial shadow,' commented Meredith.

'May be, sir. But I've had enough of money-makin'. It's too dear at the price. And if you'll let an old servant speak his mind it ain't fit for you, this 'ere kind of work. It's good enough for black-scum and for chocolate-birds like Durnovo; but this country's not built for honest white men—least of all for born and bred gentlemen.'

'Yes—that's all very well in theory, Joseph, and I'm much obliged to you for thinking of me. But you must remember that we live in an age where money sanctifies everything. Your hands can't get dirty if there is money inside them.'

Joseph laughed aloud.

'Ah, that's your way of speaking, sir, that's all. And I'm glad to hear it. You have not spoken like that for two months and more.'

'No—it is only my experience of the world.'

'Well, sir, talkin' of experience, I've had about enough, as I tell you, and I beg to place my resignation in your hands. I shall do the same by Mr. Oscard if I reach that Platter, God willin', as the sayin' is.'

'All right, Joseph.'

Still there was something left to say. Joseph paused and scratched the back of his neck pensively with one finger.

'Will you be writin' to Mr. Oscard, sir, for me to take?'

'Yes.'

'Then I should be obliged if you would mention the fact that I would rather not be left alone with that blackguard Durnovo, either up at the Platter or travelling down. That man's got on my nerves, sir; and I'm mortal afraid of doing him a injury. He's got a long neck—you've noticed that, perhaps. There was a little Gourkha man up in Cabul taught me a trick—it's as easy as killing a chicken—but you want a man wi' a long neck—just such a neck as Durnovo's.'

'But what harm has the man done you,' asked Meredith, 'that you think so affectionately of his neck?'

'No harm, sir; but we're just like two cats on a wall, watchin' each other and hating each other like blue poison. There's more villany at that man's back than you think for—mark my words.'

Joseph moved away towards the door.

'Do you *know* anything about him—anything shady?' cried Meredith after him.

'No, sir. I don't *know* anything. But I suspects a whole box full. One of these days I'll find him out, and if I catch him fair there'll be a rough and tumble. It'll be a pretty fight, sir, for them that's sittin' in the front row.'

Joseph rubbed his hands slowly together and departed, leaving his master to begin a long letter to Guy Oscard.

And at the other end of the passage, in her room with the door locked, Jocelyn Gordon was sobbing in a wild burst of grief, because she had probably saved the life of Jack Meredith, and in doing so had only succeeded in sending him away from her.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

DARK DEALING.

Only an honest man doing his duty.

WHEN Jack Meredith said that there was not another man in Africa who could make his way from Loango to the Simiacine Plateau he spoke no more than the truth. There were only four men in all the world who knew the way, and two of them were isolated on the summit of a lost mountain in the interior. Meredith himself was unfit for the journey. There remained Joseph.

True, there were several natives who had made the journey, but they were as dumb and driven animals, fighting as they were told, carrying what they were given to carry, walking as many miles as they were considered able to walk. They hired themselves out like animals, and as the beasts of the field they did their work—patiently, without intelligence. Half of them did not know where they were going—what they were doing; the other half did not care. So much work, so much wage, was their terse creed. They neither noted their surroundings nor measured distance. At the end of their journey they settled down to a life of ease and leisure, which was to last until necessity drove them to work again. Such is the African. Many of them came from distant countries, a few were Zanzibaris, and went home made men.

If any doubt the inability of such men to steer a course through the wood, let him remember that three months' growth in an African forest will obliterate the track left by the passage of an army. If any hold that men are not created so dense and unambitious as has just been represented, let him look nearer home in our own merchant service. The able-bodied seaman goes to sea all his life, but he never gets any nearer navigating the ship—and he a white man.

In coming down to Loango Joseph had had the recently-made track of Oscard's rescuing party to guide him day by day. He knew that this was now completely overgrown. The Simiacine Plateau was once more lost to all human knowledge.

And up there—alone amidst the clouds—Guy Oscard was, as he himself tersely put it, 'sticking to it.' He had stuck to it to such good effect that the supply of fresh young Simiacine was daily increasing in bulk. Again, Victor Durnovo seemed to have regained his better self. He was like a full-blooded horse—tractable enough if kept hard at work. He was a different man up on the Plateau to what he was down at Loango. There are some men who deteriorate in the wilds, while others are better, stronger, finer creatures away from the luxury of civilisation and the softening influence of female society. Of these latter was Victor Durnovo.

Of one thing Guy Oscard soon became aware, namely, that no one could make the men work as could Durnovo. He had merely to walk to the door of his tent to make every picker on the little plateau bend over his tree with renewed attention. And while above all was eagerness and hurry, below, in the valley, this man's name insured peace.

The trees were now beginning to show the good result of pruning and a regular irrigation. Never had the leaves been so vigorous, never had the Simiacine trees borne such a bushy, luxuriant growth since the dim dark days of the Flood.

Oscard relapsed into his old hunting ways. Day after day he tranquilly shouldered his rifle, and alone, or followed by one attendant only, he disappeared into the forest, only to emerge therefrom at sunset. What he saw there he never spoke of. Sure it was that he must have seen strange things, for no prying white man had set foot in these wilds before him; no book has ever been written of that country that lies around the Simiacine Plateau.

He was not the man to worry himself over uncertainties. He had an enormous faith in the natural toughness of an Englishman, and while he crawled breathlessly in the track of the forest monsters he hardly gave a thought to Jack Meredith. Meredith, he argued to himself, had always risen to the occasion: why should he not rise to this? He was not the sort of man to die from want of staying power, which, after all, is the cause of more deaths than we dream of. And when he had recovered he would either return or send back Joseph with a letter containing those suggestions of his which were really orders.

Of Millicent Chyne he thought more often, with a certain tranquil sense of a good time to come. In her also he placed a perfect faith. A poet has found out that, if one places faith in a man, it is probable that the man will rise to trustworthiness—of woman he says nothing. But of these things Guy Oscard knew little. He went his own tranquilly strong way, content to buy his own experience.

He was thinking of Millicent Chyne one misty morning while he walked slowly backwards and forwards before his tent. His knowledge of the country told him that the mist was nothing but the night's accumulation of moisture round the summit of the mountain—that down in the valleys it was clear, and that half an hour's sunshine would disperse all. He was waiting for this result when he heard a rifle-shot far away in the haze beneath him; and he knew that it was Joseph—probably making one of those marvellous long shots of his which roused a sudden sigh of envy in the heart of this mighty hunter whenever he witnessed them.

Oscard immediately went to his tent and came out with his short-barrelled, evil-looking rifle on his arm. He fired both barrels in quick succession and waited, standing gravely on the edge of the Plateau. After a short silence two answering reports rose up through the mist to his straining ears.

He turned and found Victor Durnovo standing at his side.

'What is that?' asked the half-breed.

'It must be Joseph,' answered Guy, 'or Meredith. It can be nobody else.'

'Let us hope that it is Meredith,' said Durnovo with a forced laugh, 'but I doubt it.'

Oscard looked down in his sallow, powerful face. He was not quick at such things, but at that moment he felt strangely certain that Victor Durnovo was hoping that Meredith was dead.

'I hope it isn't,' he answered, and without another word he strode away down the little pathway from the summit into the clouds, loading his rifle as he went.

Durnovo and his men, working among the Simiacine bushes, heard from time to time a signal shot as the two Englishmen groped their way towards each other through the everlasting night of the African forest.

It was midday before the new-comers were espied making their way painfully up the slope, and Joseph's welcome was not so much in Durnovo's handshake, in Guy Oscard's silent approval, as in the row of grinning, good-natured black faces behind Durnovo's back.

That night laughter was heard in the men's camp for the first time for many weeks—nay, several months. According to the account that Joseph gave to his dusky admirers, he had been on terms of the closest familiarity with the wives and families of all who had such at Loango or on the Coast. He knew the mother of one, had met the sweetheart of another, and confessed that it was only due to the fact that he was not 'a marryin' man' that he had not stayed at Loango for the rest of his life. It was somewhat singular that he had nothing but good news to give.

Durnovo heard the clatter of tongues, and Guy Oscard, smoking his contemplative pipe in a camp-chair before his hut door, noticed that the sound did not seem very welcome.

Joseph's arrival with ten new men seemed to give a fresh zest to the work, and the carefully packed cases of Simiacine began to fill Oscard's tent to some inconvenience. Thus things went on for two tranquil weeks.

'First,' Oscard had said, 'let us get the crop in, and then we can arrange what is to be done about the future.'

So the crop received due attention; but the two leaders of the men—he who led by fear and he who commanded by love—were watching each other.

One evening, when the work was done, Oscard's meditations were disturbed by the sound of angry voices behind the native camp. He turned naturally towards Durnovo's tent, and saw that he was absent. The voices rose and fell; there was a singular accompanying roar of sound which Oscard never remembered having heard before. It was the protesting voice of a mass of men—and there is no sound like it—none so disquieting. Oscard listened attentively, and suddenly he was thrown up on his feet by a pistol-shot.

At the same moment Joseph emerged from behind the tents, dragging someone by the collar. The victim of Joseph's violence was off his feet, but still struggling and kicking.

Guy Oscard saw the flash of a second shot, apparently within a few inches of Joseph's face; but he came on, dragging the man with him, whom from his clothing Oscard saw to be Durnovo.

Joseph was spitting out wadding and burnt powder.

'Shoot *me*, would yer—yer damned skulking chocolate-bird? I'll teach you! I'll twist that brown neck of yours.'

He shook him as a terrier shakes a rat, and seemed to shake things off him—among others a revolver which described a circle in the air, and fell heavily on the ground, where the concussion discharged a cartridge.

''Ere, sir,' cried Joseph, literally throwing Durnovo down on the ground at Oscard's feet, 'that man has just shot one o' them poor niggers, so 'elp me God!'

Durnovo rose slowly to his feet, as if the shaking had disturbed his faculties.

'And the man hadn't done 'im no harm at all. He's got a grudge against him. I've seen that this last week and more. It's a man as was kinder fond o' me, and we understood each other's lingo. That's it—he was afraid of my 'earing things that mightn't be wholesome for me to know. The man hadn't done no harm. And Durnovo comes up and begins abusing 'im, and then he strikes 'im, and then he out with his revolver and shoots 'im down.'

Durnovo gave an ugly laugh. He had readjusted his disordered dress and was brushing the dirt from his knees.

'Oh, don't make a fool of yourself,' he said in a hissing voice; 'you don't understand these natives at all. The man raised his hand to me. He would have killed me if he had had the chance. Shooting was the only thing left to do. You can only hold these men by fear. They expect it.'

'Of course they expect it,' shouted Joseph in his face; 'of course they expect it, Mr. Durnovo.'

'Why?'

'Because they're *slaves*. Think I don't know that?'

He turned to Oscard.

'This man, Mr. Oscard,' he said, 'is a slave-owner. Them forty that joined at Msala was slaves. He's shot two of 'em now: this is his second. And what does he care?—they're his slaves. Oh! shame on yer!' turning again to Durnovo; 'I wonder God lets yer stand there. I can only think that He doesn't want to dirty His hand by strikin' yer down.'

Oscard had taken his pipe from his lips. He looked bigger, somehow, than ever. His brown face was turning to an ashen colour, and there was a dull, steel-like gleam in his blue eyes. The terrible, slow-kindling anger of this Northerner made Durnovo catch his breath. It was so different from the sudden passion of his own countrymen.

'Is this true?' he asked.

'It's a lie, of course,' answered Durnovo with a shrug of the shoulders. He moved away as if he were going to his tent, but Oscard's arm reached out. His large brown hand fell heavily on the half-breed's shoulder.

'Stay,' he said; 'we are going to get to the bottom of this.'

'Good,' muttered Joseph, rubbing his hands slowly together; 'this is prime.'

'Go on,' said Oscard to him.

'Where's the wages you and Mr. Meredith has paid him for those forty men?' pursued Joseph. 'Where's the advance you made him for those men at Msala? Not one ha'penny of it have they fingered. And why? Cos they're slaves! Fifteen months at fifty pounds—let them as can reckon tot it up for theirselves. That's his first swindle—and there's others, sir! Oh, there's more behind. That man's just a stinkin' hot-bed o' crime. But this 'ere slave-owning is enough to settle his hash, I take it.'

'Let us have these men here—we will hear what they have to say,' said Oscard, in the same dull tone that frightened Victor Durnovo.

'Not you!' he went on, laying his hand on Durnovo's shoulder again; 'Joseph will fetch them, thank you.'

So the forty—or the thirty-seven survivors, for one had died on the journey up and two had been murdered—were brought.

They were peaceful, timorous men, whose manhood seemed to have been crushed out of them; and slowly, word by word, their grim story was got out of them. Joseph knew a little of their language, and one of the head fighting men knew a little more, and spoke a dialect known to Oscard. They were slaves they said at once, but only on Oscard's promise that Durnovo should not be allowed to shoot them. They had been brought from the north by a victorious chief who in turn had handed them over to Victor Durnovo in payment of an outstanding debt for ammunition supplied.

The great African moon rose into the heavens and shone her yellow light upon this group of men. Overhead all was peace: on earth there was no peace. And yet it was one of Heaven's laws that Victor Durnovo had broken.

Guy Oscard went patiently through to the end of it. He found out all that there was to find; and he found out something which surprised him. No one seemed to be horror-struck. The free men stood stolidly looking on, as did the slaves. And this was Africa—the heart of Africa, where, as Victor Durnovo said, no one knows what is going on. Oscard knew that he could apply no law to Victor Durnovo except the great law of humanity. There was nothing to be done; for one individual may not execute the laws of humanity. All were assembled before him—the whole of the great Simiacine Expedition except the leader, whose influence lay over one and all only second to his presence.

'I leave this place at sunrise to-morrow,' said Guy Oscard to them all. 'I never want to see it again. I will not touch one penny of the money that has been made. I speak for Mr. Meredith and myself——'

'Likewise me—damn it!' put in Joseph.

'I speak as Mr. Meredith himself would have spoken. There is the Simiacine—you can have it. I won't touch it. And now who is going with me—who leaves with me to-morrow morning?'

He moved away from Durnovo.

'And who stays with me?' cried the half-breed, 'to share and share alike in the Simiacine?'

Joseph followed Oscard, and with him a certain number of the blacks, but some stayed. Some went over to Durnovo and stood beside him. The slaves spoke among themselves, and then they all went over to Durnovo.

So that which the placid moon shone down upon was the break-up of the great Simiacine scheme. Victor Durnovo had not come off so badly. He had the larger half of the men by his side. He had all the finest crop the trees had yet yielded—but he had yet to reckon with high Heaven.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

AMONG THORNS.

> We shut our hearts up nowadays,
> Like some old music-box that plays
> Unfashionable airs.

Sir John Meredith was sitting stiffly in a straight-backed chair by his library fire. In his young days men did not loll in deep chairs, with their knees higher than their heads. There were no such chairs in this library, just as there was no afternoon tea except for ladies. Sir John Meredith was distressed to observe a great many signs of the degeneration of manhood, which he attributed to the indulgence in afternoon tea. Sir John had lately noticed another degeneration, namely, in the quality of the London gas. So serious was this falling off that he had taken to a lamp in the evening, which lamp stood on the table at his elbow.

Some months earlier—that is to say, about six months after Jack's departure—Sir John had called casually upon an optician. He stood upright by the counter, and frowned down on a mild-looking man who wore the strongest spectacles made, as if in advertisement of his own wares.

'They tell me,' he said, 'that you opticians make glasses now which are calculated to save the sight in old age.'

'Yes, sir,' replied the optician, with wriggling white fingers. 'We make a special study of that. We endeavour to save the sight—to store it up, as it were, in—a middle life, for use in old age. You see, sir, the pupil of the eye——'

Sir John held up a warning hand.

'The pupil of the eye is your business, as I understand from the sign above your shop—at all events, it is not mine,' he said. 'Just give me some glasses to suit my sight, and don't worry me with the pupil of the eye.'

He turned towards the door, threw back his shoulders, and waited.

'Spectacles, sir?' inquired the man meekly.

'Spectacles, sir,' cried Sir John. 'No, sir. Spectacles be damned. I want a pair of eyeglasses.'

And these eyeglasses were affixed to the bridge of Sir John Meredith's nose, as he sat rather stiffly in the straight-backed chair.

He was reading a scientific book which society had been pleased to read, mark, and learn, without inwardly digesting, as is the way of society with books. Sir John read a good deal—he had read more lately, perhaps, since entertainments and evening parties had fallen off so lamentably—and he made a point of keeping up with the mental progress of the age.

His eyebrows were drawn down, as if the process of storing up eyesight for his old age was somewhat laborious. At times he turned and glanced over his shoulder impatiently at the lamp.

The room was very still in its solid, old-fashioned luxury. Although it was June a small wood fire burned in the grate, and the hiss of a piece of damp bark was the only sound within the four walls. From without, through the thick curtains, came at intervals the rumble of distant wheels. But it was just between times, and the fashionable world was at its dinner. Sir John had finished his, not because he dined earlier than the rest of the world—he could not have done that—but because a man dining by himself, with a butler and a footman to wait upon him, does not take very long over his meals.

He was in full evening dress, of course, built up by his tailor, bewigged, perfumed, and cunningly aided by toilet-table deceptions.

At times his weary old eyes wandered from the printed page to the smouldering fire, where a whole volume seemed to be written—it took so long to read. Then he would pull himself together, glance at the lamp, readjust the eyeglasses, and plunge resolutely into the book. He did not always read scientific books. He had a taste for travel and adventure—the Arctic regions, Asia, Siberia, and Africa—but Africa was all locked away in a lower drawer of the writing-table. He did not care for the servants to meddle with his books, he told himself. He did not tell anybody that he did not care to let the servants see him reading his books of travel in Africa.

There was nothing dismal or lonely about this old man, sitting in evening dress in a high-backed chair, stiffly reading a scientific book of the modern, cheap science tenor—not written for scientists, but to step in when the brain is weary of novels and afraid of communing with itself. Oh, no! A gentleman need never be dull. He has his necessary occupations. If he is a man of intellect he need never be idle. It is an occupation to keep up with the times.

Sometimes after dinner, while drinking his perfectly-made black coffee, Sir John would idly turn over the invitation cards on the mantelpiece—the carriage was always in readiness—but of late the invitations had not proved very tempting. There was no doubt that society was not what it used to be. The summer was not what it used to be, either. The evenings were so confoundedly cold. So he often stayed at home and read a book.

He paused in the midst of a scientific definition, and looked up with listening eyes. He had got into the way of listening to the passing wheels. Lady Cantourne sometimes called for him on her way to a festivity, but it was not that.

The wheels he heard had stopped—perhaps it was Lady Cantourne. But he did not think so. She drove behind a pair, and this was not a pair. It was wonderful how well he could detect the difference, considering the age of his ears.

A few minutes later the butler silently threw open the door, and Jack stood in the threshold. Sir John Meredith's son had been given back to him from the gates of death.

The son, like the father, was in immaculate evening dress. There was a very subtle cynicism in the thought of turning aside on such a return as this to dress—to tie a careful white tie and brush imperceptibly ruffled hair.

There was a little pause, and the two tall men stood, half-bowing with a marvellous similarity of attitude, gazing steadily into each other's eyes. And one cannot help wondering whether it was a mere accident that Jack Meredith stood motionless on the threshold until his father said:

'Come in.'

'Thomson,' he continued to the butler, with that pride of keeping up before all the world which was his, 'bring up coffee. You will take coffee?' to his son while they shook hands.

'Thanks, yes.'

The butler closed the door behind him. Sir John was holding on to the back of his high chair in rather a constrained way—almost as if he were suffering pain. They looked at each other again, and there was a resemblance in the very manner of raising the eyelid. There was a stronger resemblance in the grim, waiting silence which neither of them would break.

At last Jack spoke, approaching the fire and looking into it.

'You must excuse my taking you by surprise at this—unusual hour.' He turned; saw the lamp, the book, and the eyeglasses—more especially the eyeglasses, which seemed to break the train of his thoughts. 'I only landed at Liverpool this afternoon,' he went on with hopeless politeness. 'I did not trouble you with a telegram, knowing that you object to them.'

The old man bowed gravely.

'I am always glad to see you,' he said suavely. 'Will you not sit down?'

And they had begun wrong. It is probable that neither of them had intended this. Both had probably dreamed of a very different meeting. But both alike had counted without that stubborn pride which will rise up at the wrong time and in the wrong place—the pride which Jack Meredith had inherited by blood and teaching from his father.

'I suppose you have dined,' said Sir John, when they were seated, 'or may I offer you something?'

'Thanks, I dined on the way up—in a twilit refreshment room, with one waiter and a number of attendant black-beetles.'

Things were going worse and worse.

Sir John smiled, and he was still smiling when the man brought in coffee.

'Yes,' he said conversationally, 'for speed combined with discomfort I suppose we can hold up heads against any country. Seeing that you are dressed, I supposed that you had dined in town.'

'No. I drove straight to my rooms, and kept the cab while I dressed.'

What an important matter this dressing seemed to be! And there were fifteen months behind it—fifteen months which had aged one of them and sobered the other.

Jack was sitting forward in his chair with his immaculate dress-shoes on the fender—his knees apart, his elbows resting on them, his eyes still fixed on the fire. Sir John looked keenly at him beneath his frowning, lashless lids. He saw the few grey hairs over Jack's ears, the suggested wrinkles, the drawn lines about his mouth.

'You have been ill?' he said.

Joseph's letter was locked away in the top drawer of his writing-table.

'Yes, I had rather a bad time—a serious illness. My man nursed me through it, however, with marked success; and—the Gordons, with whom I was staying, were very kind.'

'I had the pleasure of meeting Miss Gordon.'

Jack's face was steady—suavely impenetrable.

Sir John moved a little, and set his empty cup upon the table.

'A charming girl,' he added.

'Yes.'

There was a little pause.

'You are fortunate in that man of yours,' Sir John said. 'A first-class man.'

'Yes—he saved my life.'

Sir John blinked, and for the first time his fingers went to his mouth, as if his lips had suddenly got beyond his control.

'If I may suggest it,' he said rather indistinctly, 'I think it would be well if we signified our appreciation of his devotion in some substantial way. We might well do something between us.'

He paused and threw back his shoulders.

'I should like to give him some substantial token of my—gratitude.'

Sir John was nothing if not just.

'Thank you,' answered Jack quietly. He turned his head a little, and glanced, not at his father, but in his direction. 'He will appreciate it, I know.'

'I should like to see him to-morrow.'

Jack winced, as if he had made a mistake.

'He is not in England,' he explained. 'I left him behind me in Africa. He has gone back to the Simiacine Plateau.'

The old man's face dropped rather piteously.

'I am sorry,' he said, with one of the sudden relapses into old age that Lady Cantourne dreaded. 'I may not have a chance of seeing him to thank him personally. A good servant is so rare nowadays. These modern democrats seem to think that it is a nobler thing to be a bad servant than a good one. As if we were not all servants!'

He was thirsting for details. There were a thousand questions in his heart, but not one on his lips.

'Will you have the kindness to remember my desire,' he went on suavely, 'when you are settling up with your man?'

'Thank you,' replied Jack, 'I am much obliged to you.'

'And in the meantime, as you are without a servant, you may as well make use of mine. One of my men—Henry—who is too stupid to get into mischief—a great recommendation by the way—understands his business. I will ring and have him sent over to your rooms at once.'

He did so, and they sat in silence until the butler had come and gone.

'We have been very successful with the Simiacine—our scheme,' said Jack suddenly.

'Ah!'

'I have brought home a consignment valued at seventy thousand pounds.'

Sir John's face never changed.

'And,' he asked with veiled sarcasm, 'do you carry out the—er—commercial part of the scheme?'

'I shall begin to arrange for the sale of the consignment to-morrow. I shall have no difficulty—at least, I anticipate none. Yes, I do the commercial part—as well as the other. I held the Plateau against two thousand natives for three months, with fifty-five men. But I do the commercial part as well.'

As he was looking into the fire still, Sir John stole a long comprehensive glance at his son's face. His old eyes lighted up with pride and something else—possibly love. The clock on the mantelpiece struck eleven. Jack looked at it thoughtfully, then he rose.

'I must not keep you any longer,' he said somewhat stiffly.

Sir John rose also.

'I dare say you are tired; you need rest. In some ways you look stronger, in others you look fagged and pulled down.'

'It is the result of my illness,' said Jack. 'I am really quite strong.'

He paused, standing on the hearthrug, then suddenly he held out his hand.

'Good-night,' he said.

'Good-night.'

Sir John allowed him to go to the door, to touch the handle, before he spoke.

'Then——' he said, and Jack paused. 'Then we are no farther on?'

'In what way?'

'In respect to the matter over which we unfortunately disagreed before you went away?'

Jack turned, with his hand on the door.

'I have not changed my mind in any respect,' he said gently. 'Perhaps you are inclined to take my altered circumstances into consideration—to modify your views.'

'I am getting rather old for modification,' answered Sir John suavely.

'And you see no reason for altering your decision?'

'None.'

'Then I am afraid we are no farther on,' he paused. 'Good-night,' he added gently, as he opened the door.

'Good-night.'

CHAPTER XXXV.

ENGAGED.

'Well, there's the game. I throw the stakes.'

Lady Cantourne was sitting alone in her drawing-room, and the expression of her usually bright and smiling face betokened considerable perturbation.

Truth to tell, there were not many things in life that had power to frighten her ladyship very much. Hers had been a prosperous life as prosperity is reckoned. She had married a rich man who had retained his riches while he lived and had left them to her when he died. And that was all the world knew of Lady Cantourne. Like the majority of us, she presented her character and not herself to her neighbours; and these held, as neighbours do, that the cheery, capable little woman of the world whom they met everywhere was Lady Cantourne. Circumstances alter us less than we think. If we are of a gay temperament—gay we shall be through all. If sombre, no happiness can drive that sombreness away. Lady Cantourne was meant for happiness and a joyous motherhood. She had had neither; but she went on being 'meant' until the end—that is to say, she was still cheery and capable. She had thrown an open letter on the little table at her side—a letter from Jack Meredith announcing his return to England, and his natural desire to call and pay his respects in the course of the afternoon.

'So,' she had said before she laid the letter aside, 'he is home again—and he means to carry it through?'

Then she had settled down to think, in her own comfortable chair (for if one may not be happy, comfort is at all events within reach of some of us), and the troubled look had supervened.

Each of our lives is like a book with one strong character moving through its pages. The strong character in Lady Cantourne's book had been Sir John Meredith. Her whole life seemed to have been spent on the outskirts of his—watching it. And what she had seen had not been conducive to her own happiness.

She knew that the note she had just received meant a great deal to Sir John Meredith. It meant that Jack had come home with the full intention of fulfilling his engagement to Millicent Chyne. At first she had rather resented Sir John's outspoken objection to her niece as his son's wife. But during the last months she had gradually come round to his way of thinking; not, perhaps, for the first time in her life. She had watched Millicent. She had studied her own niece dispassionately, as much from Sir John Meredith's point of view as was possible under the circumstances. And she had made several discoveries. The first of these had been precisely that discovery which one would expect from a woman—namely, the state of Millicent's own feelings.

Lady Cantourne had known for the last twelve months—almost as long as Sir John Meredith had known—that Millicent loved Jack. Upon this knowledge came the humiliation—the degradation—of one flirtation after another; and not even after, but interlaced. Guy Oscard in particular, and others in a minor degree had passed that way. It was a shameless record of that which might have been good in a man prostituted and trampled under foot by the vanity of a woman. Lady Cantourne was of the world worldly; and because of that, because the finest material has a seamy side, and the highest walks in life have the hardiest weeds, she knew what love should be. Here was a love—it may be modern, advanced, *chic*, *fin-de-siècle*, up-to-date, or anything the coming generation may choose to call it—but it was eminently cheap and ephemeral because it could not make a little sacrifice of vanity. For the sake of the man she loved—mark that!—not only the man to whom she was engaged, but whom she loved—Millicent Chyne could not forbear pandering to her own vanity by the sacrifice of her own modesty and purity of thought. There was the sting for Lady Cantourne.

She was tolerant and eminently wise, this old lady who had made one huge mistake long ago; and she knew that the danger, the harm, the low vulgarity lay in the little fact that Millicent Chyne loved Jack Meredith, according to her lights.

While she still sat there the bell rang, and quite suddenly she chased away the troubled look from her eyes, leaving there the keen, kindly gaze to which the world of London society was well accustomed. When Jack Meredith came into the room, she rose to greet him with a smile of welcome.

'Before I shake hands,' she said, 'tell me if you have been to see your father.'

'I went last night—almost straight from the station. The first person I spoke to in London, except a cabman.'

So she shook hands.

'You know,' she said, without looking at him—indeed, carefully avoiding doing so—'life is too short to quarrel with one's father. At least it may prove too short to make it up again—that is the danger.'

She sat down, with a graceful swing of her silken skirt which was habitual with her—the remnant of a past day.

Jack Meredith winced. He had seen a difference in his father, and Lady Cantourne was corroborating it.

'The quarrel was not mine,' he said. 'I admit that I ought to have known him better. I ought to have spoken to him before asking Millicent. It was a mistake.'

Lady Cantourne looked up suddenly.

'What was a mistake?'

'Not asking his—opinion first.'

She turned to the table where his letter lay, and fingered the paper pensively.

'I thought, perhaps, that you had found that the other was a mistake—the engagement.'

'No,' he answered.

Lady Cantourne's face betrayed nothing. There was no sigh, of relief or disappointment. She merely looked at the clock.

'Millicent will be in presently,' she said; 'she is out riding.'

She did not think it necessary to add that her niece was riding with a very youthful officer in the Guards. Lady Cantourne never made mischief from a sense of duty, or any mistaken motive of that sort. Some people argue that there is very little that is worth keeping secret; to which one may reply that there is still less worth disclosing.

They talked of other things—of his life in Africa, of his success with the Simiacine, of which discovery the newspapers were not yet weary—until the bell was heard in the basement, and thereafter Millicent's voice in the hall.

Lady Cantourne rose deliberately and went downstairs to tell her niece that he was in the drawing-room, leaving him there, waiting, alone.

Presently the door opened and Millicent hurried in. She threw her gloves and whip—anywhere—on the floor, and ran to him.

'Oh, Jack!' she cried.

It was very prettily done. In its way it was a poem. But while his arms were still round her she looked towards the window, wondering whether he had seen her ride up to the door accompanied by the very youthful officer in the Guards.

'And, Jack—do you know,' she went on, 'all the newspapers have been full of you. You are quite a celebrity. And are you really as rich as they say?'

Jack Meredith was conscious of a very slight check—it was not exactly a jar. His feeling was rather that of a man who thinks that he is swimming in deep water, and finds suddenly that he can touch the bottom.

'I think I can safely say that I am not,' he answered.

And it was from that eminently practical point that they departed into the future—arranging that same, and filling up its blanks with all the wisdom of lovers and the rest of us.

Lady Cantourne left them there for nearly an hour, in which space of time she probably reflected they could build up as rosy a future as was good for them to contemplate. Then she returned to the drawing-room, followed by a full-sized footman bearing tea.

She was too discreet a woman—too deeply versed in the sudden changes of the human mind and heart—to say anything until one of them should give her a distinct lead. They were not shy and awkward children. Perhaps she reflected that the generation to which they belonged is not one heavily handicapped by too subtle a delicacy of feeling.

Jack Meredith gave her the lead before long.

'Millicent,' he said, without a vestige of embarrassment, 'has consented to be openly engaged now.'

Lady Cantourne nodded comprehensively.

'I think she is very wise,' she said.

There was a little pause.

'I *know* she is very wise,' she added, turning and laying her hand on Jack's arm. The two phrases had quite a different meaning. 'She will have a good husband.'

'So you can tell *everybody* now,' chimed in Millicent in her silvery way. She was blushing and looking very pretty with her hair blown about her ears by her last canter with the youthful officer, who was at that moment riding pensively home with a bunch of violets in his coat which had not been there when he started from the stable.

She had found out casually from Jack that Guy Oscard was exiled vaguely to the middle of Africa for an indefinite period. The rest—the youthful officer and the others—did not give her much anxiety. They, she argued to herself, had nothing to bring against her. They may have *thought* things—but who can prevent people from thinking things? Besides, 'I thought' is always a poor position.

There were, it was true, a good many men whom she would rather not tell herself. But this difficulty was obviated by requesting Lady Cantourne to tell everybody. Everybody would tell everybody else, and would, of course, ask if these particular persons in question had been told; if not, they would have to be told at once. Indeed, there would be quite a competition to relieve Millicent of her little difficulty. Besides, she could not marry more than one person. Besides—besides—besides—the last word of Millicent and her kind.

Lady Cantourne was not very communicative during that refined little tea *à trois*, but she listened smilingly to Jack's optimistic views and Millicent's somewhat valueless comments.

'I am certain,' said Millicent, at length boldly attacking the question that was in all their minds, 'that Sir John will be all right now. Of course, it is only natural that he should not like Jack to—to get engaged yet. Especially before, when it would have made a difference to him—in money I mean. But now that Jack is independent—you know, auntie, that Jack is richer than Sir John—is it not nice?'

'Very,' answered Lady Cantourne, in a voice rather suggestive of humouring a child's admiration of a new toy; 'very nice indeed.'

'And all so quickly!' pursued Millicent. 'Only a few months—not two years, you know. Of course, at first, the time went horribly slowly; but afterwards, when one got accustomed to it, life became tolerable. You did not expect me to sit and mope all day, did you, Jack?'

'No, of course not,' replied Jack; and quite suddenly, as in a flash, he saw his former self, and wondered vaguely whether he would get back to that self.

Lady Cantourne was rather thoughtful at that moment. She could not help coming back and back to Sir John.

'Of course,' she said to Jack, 'we must let your father know at once. The news must not reach him from an outside source.'

Jack nodded.

'If it did,' he said, 'I do not think the "outside source" would get much satisfaction out of him.'

'Probably not; but I was not thinking of the "outside source" or the outside effect. I was thinking of his feelings,' replied Lady Cantourne rather sharply. She had lately fallen into the habit of not sparing Millicent very much; and that young lady, bright and sweet and good-natured, had not failed to notice it. Indeed, she had spoken of it to several people—to partners at dances and others. She attributed it to approaching old age.

'I will write and tell him,' said Jack quietly.

Lady Cantourne raised her eyebrows slightly, but made no spoken comment.

'I think,' she said, after a little pause, 'that Millicent ought to write too.'

Millicent shuddered prettily. She was dimly conscious that her handwriting—of an exaggerated size, executed with a special broad-pointed pen purchasable in only one shop in Regent Street—was not quite likely to meet with his approval. A letter written thus—two words to a line—on note-paper that would have been vulgar had it not been so very novel, was sure to incur prejudice before it was fully unfolded by a stuffy, old-fashioned person.

'I will try,' she said; 'but you know, auntie dear, I *cannot* write a long explanatory letter. There never seems to be time does there? Besides, I am afraid Sir John disapproves of me. I don't know why; I'm sure I have tried'—which was perfectly true.

Even funerals and lovers must bow to meal-times, and Jack Meredith was not the man to outstay his welcome. He saw Lady

Cantourne glance at the clock. Clever as she was, she could not do it without being seen by him.

So he took his leave, and Millicent went to the head of the stairs with him.

He refused the pressing invitation of a hansom-cabman, and proceeded to walk leisurely home to his rooms. Perhaps he was wondering why his heart was not brimming over with joy. The human heart has a singular way of seeing farther than its astute friend and coadjutor, the brain. It sometimes refuses to be filled with glee when outward circumstances most distinctly demand that state. And at other times, when outward things are strong, not to say opaque, the heart is joyful, and we know not why.

Jack Meredith knew that he was the luckiest man in London. He was rich, in good health, and he was engaged to be married to Millicent Chyne, the acknowledged belle of his circle. She had in no way changed. She was just as pretty, as fascinating, as gay as ever; and something told him that she loved him—something which had not been there before he went away, something that had come when the overweening vanity of youth went. And it was just this knowledge to which he clung with a nervous mental grip. He did not feel elated as he should; he was aware of that, and he could not account for it. But Millicent loved him, so it must be all right. He had always cared for Millicent. Everything had been done in order that he might marry her—the quarrel with his father, the finding of the Simiacine, the determination to get well which had saved his life—all this so that he might marry Millicent. And now he was going to marry her, and it must be all right. Perhaps, as men get older, the effervescent elation of youth leaves them; but they are none the less happy. That must be it.

(*To be continued.*)

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MATTHEW AUSTIN.[1]

BY W. E. NORRIS.

CHAPTER XIII.

LEONARD GIVES HIS OPINION.

SOMETIMES, after the turn of the year and long before the spring, there come to us dwellers in a northern island, of which the rigorous climate is mitigated by that ever-blessed Gulf Stream, a few days so mild and soft and sunshiny that they seem to have been plucked by mistake out of the brief coming summer which is our due. Birds begin to chirp and twitter, windows are thrown open, fires are allowed to burn low, and the half-forgotten smell of the moist earth greets our expanded nostrils.

Well, we all know what that means. Presently the wind will work round by north to east, where it will stick for six weeks without a break; the winter is only playing with us; the worst of our miseries are yet to come, and it is ten to one that every man and woman whom we meet in the course of the day will accost us with the same sagacious observation—'Ah, we shall pay for this later on!'

Such, indeed, was the original and novel remark which Leonard Jerome had just made, one fine afternoon, to his friend and medical adviser, in whose pretty, old-fashioned drawing-room he was lounging at his ease, with his hands in his pockets and his long legs stretched out before him. Of his legs he had for some time past enjoyed the full use, and, although one of his arms was still in a sling, the other had recently been set free. Long con-

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finement to the house had toned down the usual ruddy brownness of his complexion ; but this pallor was not unbecoming, and, taking him altogether, his appearance was of a nature to reflect credit both upon his doctor and upon the friend who was about to exhibit him to a couple of expectant ladies.

'The future may pretty generally be counted upon to take its revenge on the present,' Matthew said, in answer to his gloomy forecast. 'Why not make the best of good times while they last?'

He was thinking of other things besides the weather as he spoke. His good time, he very well knew, was irrevocably destined to be short, and it was not always that he could manage to act upon his own excellent advice. Still he had at least one small matter for self-congratulation in that neither frost nor rain nor snow had intervened to put a stop to his little tea-party. A less disinterested or a more apprehensive man might not have been in so great a hurry to introduce the handsome and eligible Mr. Jerome to the object of his affections; but Matthew flattered himself that he had no silly illusions. Leonard Jerome or another —what did it matter to him, since it was obvious that a provincial practitioner could never stand in the position of a rival to Lilian's suitor or suitors?

'I hope that old Lady Sara of yours won't expect a one-armed man to trundle her round the garden in her bath-chair,' Leonard was beginning, when the door was thrown open and the subject of his groundless alarm walked in.

Lady Sara, who was now almost as well as she had been before her dangerous illness, scarcely looked like an invalid. Always well dressed, carrying herself gracefully, and retaining, as she did, perceptible vestiges of the beauty for which she had been famous in years gone by, she could hardly fail to produce a favourable impression upon a stranger. But of course it was not upon her that the gaze of this admiring and astonished stranger became instantly riveted. Matthew saw that, and experienced a momentary sensation of pain on witnessing what he saw; but, after all, it was only what he had been fully prepared for, and, for that matter, had desired. He would have been much disappointed if Leonard Jerome had not admired Miss Murray. When the necessary introductions had been effected, and the inquiries and condolences which the occasion called for had been interchanged, he said briskly:

'Now, shall we have tea first and flowers afterwards, or will you come out into the garden at once? I can allow you to choose, Lady Sara, because on such an afternoon as this I sha'n't feel it my duty to pack you off home for another hour and a half.'

Lady Sara replied that, under those circumstances, she would have her tea. 'I want to look about me before I do anything else,' she said. 'What a dear old room!—and what a number of pretty things you have got! Is that a Bartolozzi?'

She moved away to examine the engraving which had attracted her attention and proceeded to inspect Matthew's modest stock of treasures, taking her host with her and leaving—perhaps not altogether without design—the two younger people to entertain one another. The young people, however, did not seem to be particularly eager to fall in with her wishes. Some few observations they must have exchanged, but it was not long before Matthew became aware that Lilian was at his elbow, and while the tea was being carried in she took occasion to say to him in an agitated whisper:

'Freeze to me!—don't leave me for a moment! I won't perambulate the garden for three-quarters of an hour with that masher!'

'You will like him very much when you have talked a little more to him,' returned Matthew, in amused and subdued accents; 'he is as far removed from being a masher as I am. A more manly, unaffected young fellow I never met, and——'

'Oh, yes,' interrupted the girl impatiently, 'I dare say he is all that, and he is right enough with other men, and just now he is wearing his country clothes. But I can see him in a frock-coat and a tall hat, all the same, and I don't want to be bothered with him. *Please* hand him over to Mamma; they are sure to have any number of common acquaintances, and they will get on together splendidly.'

It is all very well to assert that the path of duty is not invariably unpleasant, and that to do what is distasteful to us is not necessarily to perform a meritorious action, but we are all firmly convinced of the contrary, nor could Matthew doubt that he was bound to disregard this seductive entreaty. His place, beyond all question, was by Lady Sara's side, and he gallantly claimed it. After tea—which informal repast, somehow or other, afforded fewer opportunities for the development of informality than might have been hoped for—she accepted the support of his proffered arm, and he led her forth into the cool greenhouse, Leonard and Lilian following closely in the wake of the couple and displaying marked anxiety to be included in the general conversation. It was ridiculous of them to behave in that way; still, so long as they chose to do it, nobody could prevent them, and their entertainer, by reason of the frailty of his mortal nature, was more tickled than provoked with their conduct.

But they could not possibly keep it up. Even if Bush, who was in attendance, had been less long-winded and Lady Sara less ecstatically loquacious, the obstinate silence with which their occasional diffident comments upon a subject about which neither of them knew anything at all were received must eventually have forced them back upon one another, and their mutual animosity had already undergone some diminution before Lady Sara, after minutely examining the fragrant blooms in the stove-house, announced, with every appearance of regret, that she was too tired to walk round the grounds.

'I shall go back to the drawing-room and wait for you, while Mr. Austin does the honours,' said she. 'Don't think of hurrying; I can make myself quite happy with a book.'

Naturally, Matthew protested that his notion of doing the honours was to remain with his chief guest, adding that 'the grounds' were not so extensive as to require a guide: naturally, also, Lilian felt that it would be hardly polite to avow the absolute indifference with which she regarded Mr. Austin's cherished shrubs. So her ladyship carried her point, after all—a point to which, in truth, she attached scanty importance. Only, as the mother of a marriageable daughter, she felt it incumbent upon her to neglect no chance that might turn up.

'Your young friend is handsome, but scarcely brilliant,' she remarked, on her way back towards the house. 'I should think there was no fear of his being disinherited. Why should anybody wish to disinherit such a nice, gentlemanlike, commonplace sort of person?'

Perhaps that was not quite the light in which Lilian saw Mr. Jerome; assuredly it was not the light in which that young man was accustomed to see himself. Anyhow, his first remark to his companion, while they paced, somewhat sullenly, side by side, down one of the gravel paths, could not fairly be stigmatised as commonplace.

'May I ask,' he began, 'whether I have been unfortunate enough to strike you as more objectionable and offensive than the ordinary run of casual acquaintances?'

She thought it decidedly objectionable and offensive on his part to put such a question, but, being as yet unversed in the art of fine innuendo, could hit upon no other rejoinder than the rather bald and curt one of 'Not at all.'

'I am glad of that; because I was afraid, from the savage manner in which you have been snubbing me all this time, that I had unintentionally done something that you couldn't forgive.'

'That is nonsense,' returned Lilian impatiently. 'You are much too well satisfied with yourself to have been afraid of anything of the sort, and if I had really snubbed you, you would have turned your back upon me at once and begun to talk to my mother. Why didn't you?'

'Ah, now we are getting at it; now one begins to perceive what one's offence has been! Well, really, Miss Murray, it was no fault of mine. I don't want to be rude, but the unvarnished truth is that I would quite as soon have talked to your mother as to you, if only I had been allowed. Dense as I have no doubt you think me, I have intelligence enough to understand that you came here to see our friend Austin, not me.'

'You would indeed have been dense if you had imagined that I came here to see you,' Lilian rejoined, with an angry laugh; for at this period of her life she had not learnt to disguise her emotions, and did not in the least care how rude she might appear to a young man whom she had rather hastily set down as supercilious and conceited. She went on to say, in a needlessly defiant tone, 'Mr. Austin is a very great friend of ours. He saved my mother's life, and he has been kindness itself to us ever since we came here. I don't believe there is anybody else in the world like him.'

'Then we have at least found one subject upon which we are of the same mind,' remarked Leonard good-humouredly, 'for Austin is a very great friend of mine too, and I agree with you in doubting whether there is anybody else in the world quite like him. I can't say that he has saved my life, but that is only because I haven't given him the chance, and as for kindness, I have had as much of that from him as I can carry. Don't you think we might make friends—you and I—upon the strength of our common affection for a third person? It would be more comfortable if we could, because I suppose we are bound to spend a short time together in examining the third person's outdoor plants. He is sure to catechise us about them when we go in.'

'Very well; it need not take us long, I should think,' was Lilian's somewhat ungracious response to these overtures.

But, as a matter of fact, their stroll over the two modest acres which were inclosed by Mr. Austin's garden fence did last a good deal longer than one of them was aware of. Leonard Jerome had never earned, nor desired to earn, the odious reputation of a lady-killer; still he had all his life been accustomed to be a favourite with the opposite sex, and he was not unnaturally piqued by the disdain with which the beautiful Miss Murray had seen fit to treat him so far. He felt that he owed it to himself to convince her that she was under some misapprehension or other, and in truth the task of putting her into a better humour proved to be no very hard one. He talked so simply, boyishly and pleasantly that she soon had to change her opinion of him; he did not brag of his prowess in field sports or his intimate knowledge of smart society, as she had felt certain that he would do; and if his conversation was a trifle egotistical, it was not the less interesting on that account. There are people who can discourse quite charmingly about themselves—who, in fact, cannot discourse with anything approaching the same charm upon other topics. So Lilian heard the whole—or, at any rate, as much as could be related to her—of Mr. Jerome's personal history, was informed that he possessed a place in the far north where he supposed he would have to take up his residence some fine day, learnt that he was not nearly as well off as he would like to be, and was candidly told that he based great hopes, not unmingled with misgivings, upon the provisions of his uncle's will.

'The worst of it is,' said he, 'that one never knows what to be at with Uncle Richard. 'Sometimes he growls at me for not being in Parliament or making some other good use of what he is pleased to call my talents, and then, when I least expect it, he'll turn round upon me and abuse me for spending a couple of months in London when I might have been leading a healthy life in the country. It takes more patience than I can boast of to put up with him. However, we have got on rather better together of late, thanks to dear old Austin, who stands between us and strokes us both down. Austin has quite won my uncle's heart.'

'I don't wonder at that,' remarked Lilian.

'I expect you would wonder a little if you knew Uncle Richard.

I am not surprised at Austin's winning any quantity of other hearts, though.'

Leonard concluded his sentence with a sigh, to which Miss Murray took instant exception.

'Oh, if you mean that he is lucky to be so popular, you understand very little about it,' said she. 'You can have the same luck and the same popularity whenever you like. All you have to do is to be as good and kind and unselfish as he is.'

'That is all, is it? Then luckless and unpopular I shall remain to the end of my days, I am afraid. The only consolation is that nine-tenths of the human race must be in the same boat with me. Even you yourself, perhaps.'

'Oh, I don't pretend to be anything but thoroughly selfish, and I don't think I particularly care about being popular,' answered the girl. 'Hadn't we better go in now?'

A quarter of an hour later Matthew was walking across the fields towards Wilverton Grange with his young friend, whom he had undertaken to see part of the way home. Lady Sara, laden with the flowers which Bush, in obedience to orders, had reluctantly cut for her, had been wheeled away in her bath-chair, after taking a very cordial leave of her entertainer and her fellow-guest. She had begged the latter to call upon her any afternoon when he should have nothing better to do, and he had accepted the invitation with eager alacrity. Just now he was eulogising Miss Murray's beauty in unmeasured terms.

'The most beautiful girl I have ever seen in all my life, bar none!' he declared emphatically.

'Ah, I was pretty sure that you would think so,' Matthew observed, with a laugh which did not sound altogether merry.

'Well, *you* think so too, don't you?'

'Oh, yes; I think so too.'

'Mind you, I don't say she is quite the nicest girl I have ever met; though she may even be that to other people, for anything that I know to the contrary. But not to me. Oh, no, she took very good care not to be nice to me—which was rather unkind of her, considering what a lot of trouble I took to be nice to her. Was I to blame for not being Matthew Austin, M.D., or for having been ordered by Matthew Austin, M.D., to perambulate a damp garden with her, when I would much sooner have been sitting before the fire?'

'I am not entitled to write M.D. after my name, and you are not entitled to shirk the duties that belong to your age,' Matthew answered. 'Not that I believe for one moment that you wished to shirk them. Was it for Lady Sara's sake that you jumped with such avidity at her permission to you to call in Prospect Place?'

'I am sorry, my dear Austin,' said the younger man, 'to notice in you a tendency towards humbug, which I had imagined to be foreign to your character. I trust it is only humbug. I trust it isn't the jealousy which it pretends to be. Because, if it were, I should have to write you down not as an M.D. but as a D.D. ass.'

'Jealousy!—at my age!'

'Oh, that puts the matter beyond a doubt; if you weren't a horrid old humbug you wouldn't begin to talk about your age. Why, what are you?—five and thirty?'

'Not quite so much; but I dare say I look more, and I know I often feel more. Anyhow, I am centuries older than Miss Murray: added to which, I am her mother's physician and a mere nobody in point of rank. By all means call me an ass, if you like; but please acquit me of having been such an ass as to fix my provincial and medical affections upon a young lady who is not unlikely to figure as one of the fashionable beauties of the coming London season.'

Leonard did not reply at once; the two men were just then walking in single file through a copse, traversed by a narrow footpath. But when they emerged into a pasture he laid his one available hand upon Matthew's shoulder and said:

'Now, look here, old chap; we've been pretty good friends, haven't we?—and I don't see the use of making mysteries. Of course I don't want you to tell me anything that you would prefer to keep to yourself; only, you know, you did virtually tell me everything some time ago.'

'I told you everything? I don't know what you mean!' ejaculated Matthew, in honest bewilderment.

'Why, my dear man, you weren't under the impression that you hadn't betrayed yourself a hundred times, were you? I didn't respond as I might have done, because I wanted to have a look at the young woman first. Well, I have had a look at her now, and I congratulate you. Rubbish about your age and your rank! You are every bit as good as she is in one sense, and a great deal better in another. Her mother, I grant you, may not be of that opinion just at first; but what then? It will be all right, so long as you don't insist upon depreciating yourself to them. It's a mistake to depreciate yourself, and a man of your wisdom ought to know it.'

Matthew was so taken aback that it was some minutes before he recovered full possession of his faculties. By the time that he had done so he could no longer dispute the accuracy of Leonard Jerome's conjectures; but he gave many good reasons—of which the young man made light—for his determination to keep his secret to himself, so far as Lilian and her mother were concerned.

'And, after all,' he concluded, 'there is such a thing as absolutely disinterested love. It is possible——'

'Oh, no, it isn't,' interrupted the other. 'You will never get me to believe that; and when you say such things you almost make me doubt whether you are really in love with the girl at all.'

'You needn't doubt that. There is no more doubt about my being in love with her than there is about the impossibility of her ever falling in love with me.'

'Austin, you exasperate me. I don't want you to walk any farther with me this evening, thanks; I would rather you went back home and considered your ways. If you don't know that Miss Murray simply adores you, all I can say is you ought to know it. But I expect you do, and you are only trying to find out what she said to me about you in the garden. 'You're a lucky devil; though I'm not going to deny that you deserve your luck. Now good night—and be hanged to you!'

With that, he turned away and, breaking into a trot, was soon lost to sight in the falling darkness.

'I dare say,' muttered Matthew to himself, as he stroked his short beard meditatively, 'that from his point of view I did seem to be insincere. But of course he wouldn't understand.'

CHAPTER XIV.

A GRACEFUL RETREAT.

It is possible that when an attack of gout declines to yield to treatment (as it almost invariably does) something may be done towards hastening the sufferer's recovery by means of cheerful conversation and sanguine assurances. Such, at all events, were the remedies employed by Matthew in the case of Mr. Frere, whose enemy released him a full week earlier than usual and who not unnaturally ascribed to one species of dexterity what was more probably due to another.

'That fellow,' he told his wife confidentially, 'ought to be at the head of his profession. He has no business to bury himself down here—though I'm sure *I* don't want him to leave us. It's true that there is plenty of money to be made in Wilverton, and he ought to grow rich as soon as he has cut old Jennings out—which he is bound to do, sooner or later, whether he wishes it or not. People can't be expected to put up with incompetency out of a sentimental regard for vested interests. Oh, don't throw Litton at my head! Litton, I know, sticks to Jennings, in spite of all that Austin has done for that nephew of his; but then Litton hasn't had the gout yet.'

Mrs. Frere felt no special interest in Mr. Litton, a surly old curmudgeon with whom it was impossible to maintain neighbourly relations; but her curiosity had been slightly excited with regard to his nephew ever since somebody had told her that that young man had twice been seen to emerge from Lady Sara Murray's door.

'So the Murrays are friends of your friend the broken-boned bicycle rider, I hear,' she took an early opportunity of remarking to Matthew. 'Where did they fall in with him?—in London?'

'No; they met him for the first time at my house,' Matthew answered. 'I thought it would be a kindness both to them and to Jerome to bring them together, and I wanted Miss Frere to come the same day. However, she wouldn't: she says she dislikes young men.'

'Poor dear Anne! Yes; I am afraid it is only too true that she does *not* like young men, and I live in constant dread of her coming to announce to me that she has accepted an elderly widower, with a large family and a small income. That is just the sort of dreadful thing that Anne would delight in doing, if she got the chance. One can't be thankful enough that all the poverty-stricken paterfamiliases hereabouts are blessed with exceptionally robust wives. But wasn't it a little bit imprudent of you to take the responsibility of presenting a more or less interesting youth to that lovely girl?'

'I don't think so. She will have to meet a number of more or less interesting youths before long, you see.'

'Yes; but taking them in the lump is quite another affair, and if anything were to happen, her mother would be sure to lay the blame on you. Because, although young Jerome has expectations, he is no great catch as he stands. I think, if I had been you, I should have left it alone.'

'You are the last person whom I should have suspected of being so worldly and wary,' Matthew said, laughing.

'Ah, I'm like David Copperfield's landlady, "I'm a mother myself." When it comes to be a question of daughters and marriages we are all apt to be worldly; we can't very well help it. Let us hope that Lady Sara is sufficiently so for the purpose.'

From what Matthew knew of Lady Sara Murray, he thought it probable that her worldliness would prove equal to the occasion; but he did not know as much as Mrs. Frere did about her recent relations with young Jerome, stress of work having prevented him from visiting Prospect Place since the occurrence of the episodes recorded in the last chapter. Leonard's words had made a certain impression upon him, and of course he had thought a good deal about them; but his common sense had preserved him from taking them too literally. It was easy to understand how the misapprehension had arisen—easy to conjecture that Lilian had made use of more emphatic language in speaking of a man whom she liked than she would have done in speaking of a man whom she loved, and it was not surprising that a young fellow who was doing his best to be agreeable to her should have been spurred by vexation towards erroneous conclusions. If there was one thing of which Matthew was more persuaded than another, it was that he might with perfect safety to himself and others keep up his pleasant intimacy with Lady Sara and her daughter; and, as he had a spare half-hour that afternoon, he drove straight from Hayes Park to their temporary residence.

He was received by Lilian alone—her mother, as she presently explained, having gone to lie down—and, for all his common sense, he could not but rejoice a little when she upbraided him for having absented himself so long.

'How horrid you are!' she exclaimed. 'Every day I have been thinking that you *must* come at last, and four times have I seen you drive past the door without even turning your head! Is it that you don't care to see us except when we are at the point of death?'

'No; it isn't that,' answered Matthew simply, 'but the number of my patients keeps on increasing, and lately I have had to devote all my little free time to cheering up poor old Mr. Frere, who has had the gout and has been very sorry for himself.'

'Bother old Mr. Frere and his gout! Though I like you all the better for being so kind to everybody—even to gouty old gentlemen. Do you know what your friend Mr. Jerome says about you? He declares that you have been neglecting us on purpose, lest we should hold the honour of your friendship too cheap.'

'My friend Mr. Jerome says a good many silly things. You have seen him, then?'

The girl made a grimace. 'Oh, yes,' she answered, 'he has contrived to find one excuse or another for dropping in almost every day since we first met. I have heard a great deal about him too—both from himself and from Mamma's friend Mrs. Brudenell, who often comes across him in London, it seems. Evidently he is very much sought after and is fully aware of his own value. He doesn't adopt your system of impressing it upon others, though.'

'Ah, you are prejudiced; you made up your mind to dislike him from the first.'

'No; I like him well enough; only, as I told you, I am not fond of fashionable and conceited young men. One can never feel at one's ease with them, and one is always offending their vanity. However, I will say for Mr. Jerome that he has one redeeming point: he thoroughly appreciates you.'

'Does he? Well, I think I appreciate him too. Fashionable he may be, but I don't believe he is conceited, and as for his being young—all I can say is I wish I had half his complaint!'

'Do try to break yourself of talking like that!' exclaimed Lilian, with an impatient gesture; 'you will be young for another ten years at least, and what is the use of making yourself out old before your time? You go on repeating it until people end by taking you at your word. Even Mamma speaks as if you were somewhere about her own age, whereas in reality you are just about mine. Men are always ten years younger than women.'

Matthew, resolved to adhere to the prudent and unromantic course which he had marked out for himself, was in the act of asserting that middle age overtakes many a man who has not yet entered upon his thirty-second year, when he was interrupted by the entrance of indisputable youth in the person of Mr. Leonard Jerome. Lilian, after giving utterance to an exclamation of annoyance which was perfectly audible, and was doubtless intended to be so, called out to the retreating housemaid, 'Tell Lady Sara, please'—while the intruder, having shaken hands with her, turned to Matthew and said:

'I saw your cart at the door, old man; so I thought I would come in.'

'What a very odd reason!' remarked Miss Murray. 'Most people, when they see a doctor's carriage at the door, stay outside.'

'I apologise,' answered the young man, with an assumption of good humour which was not altogether effectual in masking his chagrin; 'I quite understand that I am *de trop*; but the beauty of me is that I shall not be *de trop* much longer. I am off to London to-morrow, Miss Murray, you will be glad to hear, and, as I rather want Austin to have a look at my arm before I go, I took the opportunity of killing two birds with one stone by catching him and wishing you goodbye at the same time.'

Lilian made no response; but Matthew exclaimed, in unaffected concern, 'My dear fellow, this is very sudden! You haven't been quarrelling with your uncle, I hope?'

'Not more than usual; but it is really time for me to be moving on. Can I execute any commissions for you in town, Miss Murray?'

Lady Sara, who entered the room before Lilian could answer, echoed this query in accents of polite regret. 'In town? I hope that doesn't mean that you are thinking of deserting us, Mr. Jerome.'

'It's awfully nice of you to put it in that way, Lady Sara,' the young man made reply, 'but I'm afraid I can't flatter myself that my friends here will miss me half as much as I shall miss them. As for my uncle, he has been dead sick of me for a long time past, and it's better to end a visit of one's own accord than to wait until one is told at what hour the train leaves the next morning, don't you think so?'

Lady Sara smiled. She was not particularly eager to arrange an alliance between her daughter—who might do so very much better—and the potential heir of a well-to-do country gentleman, although she had not felt justified in discouraging what had appeared to her to be advances on Leonard's part.

'I dare say you are longing to get away from this dull place,' she remarked. 'Of course it must be dreadfully dull for you in your disabled state, and when a man can neither hunt nor shoot, he is better off in London than anywhere else, no doubt.'

Some talk upon this not very novel topic of discussion ensued. Lilian took no share in it, and at the end of five minutes or so Leonard rose.

'Have you time to drive me to the Grange and make a last examination of me, Austin?' he asked. 'I was on my way to your house, and I meant to leave a note for you if I didn't find you at home.'

'Come along,' answered Matthew, after consulting his note-book; 'I can just manage it, if we start at once.'

'How tiresome it is of you!' Lilian ejaculated in an undertone, while Lady Sara was telling Mr. Jerome that she quite hoped to meet him again later in the year and in livelier scenes; 'he can't really want you to look at his arm, and I'm sure you can't want to see it! Now it will be weeks, I suppose, before you deign to honour us with another call.'

'I should be here every day, if I could consult my own inclinations,' Matthew answered, with absolute truth. 'And I certainly could not think of letting Jerome escape from my hands without a final overhauling. He is not by any means well yet, whatever he may say. Why he should be in such a desperate hurry to get away all of a sudden I can't make out.'

Lilian shrugged her shoulders. She meant to imply that she was equally ignorant and indifferent as to Mr. Jerome's motives; but she may not improbably have formed some surmise upon the subject, and it is hardly necessary to add that a somewhat similar conjecture had suggested itself to Matthew's mind.

However, nothing in the semblance of a confession was forthcoming from Leonard during the rapid drive through the twilight that ensued. The young man was in high spirits and very loquacious. He said he presumed there was no reason why he should not get on a horse now, and, although he might not be able to follow the hounds, he might go to the meets, potter about the roads and lanes, and see a little of the sport in a country that he knew. If that should prove impracticable, he would manage to amuse himself somehow or other in the metropolis.

'At least one will be amongst one's friends there,' he remarked, 'and there's always something to be done when one is in touch with civilisation. You aren't a native, so I don't mind telling you that I would sooner be shot at once than spend the rest of my days at Wilverton.'

'It is a matter of taste,' said Matthew. 'Personally, I like the place, and I am quite contented here. So would you be, I dare say, if you were in a fit state for field sports. By the way, it would have been prettier on your part to remember that you are leaving at least one friend behind you.'

'My dear old chap, you don't suppose I forget that, do you? But, as I say, you're not a native, and of course you won't stay here much longer. You are thrown away in a stupid provincial watering-place; besides which, Mrs. Austin won't stand it. I am willing to lay a trifle of odds that, in eighteen months or two years' time at the outside, I shall be doing myself the honour to call at some house in Brook Street or Grosvenor Street which will have your name inscribed upon a brass plate on the door.'

'The brass plate and the house in Mayfair stand upon much the same plane of probability as the Mrs. Austin, no doubt. No; you will find me here, jogging along just as usual, the next time that Mr. Litton sends for you; but I hope that will not be as much as eighteen months hence.'

Leonard only laughed and gave another turn to his companion's thoughts by beginning to talk about his symptoms. The fact was that his injuries had not been limited to a couple of broken bones; so that there was some need for the careful examination of him which Matthew made after they had reached the Grange. At the end of it his friend and physician impressed upon him that for some time to come he would have to keep quiet and avoid making any demand upon forces which were not yet at his disposal.

'If you exercise common prudence you will be as well as ever before the summer; but if you don't, we may have you upon your back for an indefinite length of time. Mind that. I only wish you would remain where you are for another week or two; you can't very well get into mischief here.'

'Can't I, though! If I know anything of myself, I am one of those people who can get into mischief anywhere, and the Devil will have fewer chances of finding work for my idle hands in London than he would here. Oh, I'll be as prudent as you please; I don't want to be an invalid, I assure you! Drop me a line sometimes, will you, like a good fellow? I'm not going to keep you any longer now, because I know you're dying to be off.'

Matthew did not stir. He stood for a few moments, gazing at the other, with a smile which was half-amused, half-embarrassed, and wholly affectionate. He had in truth become very fond of his muscular young patient, whom he believed—mistakenly perhaps—that he could read like a book.

'Jerome,' he said at length, 'we are not going to part like this; it's absurd. You know well enough that, when you asked me to drive you home, it wasn't about your physical condition that you wanted to speak to me.'

'Good Lord, man! do you imagine that I feel uneasy about my mental condition?'

'That's just what I do imagine; and it doesn't require a very vivid imagination to guess why you are taking to your heels so abruptly either. I think you meant to tell me, in case I shouldn't guess, why you had determined to beat a retreat, and then your courage failed you, or else, perhaps, you came to the conclusion that it would be better to hold your tongue. My dear fellow, you needn't hold your tongue, and you needn't take to your heels. There is nothing at all to be ashamed of in what has happened to you. Nobody knows better than I do that falling in love is an involuntary process, and although I thoroughly appreciate your chivalrous scruples, they are misplaced in this instance, believe me. If you and I stood in any sense upon an equal footing, the case might be different; but since we don't, you can inflict no injury upon me by staying here and allowing things to follow their natural course. I have no sort of right to propose to Miss Murray, nor have I the remotest intention of ever doing so.'

Leonard burst into uproarious laughter. 'So that was what you thought I wanted to tell you! You make me out a nice, modest sort of fellow, I must say! So generous of me to retire, rather than cut out a friend who, of course, wouldn't have had the ghost of a chance against me if I had chosen to stand to my guns! I wonder whether it is possible to persuade you that seeing Miss Murray isn't of necessity loving her. Perhaps not; but I dare say you will believe me when I declare, upon my honour, that it never entered into my head to make the extraordinary statement that you seem to have expected. I did think of saying something to you about Miss Murray; but it amounted to no more than what I said the other day, and why weaken truth by repetition?'

'You don't convince me,' Matthew remarked.

'Ask her herself, then; she will soon remove all shadow of doubt from your mind.'

'That is not what I mean. I mean that you haven't yet convinced me of error as to your own case.'

'Oh, well, put it as you please, then,' returned Leonard, with a touch of petulance. 'Let us say, if you like, that I am a little bit smitten with your fair friend, and that I think it just as well to lose no more time in turning my back upon her perpetually upturned nose. Even if it were so, there would be no occasion for heroics. I am not like you; I am in a chronic state of being a little bit smitten with somebody, and I can't remember a single instance in which I haven't been cured at once by change of air. Moreover, I am not a marrying man—and don't mean to be until I meet the lovely and accomplished heiress for whom I am always on the look-out.'

There was nothing more to be got out of him; nor could Matthew, who was in a hurry, prosecute investigations at much greater length. The two men parted with mutual expressions of friendship and goodwill; but one of them felt sure that the other had not been entirely candid with him—for which he was sorry.

CHAPTER XV.

COMMON SENSE BREAKS DOWN.

It is proverbially perilous to play with fire; yet pyrotechnic displays are the commonest of diversions, and are not supposed to endanger the lives of skilled operators. If only you keep cool and understand what you are about, your fireworks may dim the firmament without exposing you to any greater degree of risk than is inseparable from existence. So Matthew Austin, having a perfectly clear comprehension of what he was doing, and being in no fear—or scarcely any—of losing his self-control, had a pleasant time of it while the days grew longer and the pale sun stronger and winter began grudgingly to make way for spring.

There were moments when he was fain to laugh at himself—for never, surely, had a man been in love in such a queer, contented, hopeless fashion before, and it seemed clean against nature that he should enjoy the position—but he had very little time for introspection, nor did he often care to indulge in it. Wisely or foolishly, he had determined to make the most of what he felt sure would prove to have been the happiest days of his life, and by making the most of them he merely meant seeing as much as he could of Lilian Murray. To see her, to watch her, to hear her talk was enough—had to be enough, since it was out of the question for him to betray his love by word or look.

Now, it was not because he had undertaken an obviously impossible task that Matthew sometimes laughed at himself: on the contrary, he considered it well within his powers to go on as he was doing without letting anybody guess his secret, and, as a matter of fact, Lady Sara remained in happy ignorance of it. As for that curious, crabbed specimen of humanity, Mr. Litton, his conjectures could not, of course, be the result of personal observation; so that Matthew was neither startled nor vexed when the old fellow said abruptly to him, one day:

'I suppose there is no use in my speaking, but I wish, for your sake, that those Murrays would leave the place! Mark my words; you will live to regret it if matters advance any farther between you and the girl.'

A friendship had sprung up between the recluse of Wilverton Grange and the young doctor which had its origin chiefly in a common love of philosophic literature. The former, whose suspicious temperament had at first set him on his guard against admitting a fresh physician to his intimacy, had taken a great fancy to Matthew after satisfying himself that the latter had no design for supplanting Dr. Jennings, while Matthew, on his side, liked Mr. Litton's library very much and its owner pretty well.

'Leonard has been talking nonsense to you,' he replied tranquilly; 'I have no regrets, and I am in no danger of earning any.'

'Oh, so you say!—you can't say anything else, I suppose. Go your own way, then, and get yourself into trouble, like the rest of the world. If women could but be clean abolished, there would be no occasion to cheer people up by holding out hopes of a future state of bliss to them. Only then, to be sure, we should be even less willing to die than we are already.'

Matthew wrote to Leonard Jerome to reproach him for his indiscretion, and received a prompt disclaimer, in reply, from the young man, who added: 'You have no idea what a sharp old file that uncle of mine is. He knows all manner of things that he has not any business to know; though I will say for him that, in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred, he keeps his mouth closed. For the rest, you really mustn't expect your neighbours to be stone-blind—or dumb either. Give them something to talk about, my dear old man; it will be a charity to them and a relief to others besides yourself. For my own part, I can't see what on earth you are waiting for.'

Not for encouragement, at all events, Lilian having given him as much of that as she could have done if he had been a fit and proper person to become her husband, and if, to use Leonard's absurd phrase, she had 'adored' him. But he was not misled by flattering and affectionate expressions which, he felt sure, would never have been uttered, had not the speaker been wholly fancy-free, nor was he in the least afraid of breaking Miss Murray's heart. That allusion to the perspicacity of his neighbours did, however, cause him some passing disquietude; for it was true enough that in country towns people begin to chatter upon very slight provocation, and he had no business to give the Wilvertonians an excuse for coupling his name with that of his patient's daughter. Accordingly, he gave Prospect Place a wide berth until he was questioned and upbraided, when he resumed his interrupted visits. The truth was that he had never been accustomed to trouble himself about what might be said behind his back, and it was difficult for him to bear in mind always that young ladies cannot afford to be equally indifferent.

Thus the days and weeks slipped rapidly away until the hedgerows were green, and the glory of the tulips and hyacinths in Matthew's garden was already a thing of the past. It was on a day mild and sunny enough to have done no discredit to the average month of June that our hero, unsuspicious of an impending crisis in his life, betook himself to Hayes Park, in fulfilment of an engagement to lunch with his friends there and meet the Murrays. Owing to one cause and another, he had seen little of Hayes Park and its denizens for some time past, while Anne had become almost a stranger to him. Of her brother he had heard nothing, or he would have made a point of placing himself in communication with her; but he was inclined to think that no news from that quarter might be regarded as good news, and if he had not tried to meet Miss Frere, she had certainly made no effort to meet him. It was, therefore, an entirely superfluous proceeding on his part to enter into apologetic explanations as he shook hands with her, and so she hastened to assure him.

'You aren't expected to drive about the country, paying calls,' said she; 'of course we all understand that your work takes up the whole of your time.'

'Well, almost the whole,' Matthew answered, guiltily conscious of many spare hours spent in Prospect Place. 'I am not quite so busy as I was, though; otherwise I couldn't have given myself the pleasure of coming here to-day. People are beginning to leave, you see.'

'Yes; isn't it too tiresome of them!' chimed in Mrs. Frere, who had caught his last words. 'One sets the example and all the others become infected immediately—that is always the way, and nobody pities us, poor things, who are left here to vegetate in solitude for six months! Although I must own that I think you are quite right,' she added, turning to Lady Sara, who was seated beside her; 'a girl's first season ought always to be a long one, if possible.'

'Oh, I don't know whether we shall be able to see the season out,' Lady Sara answered; 'that must depend upon circumstances. But this invitation from our cousins to stay with them until we could find a house for ourselves seemed like an opportunity which it would be a pity to lose. Personally, I shall be very sorry to leave Wilverton; the waters and Mr. Austin—especially Mr. Austin—have done such wonders for me.'

Mr. Austin at that moment looked very much as if his patient had returned the compliment by producing a wonderful effect upon him. Although he was well aware that Lady Sara Murray intended to spend the coming season in London, although he knew that the time of her departure could not be now far distant, and although he was conscious of the scrutiny of half a dozen pairs of eyes, he was unable to prevent the consternation with which he had been filled by this abrupt announcement from showing itself in his face. However, if he could not command his expression, he retained sufficient control over his voice to say cheerfully:

'Are you about to desert us, then, Lady Sara?'

'Alas! we are. The letter only came yesterday, and I didn't see you, to consult you, before answering it. Besides, to tell you the truth, I am afraid I should have had to disobey you, even if you had ordered me to stay here a little longer. On Lilian's account, I felt that it would be madness to refuse such an offer. It *does* make a difference, you see, to be launched from a good house, where there are constant entertainments going on.'

'No doubt it does,' Matthew agreed, 'and you might have consulted me without any misgivings. The waters and I have done all that we can do for you. In fact, I believe you will be all the better for a change.'

'Oh, everybody is the better for a change,' said Mr. Frere; 'we all want it now and then. Some of us can't get what we want, though, in this wicked world—can't even get our food until twenty minutes past the proper time!'

He rang the bell noisily just as the butler threw the door open, and Mrs. Frere, taking Lady Sara by the arm, led her out. Lilian, as she passed Matthew, threw him a quick glance, the meaning of which he was at a loss to interpret. It had the appearance of being reproachful, and yet he did not see what he had done to merit reproach. He might perhaps have interrogated her, had he been placed next to her at the luncheon table, but such was not his privilege. Seated between Mrs. Frere and Maggie, he had enough to do to keep conversational step with his neighbours, and although he scarcely knew what either of them was talking about, it was necessary to make continual response to the younger, who had no notion of allowing her valuable remarks to fall upon inattentive ears. From the opposite side of the table Anne contributed an occasional observation, while Mr. Frere entertained Lady Sara with a prolonged jeremiad upon the decay of agriculture, and Dick, home for the Easter holidays, made precocious advances to Lilian, whose beauty had evidently produced a profound impression upon his youthful heart. What would have irritated Matthew, if he had been an irritable person, was the persistent reiteration with which Maggie addressed him by his *sobriquet* of 'the Medicine-man,' and the comments thereupon which Mrs. Frere's kindness induced her to make. 'Physician, heal thyself!' he was thinking. 'I have common sense enough to prescribe common-sense measures to other people, but I am too great an imbecile to smother my own folly, or even conceal it. Everybody must have seen how dismayed I was.'

The worst of it was that this consciousness of having already made an exhibition of himself prevented him from recovering his natural manner. He knew that he was answering at cross-purposes, he knew that his laughter was palpably forced, he saw that Mrs. Frere was looking at him curiously and compassionately; so the only thing to be done seemed to be to get away as soon as possible.

Now, it was not likely that, on so fine an afternoon, Mrs. Frere would suffer her guests to depart without having shown them her daffodils, nor could one of them, when specially invited to accompany her to the lower garden for that purpose, find it in his heart to plead an engagement elsewhere. As soon as luncheon was over, therefore, Matthew was led out into the open air by his hostess, Mr. Frere following with Lady Sara, and Lilian, to whom the two young ones had attached themselves, bringing up the rear. Anne had disappeared. Perhaps she had come to the conclusion that nobody wanted her, and perhaps she had not been very far wrong in so concluding.

'Ah, well!' Mrs. Frere said, with one of her placid, comfortable sighs, 'one is sorry when nice people go away; still it is often better, for some reasons, that they should go. And one soon forgets them.'

'I dare say one does,' answered Matthew.

'Eh? Oh, yes, everybody soon forgets—especially you, with your work and all your other interests in life. As for me, I haven't much nowadays, except the garden; but the garden suffices to drive my troubles away from my mind for several good hours out of every day, and then I always think it is such a mistake to go on mourning over things that can't be helped. If I could only persuade George to feel as I do, I am sure he wouldn't have the gout nearly as often as he does.'

That was probably quite true; and if our philosophy were not apt to serve us the shabby turn of deserting us just when it is most required, we should be a much more cheerful race than we are. The discomfited philosopher who was gazing at Mrs. Frere's daffodils with abstracted eyes could only acknowledge the justice of her remarks and was not ungrateful to her for her well-meant attempt at consolation, though he was not disposed to pursue the subject farther. Happily, Mrs. Frere had an endless store of other topics, equally interesting to her, to dilate upon; and so the inspection of outdoor and indoor plants went on, without any more embarrassing allusions, until Lady Sara's fly was seen approaching across the park.

'Can we give you a lift?' her ladyship asked, turning to Matthew, or must you rush off somewhere now? If so, perhaps you could look in upon us later in the day.'

Matthew hesitated. He was not obliged to rush off anywhere, and of course he would have to look in upon Lady Sara before long, but he did not quite relish the prospect of the suggested drive. He wanted to be alone for an hour and administer to himself the sharp castigation that he deserved.

'I was thinking of walking back,' he began.

'Oh, then let me walk with you!' interrupted Lilian eagerly; 'there is plenty of time, and I do so hate driving in a shut fly!'

It was the first time that she had spoken to him directly that day. Her eyes expressed a command, rather than an entreaty, which was half painful, half pleasurable to him. 'She, at any rate, doesn't suspect!' he thought. With smiling alacrity, he said what nobody could have helped saying in answer to such a speech, and Lady Sara's consent was readily given. Evidently, Mr. Austin was regarded in the light of one of those safe elderly gentlemen whose society calls for no chaperonage.

A gallant but indiscreet offer on Dick's part to accompany the pair was declined by Lilian with such uncompromising bluntness that the boy fell back in manifest and crestfallen indignation, upon which, no doubt, he was subsequently chaffed without mercy by his younger sister; and so it presently came to pass that Matthew and the girl whom he loved were pacing, side by side, across the grass, with nobody to overhear or interrupt them.

'Isn't it horrid!' Lilian burst out suddenly.

'I don't know,' answered Matthew. 'A good many things are horrid, but not the weather or the landscape or the present moment. At least, not to me.'

'You understand quite well what I mean—our going off to London like this. I thought we should have been here for another month or six weeks, and so did Mamma until these people sent us their tiresome, officious invitation!'

'You are really sorry to leave these parts, then?'

'Does that strike you as so very wonderful? Do you think I am going to enjoy myself or that I shall make any new friends like those whom I am leaving behind me? But as *you* don't care, you are naturally surprised that I should.'

'I never said that I didn't care.'

'No; you only show plainly by your manner that you don't.'

Matthew, who was under the impression that his manner had given unmistakable evidence to the contrary, was very nearly rejoining, 'I am glad you think so.' But that would have been inexcusable; so he kept silence for a few seconds, in order to make sure that he had himself well in hand; after which he remarked, in a cheerful, friendly tone of voice:

'I assure you that your departure will be a very great loss to me; I shall miss you and Lady Sara long after you have both ceased to think about your country doctor. But it was in the nature of things that you should return to your own world, while I remained in mine. Besides, whatever you may think, you are really going to enjoy yourself and make plenty of fresh friends. Those whom you leave behind you are well aware of that; and they would be selfish sort of friends if they wished to retard you from fulfilling your destiny.'

Lilian vouchsafed no reply to these eminently sensible and fitting observations. They had reached a small copse, through the pale green branches of which the sun's rays fell aslant upon a carpet of spring wild flowers, and at every other step she bent down to gather primroses and blue-bells.

'Do you know,' she asked abruptly at length, 'what those children were talking about to me after luncheon?'

'They were very amusing, I have no doubt.'

'They were so amusing that I longed to knock their heads together. I always knew that you had a great admiration for that cold, immaculate Miss Frere, but never—no, never!—should I have believed that you were actually thinking of marrying her. How you will regret it when it is too late!'

'Indeed I shall do no such thing—and for excellent reasons. You are altogether wrong. I don't call Miss Frere cold, I doubt whether she is more immaculate than other people, and most certainly I am not thinking of marrying her.'

'Well, *they* think you will, anyhow. They are quite eager for the match; they are sure their sister will be graciously pleased to accept you; they have arranged everything——'

'Oh, what does it matter what a couple of children have arranged?' interrupted Matthew impatiently. 'It is all nonsense from beginning to end.'

Lilian raised her eyes to his, with a doubting glance. 'I think it is true,' she said. 'Why do you look so guilty? Yes, I know it is true!'

Even then he might have held out, if the eyes which were anxiously interrogating his own had not been liquid, beyond all doubt or question, with gathering tears; but that sight was more than he could stand—perhaps it was more than any man could have stood. Away went wisdom, prudence and conscientiousness; he had clasped her hand before he well knew what he was about, and was exclaiming: 'Oh, no, you don't!—you know what the real truth is—you know that I shall never marry anyone, since it is utterly, ridiculously impossible that I should ever marry you!'

Whether, during the next five minutes or so, Lilian convinced him that no sort of impossibility was involved in the matter is uncertain—shortly afterwards Matthew was of opinion that she had not so convinced him—but that she really and truly loved him he could not do otherwise than believe, and such a discovery was enough to drive all other thoughts from his mind for the time being. There are a few, always brief, moments in life when we find out what happiness means, and it would be a thousand pities to shorten them, even if we could, by reflections which are quite sure to present themselves with all necessary rapidity. Perhaps rather more than five minutes had elapsed before Matthew descended from the seventh heaven to the surface of the prosaic planet which we inhabit, and said decisively:

'At all events, I must not dream of binding you. Your mother will have every right to accuse me of dishonourable conduct, as it is.'

'Will she?' asked the girl, who was clinging to his arm and looking up into his face with mingled triumph and humility. 'I don't think she will after I have told her that it was really I who proposed to you, and that you would have refused me if you had had the strength of mind. Of course I ought to be ashamed of myself; but I am not very much ashamed. And you *must* bind me, please, because I mean to bind you. I couldn't go away in peace unless you were publicly and formally bound.'

'Surely you are not afraid that I shall jilt you!' said Matthew, laughing.

'I don't know. I was really afraid of Miss Frere—though I see you don't believe me—and I am not sure that I am not a little afraid of her still. She is so very superior to me, you see!'

'Ah, my dear, that isn't the question. One doesn't fall in love with superiority, though one may easily fall in love with one's superiors. I am a shocking example of a man who has fallen in love with his social superior——'

Lilian stopped him by laying her finger upon his lips. 'I can't bear to hear you talk like that!' she exclaimed. 'In the first place, it isn't true, and in the second place, social distinctions have nothing to say to you and me; we have got beyond them. You are a thousand times too good for me—you know you are

'I can't imagine why you should think so.

'Anybody will tell you why; lots of people will tell you as soon as our engagement is announced.'

And it was in vain that Matthew protested against engagements and announcements. It was pointed out to him, with some show of reason, that an engagement which is not announced is practically no engagement at all, and that, since he chose to speak of dishonourable conduct, nothing can well be more dishonourable than an avowal of love, followed up by a refusal to face the legitimate consequences of such an avowal. Finally, he could only say that Lady Sara's wishes in the matter must be paramount.

'It is almost certain that she will forbid an engagement; I should, if I were in her place. But, whatever may happen, I shall not change; you may be sure of that.'

'You think I shall change, then?'

'I think it is absolutely essential that you should make sure,' Matthew answered gravely. 'You cannot be sure yet; you have seen nothing. All manner of things and people are waiting for you, and you will have to look at them.'

'Oh, I shall have to go through this one season, I know; there is no help for that. Only I want everybody to understand that I am not free.'

Matthew smiled. There was no occasion to argue further against a stipulation which he knew in advance would be deemed—and rightly deemed—inadmissible. He had pleasanter subjects than that to discourse upon during the remainder of the walk to Wilverton, at the end of which, as he could not but foresee, a very unpleasant quarter of an hour was in store for him.

CHAPTER XVI.

LADY SARA'S SENTENCE.

'ARE you going to have it out with Mamma at once?' Lilian asked, when she and her affianced lover were standing on the doorstep in Prospect Place.

'Oh, yes,' Matthew answered, with a rather rueful smile; 'I think she ought to be told at once. You must be prepared for a scolding.'

'I don't feel much alarmed.'

'Don't you? Well, I must confess that I do. In fact, I am not sure that I have ever before in my life felt as thoroughly frightened as I do at this moment.'

The girl laughed, as she preceded him up the narrow staircase.

'How funny you are!' she exclaimed. 'Why, what can poor Mamma do to you? Besides, she is almost as fond of you as I am—only in a different way, of course.'

'Ah! that doesn't make things any easier!' sighed Matthew. But Lilian either did not hear or did not heed his ejaculation. She had opened the drawing-room door, had peeped through the aperture and now drew back.

'Go and have your tooth out, while I take off my hat and jacket,' she whispered; 'I will be with you again in time to apply cold water and burnt feathers in case you faint.' And so, with an encouraging pat on the shoulder and a gentle push, she dismissed him to make the best he could of a bad business.

He was very conscious indeed of its being a bad business as he advanced across the room towards the invalid chair in which the unsuspecting Lady Sara reclined.

'So here you are at last!' said she cheerfully; 'what a time you have been! Do you find it too hot with the windows shut? I can't bring myself to give up fires yet.'

'I am hot; but it is with shame, not with the fire,' Matthew answered. 'Lady Sara, I have something to tell you which you will dislike extremely, and which, I am afraid, will make you angry as well.'

The faded, emaciated woman in the *chaise-longue* started forward, clasping her fingers with a nervous, apprehensive movement. In the course of her life she had had to be told of a great many things which she had disliked extremely, although it cannot be said that anger was the emotion to which she had been most frequently moved by the hearing of them.

'What is it?' she asked quickly. 'Have you heard something about my sister, or—or any of the others?'

'No; the trouble is nearer home than that. It is better to speak out than to keep you in suspense, I think. Lady Sara, while I was walking back with your daughter this afternoon, I told her that I loved her, and she—well, I must not say that she accepted me, because she could not do that without your consent; but she wishes to accept me. Now you know the worst!'

He paused, thinking that the right of reply belonged to the opposition; but for several seconds none was forthcoming. Lady Sara had drawn a long breath and had fallen back upon her cushions.

'*You!*' she ejaculated at length, in accents of the most profound amazement.

'Oh, I know what a shock it must be to you. You have been deceived in me; I have abused a position of trust; I won't attempt to excuse myself. All I can say is that nothing was farther from my intentions this morning than to act as I have done—and there is very little use in saying that now. Of course you cannot sanction an engagement.'

There was another protracted pause, at the end of which Lady Sara said: 'Mr. Austin, do you yourself think that I ought to sanction it?'

'No, I don't,' answered Matthew unhesitatingly; 'I should not sanction it, if I were in your place, though my grounds for refusal might not be the same as yours. Personally, I can't see the great importance of conventional degrees in rank; still it must be admitted that, so long as they exist, they are not entirely meaningless, and I have tried always to remember, in associating with you, as I have done——'

'Oh, it isn't that!' Lady Sara interrupted; 'I wouldn't for the world have you think that it was that! Of course your blood is quite as good as most people's, and a great deal better than that of a host of nobodies who are received everywhere because they are rich; but—but——'

'But in any case, you couldn't allow your daughter to take such a leap in the dark; you wouldn't be doing your duty to her unless you gave her at least the chance of making some more suitable choice. Isn't that what you mean?'

Lady Sara supposed that was what she meant. A position so unassailable was, at all events, quite the best to take up, under the circumstances, and she was glad to be spared the painful task of dwelling upon subsidiary drawbacks. She listened tolerantly while Matthew entered upon a more ample avowal; she had no reproaches to address to him; she was not, to tell the truth, greatly surprised at his having lost his heart to her beautiful daughter, although the risk of his doing so had not happened to come within the range of her prevision. What astonished her beyond measure was that Lilian should have become enamoured of a man who, notwithstanding all his admirable qualities and the claims which he had established upon her gratitude, looked and behaved so very little like the subject of a romantic passion.

'I can't account for it,' she said, with touching candour; 'it does seem so unnatural and improbable! But perhaps she may have been carried away by her feelings, poor child, and by the admiration which I am sure you well deserve. She is impulsive at times, as all my family are. Unluckily,' added Lady Sara, sighing retrospectively, 'our impulses are apt to be soon driven out of sight and mind by fresh ones.'

Matthew could only assure her in reply that he had no desire to take advantage of Lilian's impulsiveness. 'I wish her to go away absolutely unfettered,' he declared. 'It stands to reason that that must be your wish also, and I think you have shown very great kindness and forbearance in blaming me as little as you have done.'

'Oh, I don't blame you at all,' Lady Sara answered simply; 'most likely it wasn't in the least your fault. I can truly say that there is nobody in the world whom I would rather have had for a son-in-law, if only you had been richer and—and a little more in society. There are reasons which make it necessary for me to consider such things, and I certainly think, as you do, that Lilian ought to be left absolutely unfettered for the present.'

'But *I* don't think so,' said Lilian herself, who had slipped noiselessly into the room during her mother's speech, and who now sank down upon a footstool beside the invalid chair. 'You are very good and wise people, both of you,' she continued; 'only you don't happen to know me quite as well as I know myself. You might give me credit for knowing what I want, all the same.'

'Oh, my dear,' Lady Sara returned, stroking her daughter's copper-coloured hair, from which the flickering fire-light drew gleams of gold, 'nobody doubts your knowing what you want *now*; the question is what you will want six months hence. There are so many things that one begins to feel the want of after one has seen other people in possession of them!'

The discussion went on in a curiously dispassionate style, Lady Sara and Matthew being the chief speakers and being as completely in accord as they were obviously in the right. At length Lilian started suddenly to her feet, and, catching her submissive wooer by the coat-sleeve, said:

'Come into the dining-room; I want to speak to you alone for a minute.'

Matthew obeyed, after casting an interrogative glance at Lady Sara, who made a sign of assent, and as soon as a passage and two solid partition walls had been placed between her and her mother, Lilian began:

'Matthew—oh, I wish your name wasn't Matthew; it sounds so ancient and righteous!—well, I must make the best of it, and I think I will call you Mat in future. Mat, then, do you love me?'

'Is there any need for you to ask that question?' he returned.

'Most people would say there was, after the way in which you have been talking; but never mind!—I believe you do. Now, as you love me, as you are a gentleman, as there isn't a word to be said against you, and as you are well enough off to marry—I suppose you are well enough off to marry?'

'Oh, I suppose so.'

'Then there is no reason why our engagement should not be announced, except that you and Mamma think I may meet somebody in London whom I shall like better.'

'But we cannot announce what does not exist.'

'The engagement *does* exist; I have your promise and you have mine. Only you wish for secrecy, while I wish for publicity. Mind, I am not asking for anything formal; all I want you to do is just to mention it, as I shall, to a few intimate friends—to Mr. Jerome, for instance, when you write to him, and to the Freres and one or two others.'

Matthew smiled and shook his head. 'It would be better not,' he said. 'Moreover, you must see that I couldn't possibly do such a thing without your mother's consent.'

'She will consent; and even if she didn't—but she will.'

'If she does, of course I will willingly do as you wish. But I can't quite understand why you are so bent upon it.'

'You will understand still less after I have told you, I'm afraid. Or rather you will misunderstand—which is worse. My reason is that I want to have something real and definite to take away with me. When I can't see you or talk to you any more, when everything and everybody about me will be so different, I may—I don't think it is likely, but I *may* come to feel as if all this had been a dream, as if it had happened to some girl whom I once knew, not to me myself. Do you ever have that feeling?'

'I think I have had something of the kind,' Matthew answered, keeping his countenance from falling by an effort; 'but your reason isn't a convincing one. It is the very reason that I should have given for leaving you free.'

'Didn't I tell you that you would misunderstand? Clever and wise as you are, Mat, there are things which seem to be beyond you, and I am much too stupid to explain them. However, it doesn't matter, now that you have agreed to do as I ask you, so long as Mamma doesn't object. Come and hear me conquer all her objections.'

Not a little to Matthew's surprise, this task was accomplished almost without difficulty. During her daughter's brief absence Lady Sara had reflected, and had arrived at two conclusions: firstly, that the girl's fancy for Mr. Austin was pretty sure to be short-lived; and secondly, that it would be a great mistake to stimulate that fancy by needless opposition. Therefore, after some slight show of reluctance, for form's sake, she said:

'Very well, dear, let it be so. We have nothing to conceal, and perhaps no great harm will be done by our friends' hearing the truth. The truth, of course, is that there is no actual engagement.'

But Lilian demurred to this way of putting things. 'The engagement is as actual as anything can be,' she declared; 'only we are not proclaiming it yet, because you hope, or think, that it may be broken off before next August. If it hasn't been broken off by then——'

'Ah, well, it will be time enough to think about what is to happen next August when August comes,' interrupted Lady Sara. Then she turned to Matthew and said: 'I hope you don't think me a very worldly and ungrateful old woman; I can but do my best according to my lights.'

'I think you have been kindness and generosity itself,' he replied emphatically.

And indeed, during the next few days, she showed herself in many respects worthy of his eulogy. Those were happy days for Matthew, in spite of the parting which was imminent; he was allowed to spend nearly the whole time that he could spare out of them with his betrothed; and Lady Sara, who came to tea with him on the last afternoon, spoke as though she anticipated revisiting his house at no very distant date. It was a delightful and spacious house, she remarked; no pleasanter home could be desired by persons of unambitious tastes.

The fact is that she was not ungrateful, nor was she more worldly than education and experience had forced her to be. For her own part, she could have been happy enough as the wife of a well-to-do country practitioner—always supposing that country practitioner to be so superior a specimen of the genus as Matthew Austin—but she had her doubts about Lilian, in whom she had long ago detected the existence of certain family characteristics, and she had an exaggerated appreciation of the advantages that belong to wealth. Upon the whole, her attitude towards her would-be son-in-law was rather one of benevolent neutrality than of obstructiveness. The course of events must settle his fate, she thought.

So when he helped her into the railway carriage which was to bear her and her daughter away to the scene of the latter's prescribed ordeal, her leave-taking was almost affectionate. There were to be letters, constant letters, and in case of illness he would be summoned instantly. 'Because there is nobody in London or anywhere else like you!'

As for Lilian, she had bidden farewell to her lover in a less public spot than a railway station. All she had to say to him now was: 'Remember, the Freres are to be told, and other people are not to be contradicted, if they ask questions. Oh, and by the way,' she added, as an after-thought, 'don't forget to write to your friend Mr. Jerome. I think he foresaw what was coming, and he is sure to be pleased.'

(To be continued.)

THE SWEET TOOTH.

HAS it ever occurred to you that the innocent boyhood of the Greeks and Romans knew nothing of the parlous delights of barley sugar or Everton toffee? Sad as it seems in a Christian land to contemplate the fact, whole generations of human boys and girls grew up for ages in utter ignorance of the joys of sugar. The Mother of the Gracchi could never have presented the aspiring Tiberius in his untogaed youth with a pictured box of chocolate creams, or soothed little Caius's first childish displays of revolutionary spirit by the timely administration of a packet of bonbons. Young Plato, strolling down from Athens to Piræus, saw no enticing butter-scotch in the confectioners' windows, in pursuit of which to tease Ariston for an owl-faced obolus. Infancy without sugar is terrible to think upon. We in this enlightened age of School Boards and caramels can hardly realise it. And yet mankind for many centuries and in many nations had no solace to bestow upon its budding members save honey, dried figs, or the fruits of the earth in due season; and what were they among so many? No treacle for puddings, no jam, no marmalade; no sweetening for one's tea, and no tea to put it in! What could Agariste have packed in the half-term hampers she despatched by carrier to the youthful Pericles? What substitute for plum-cake and gingerbread-pudding could have rejoiced the birthdays of Alexander and Julius? Imagination staggers before that appalling void: Fancy herself can hardly paint a sugarless childhood.

Still, the fact remains that up to the Christian era, sugar, as such, was wholly unknown in Europe, and that it has only been common in the western world since the seventeenth century. No wonder the poet exclaimed, 'Alas! poor Yorick!'

Now, what is sugar, and whence do we get it?—to employ the familiar formula of Mangnall's Questions. If you turn to any of the recognised sources of information—encyclopædias, dictionaries of chemistry, *hoc genus omne*—you will learn a vast number of interesting particulars about the origin and classification of saccharoids, glucoses, and saccharoses: their composition and chemical nature, their behaviour towards a ray of polarised light, and their action on that mysterious but unpopular body known as

Fehling's solution. You will also be informed that sugar is crystallisable—a point which you may already have noted in your own sugar basin; and that it is soluble in water, but less so in alcohol —a fact which you will doubtless have discovered for yourself in the manufacture of toddy. You will furthermore become the recipient of a great many curious and minute observations on dextrose and sucrose, as well as on those singular bodies caramelan, caramelen, and caramelin, whose names, differing only in a single vowel, science seems to have invented in a fit of despair, or else to have devised of set purpose and malice aforethought with the object of deceiving the unwary outsider. None of these thrilling disclosures, however, I venture to believe, are of a sort calculated to catch the attention of the general public. What a careless world most desires to know is not the distinction between mannite and dulcite, between melitose and mycose, but how there comes to be in the world such a thing as sugar at all, and how man has learnt to turn its existence to his own advantage. These are the questions I propose to answer in this present treatise, laying sternly on one side those higher matters of 'the behaviour of saccharoids towards the oxides of the alkaline earths,' which too closely remind one of the 'many cheerful facts about the square of the hypotenuse' held in reserve with such admirable discretion by Mr. Gilbert's immortal major-general.

Sugar in all its forms is a body of vegetable origin—in other words, it is stuff manufactured by plants to serve some useful purpose in their own economy. They make it for themselves, not for us: we only steal it. Originally, and for the most part, it is employed by the plant as a food-stuff to build up young leaves, buds, flowers, and branches. Hence it is especially common in roots, tubers, bulbs, and growing shoots, as well as in the sap which ascends to the young foliage in early spring, and which feeds the developing blossoms in the flowering season. A great many plants which have no special store of sugar in the form of nectar or sweet fruits still possess a considerable amount vaguely diffused in this way for future use through their general tissues.

In itself, this particular constituent of sap is not much more interesting than the starches and other bodies with which it is closely allied, and of which it is, in fact, but a slight modification. But while starch is almost tasteless, the crystalline nature of sugar makes it sapid, as we say—gives it a peculiar savour which I need not further describe, as sufficiently known by experience beforehand to the greater number of my intelligent readers. Now, it so happens that crystalline bodies possess above all others the property of stimulating the sense of taste in the tongues of animals. Hence it comes about that sugar in one form or another is particularly sought after by beasts, birds, and insects. The parts of the plant where it is collected in appreciable quantities are the parts which depredators most desire to lay hands or claws or bills upon. From the plant's point of view, of course, this property of edibility and attractiveness to animals is a distinct disadvantage: no herb or tree desires to be eaten. On the contrary, it lays itself out as much as possible to avoid that fate, and protects itself where it can by spines and thorns and prickles, by downy hairs, by stings like the nettle, or by unpleasant flavours like the buttercup or the camomile. And so, as a rule, we find in Nature that the portions of plants where sugar collects in the greatest quantities are either hidden underground, or encased in hard shells and nauseous rinds, or mailed round with flinty stems, or protected by offensive and defensive armour.

Nevertheless, there are certain ways in which animals, great and small, may be of use to plant-organisms; and wherever this is the case, the plant bribes them, as it were, to perform useful work for it by laying up in convenient places for their enjoyment little stores of sugar. I will not say much on this aspect of the question, because I have already made it familiar to readers of the CORNHILL on previous occasions; but still, for the sake of formal completeness, I must mention very briefly in passing the two chief ways in which stores of sugar are thus specialised for the attraction of friendly animals.

The first case is that of the nectar or honey in flowers. This is a little secretion of sugar, mixed with a few delicate flavouring matters, and laid up by special glands near the base of the petals in order to attract the fertilising insects, or even in some cases the fertilising birds, such as humming-birds, sun-birds, and brush-tongued lories. The insect or bird visits the flower for the sake of the honey, and in doing so incidentally and unconsciously carries the pollen from the stamens of one plant to the virgin ovary of another. The sugar is the wage the plant pays winged creatures for their services as carriers.

The second case is that of sweet edible fruits. Here sugar is laid by in the soft pulp surrounding the grain or seed vessel, and is generally accompanied by dainty flavouring matters which increase its attractiveness, as in the strawberry, the pineapple, the peach, and the orange. All these fruits are deliberately meant to be eaten: they court inquiry; the plant produces them on purpose to allure to itself parrots, toucans, monkeys, and other fruit-eaters, which devour the sweet pulp, but disperse the hard and indigestible seeds under circumstances admirably adapted to their proper germination. The sugar is the wage the plant pays these allies for sowing and manuring its seeds for it.

Other instances occur besides these in which sugar is laid up in special parts of plants, alike for attractive and protective purposes. Ants are great honey-thieves; but as they crawl indiscriminately up the stems of weeds, instead of flitting direct, like bees or butterflies, from flower to flower, they are useless as fertilisers, because, being attracted by the mere smell of honey, they do not go regularly from herb to herb of a single species, but run about in the most dissipated and inconstant way from one kind to another. They waste their host's pollen in riotous living. The plant, therefore, buys them off, often enough, by a special bribe—in point of fact, pays blackmail to the burglars. There is a common English vetch, for instance, whose stem is beset with barbed, arrowlike stipules, or downward-pointing flaps, which block the way at every joint against crawling insects. In the centre of each such stipule stands a tiny black spot, which turns out on examination to be an active honey-gland or extra-floral nectary. The ants, lured by the sweet scent, creep up the stem as far as these wee black glands and rob them of their honey; but finding their way blocked by the barbed projections, do not attempt to go on to the flowers themselves and rifle them of the nectar laid by for the use of the friendly winged insects. A Central American acacia carries the same wise tactics one step further. This tropical tree suffers much from the depredations of leaf-cutting ants; but it has found out a way to guard against such invaders by transforming some of its spines into hollow honey-bearing domes, intended as nests for their sugar-loving congeners. Little communities of the sugar-eating ants take up their abode, accordingly, in the homes thus provided for them, and repay the plant for their board and lodging by acting as a bodyguard, and repelling the attacks of their leaf-eating relations. I know no better instance in the economy of Nature of an offensive and defensive alliance concluded in due form between plant and animal.

In most cases, then, where we find considerable quantities of sugar conspicuously massed in any part of a plant organism, the sweet juice is placed there on purpose to be eaten. In comparatively small masses, it is stored in flowers or elsewhere for the use of insects. In larger amounts, it is stored in fruits for the use of birds and mammals. And it is these conspicuous storehouses of native sugar that man in the first instance began to seize upon for his own purposes. Himself a descendant of the fruit-eating monkeys, he has always remained to a great extent a fruit-eater. In the tropics, to this day, he subsists largely upon plantains, bananas, mangoes, bread-fruit, and cocoa-nuts, though he also depends to no small degree upon subterranean storehouses of starch or sugar, such as yams and sweet potatoes. In temperate climates, on the other hand, he derives his food more from seeds than from fruits: wheat, rye, maize, barley, oats, rice, and millets form the staple of his diet, while his principal subterranean food, the potato, is starchy, not sugary. Accordingly, his inherited sweet tooth feels the need for sugar—a need which he has endeavoured from all time to satisfy, especially in youth, with dried fruits, figs, raisins, and other like devices.

Till the introduction of cane-sugar, however, honey was the chief source relied upon for the gratification of this prime want in humanity. Hybla and Hymettus took the place now filled by Jamaica and Demerara. 'A land flowing with milk and honey' was the ideal of luxury. And honey is just the nectar of flowers, collected by bees for their personal use, and perverted by man to his own selfish purposes. At first, of course, it was only procured from the nests of wild bees; but with the domestication of the hive-bee man succeeded in pressing into his faithful service whole communities of insect workers, who could gather and condense for him small quantities of nectar far too insignificant and too widely diffused for his own clumsy fingers to garner efficiently. The bees themselves, in turn, obtain different brands from different sources: clover-honey is clear and white; heather-honey, on the contrary, is deep amber-coloured and viscid. It is well known that the bees never mix their liquors; each sticks on each day to one particular species of flower; and I do not doubt, myself, that every cell in the comb is stored with honey of a recognised character. Probably old workers can tell at a sip buttercup-honey from ivy-honey as easily as old topers can recognise '70 port, or distinguish Veuve-Clicquot from Heidsieck's dry Monopole. In default of flowers, however, the industrious bee will have recourse to honey-dew, which is mainly the saccharine matter from the sap of leaves, extracted as part of their food by aphides or plant-lice, and exuded by them from special organs as a waste product of digestion. You can find it in abundance on warm days in summer as a sticky and slimy deposit coating the surface of lime-leaves; but the honey made of it is dark in hue and of inferior quality.

Curiously enough, the main modern sources of sugar are not any of these conspicuous and specialised deposits, which would seem, at first sight, the largest and most natural supplies in existence. It will be seen from what I have said that sugar is one of the commonest and most generally diffused among vegetable substances. It lurks all round us. Bees, ants, and aphides can obtain it almost everywhere. The difficulty is that you do not often find it in quantities sufficient for human manufacture. Yet so common is sugar in nature that in dry, hot weather it exudes of itself from the sap of many trees, through ruptures of the tissues due to drought, or through the minute punctures made by insects; and this is, indeed, one source of honey-dew. What is known in trade as 'manna' is in part such dried exudations of the Sicilian ash-tree and of the Australian eucalyptus.

Clearly, a material so pleasant and so generally diffused as sugar was sure in the end to be employed by man for his own purposes. The next point was to discover some form of sap which should yield it direct in commercial quantities. Strange to say, sugar is practically never made in its most natural form of grape-sugar from the grape, the gooseberry, the peach, or the currant. But from time immemorial the manna-ash has been tapped in Sicily and Calabria, and its juice has been boiled down into a sweet substance known as mannite. This body differs, however, from the true sugars in certain technical points, which, with rare consideration, I decline to inflict upon the unoffending reader. A true sugar is similarly obtained from the American sugar-maple: the trees are tapped in spring, when the sap is ascending to feed the leaves and flowers, and it is boiled down in farmhouses into a delicious sweetmeat much appreciated by American and Canadian children. But the main sources of true sugar are of course three—the sugar-cane, the beetroot, and the various palm-trees.

Palm-sugar, or jaggery, which is probably one of the earliest forms of crystallised sugar known to humanity, is procured from the sap of the cut flower-stalk. By a singular provision of Nature, —very obnoxious, no doubt, to Sir Wilfrid Lawson, but dear to the souls of unregenerate humanity—whatever produces sugar for one's toddy produces also on the same stem the toddy to put it in. Thus the self-same cane supplied Mr. Stiggins with his famous pineapple rum and with the four large lumps which he employed to sweeten it. Thus, too, John Barleycorn, when 'for England's good he yields his blood' in the form of bitter beer, passes first through the sweet stage of malt, in which condition he can easily be converted into the substance known as maltose or malt-sugar. It is the same with palm-juice. When simply boiled down it produces palm-sugar, but when allowed to ferment it turns into an excellent substitute for Bass's pale ale, called palm-wine or toddy. This is, indeed, the original and only genuine toddy, all others being spurious imitations. The name belongs by right to the heathenish Malayan and Indian mixture, and has been imported into Britain by the returned Anglo-Indian, more especially in his commonest and most toddy-consuming avatar as Tommy Atkins. 'Malay beer,' again, is palm-wine mixed with bitter herbs which check fermentation. The British mind regards it with contempt as a very inferior imitation of the genuine article; but then, we must remember that Tacitus described British beer itself as 'corn and water, decayed into a certain faint resemblance of wine.' The sugar-palm of the Malay countries will pour out from its cut flower-stalk several quarts of sap daily for weeks together. According to Mr. Alfred Russel Wallace, this sugar-palm is destined in all probability to replace the cane in the next fifty years or so. It has the great practical advantages that it will grow on the poorest and rockiest soil, and that it can be cultivated with the lightest and most intermittent labour—qualities calculated to endear it at once to the mind of Quashie. A tree which will thrive on acres of waste ground, which will yield the best sugar at little labour or expense, and which is exactly adapted to the habits and manners of semi-civilised people, ought to turn the tables at last on that objectionable and flavourless interloper, beetroot.

Till quite recently, however, the vastly larger quantity of the world's sugar was derived from grasses. Most children know that the tender stem of grass, just above the joints, is distinctly sweet; and this is more markedly the case with the larger grasses, such as wheat, oats, rye, and barley. The bigger the grass, as a rule, the greater the amount of sugar. Maize or Indian corn contains large quantities of sugary juice in its pulpy pith; and this has often been used (especially in America) as a source of sugar manufacture. The Egyptian durra or sorghum also yields appreciable quantities, extracted for commercial purposes both in Africa and America. The 'cute Yankee is not likely to let sucrose go to waste for want of boiling. But of all grasses the sugar-cane is the richest and most productive of sugar. It is a gigantic reed, allied to the millets, and its peculiarity is that the pith in the centre of the stem is wealthier in sweet sap than that of any other known plant. The main object of this sweet juice is to feed the flower-heads; and the sugar is extracted, as in the palm-tree, at the very moment when the plant is on the point of using it up for this its proper purpose. That is the way of man: he finds out the exact time when each plant or animal can be of the greatest service to him, and appropriates its products, like the anarchist that he is, without giving a second's thought to the convenience of the producer.

The sugar-cane is by descent an Oriental plant, and according to Ritter, who has written a work of true German erudition (and true German length) on this abstruse subject, is of Indian origin. In its wild state it is now unknown; and as it rarely or never produces seed in cultivation, it has probably been tilled from an extremely early period, for plants long propagated by means of suckers seem to lose at last the very habit of seed-bearing. This is the case with the banana and the plantain, both of which, like the sugar-cane, can only be reproduced by means of cuttings; and all three are therefore, like the potato, tending by slow degrees to inevitable extinction. The canes are planted out from the eyes or buds which sprout from the stems; when they are fit for cutting, the annual shoots are hacked down with cutlasses, and the stoles or root-stocks throw up fresh shoots, known as ratoons, in the succeeding summer. Healthy stoles will produce ratoons for several seasons running, up to sixteen or twenty; at the end of that time they must be replaced by fresh buds or cuttings. It is usual to plant the canes in rows about three feet apart; and a field of these gigantic waving grasses, with their vivid green leaves, forms a beautiful oasis in the parched and arid waste of a tropical summer. The greenness, however, is generally secured by artificial irrigation; for cane is a thirsty soul, and drinks with avidity every drop it can lay its roots on.

The plant and its uses have been known in India, its native home, from time immemorial. It is, perhaps, the earliest source from which sugar was produced, and all other modes of manufacture have been borrowed from or based on it. The early classical writers knew sugar vaguely as 'honey of canes.' To the Græco-Roman world the sugar-cane was the reed which the swarthy Indians delighted to chew, and from which they extracted a mysterious sweetmeat. It was the Arabs—those great carriers between the East and West—who introduced the cane in the Middle Ages into Egypt, Sicily, and the South of Spain, where it flourished abundantly till West Indian slavery drove it out of the field for a time, and sent the trade in sugar to Jamaica and Cuba. Naturally, you can afford to undersell your neighbours when you decline to pay any wages to your labourers. Egyptian sugar was carried to London in Plantagenet times by the Venetian fleet, where it was exchanged for wool, the staple product of mediæval England. Early in the sixteenth century, the cane was taken from Sicily to Madeira and the Canaries. Thence it found its way to Brazil and Mexico, to Jamaica and Hayti. Cane-sugar was well known in Italy about the second century, and has been common in England since the Tudor period. The spacious days of great Elizabeth had sugar for their sack; and ginger was hot i' the mouth too, as we all well remember.

There is a common, though to some extent erroneous, idea that sugar-cane as a crop exhausts the soil rapidly and calls for abundant manuring. Practically, from the planter's point of view, this is true; but only because of the curious method employed in sugar-boiling. The ancient Hebrew law-giver forbade his people to seethe the kid in its mother's milk; but the modern planter adds insult to injury by boiling the cane-juice with its own waste fibres. The stems are crushed by being passed lengthwise through powerful rollers, which express the juice and turn out the woody matter like clothes from a mangle. This rejected portion, called 'trash' in the West Indies, is dried and stacked, and then used as fuel to feed the engines and boil the syrup-pans. The consequence is that the entire crop is consumed and taken away from the soil annually. Hence it is necessary to manure the ground well in order to make up for the drain on its resources. But no part of this drain is caused by the production of the sugar itself; for the elements of sugar are obtained entirely from the air and water, and owe nothing in any way to the ground the plant grows from.

If the 'trash' were allowed to rot upon the soil, manuring would be unnecessary. It is the unnatural practice of boiling the juice with its own cane which involves the employment of manure, superphosphates, and artificial fertilisers.

Mr. Wallace has pointed out that the sugar-palm possesses in this respect great advantages over the sugar-cane, for a cane-field is denuded every year of its whole produce, and the soil thus becomes exhausted of the salts and minerals which form part of the woody fibre and foliage. To restore these, heavy manuring is necessary. But with the sugar-palm nothing is taken away except the juice itself; the foliage falls on the ground and rots, giving back to the soil all it ever received from it; so that a plantation of palms will go on supplying sugar from the air and rain for an indefinite period. The plain fact is that carbonic acid and water contain everything needful for the manufacture of sugar; the sunlight supplies the motive-power required for the production, and the leaf of the plant is merely the alembic in which the transformation into available food-stuffs is effected by the incident solar energy.

Thirty years ago, if one was writing of sugar, one would have closed the chapter with the sugar-cane and the West Indies. But of late years an immense change has come over the commerce of the world in this respect. The sugar trade has shifted from the tropics to the temperate zone; and it is that seemingly passive plant, the beetroot, that has headed as ringleader this industrial revolution. Many roots are tolerably rich in sugar; everybody must have noticed its presence in carrots, from which, indeed, it has even at times been commercially extracted. But sugar is still more abundant in the beet, whose juice contains about 15 per cent. of crystallisable sucrose. As an industry, the production of beetroot sugar has a curious history. It originated in France under Napoleon I., when the English blockade prevented communication with Martinique and Hayti. It grew rapidly after the emancipation of the slaves in the British dominions; and being fostered by protectionist governments on the Continent, it is now beginning to drive the poor antiquated and superannuated cane entirely out of the market. Of recent years, by far the larger part of the sugar employed in England is of French origin or 'made in Germany.'

That is one of the reasons why brown sugar has gone out and white sugar come so largely into fashion. For the sweet and pleasant muscavadoes, produced by simple boiling of the crude cane-juice, could be employed for sweetening coffee, for the domestic rice-pudding, for the use of infancy, and for a great many other simple household purposes. The half-refined moist sugar, commonly known as Demerara, still holds its own for these daily purposes. But raw beetroot sugar displays its origin by an unpleasant earthy flavour; it smacks of the soil too much, and carries with it reminiscences of a somewhat turnipy character. On this account brown sugar has gone out, especially in those coarse and treacly forms which delighted the palate of our unsophisticated childhood. Refining is at present almost universal; and the flavourless, insipid, loose-grained beetroot loaf-sugar, sawn into oblong bricks, has invaded our breakfast-tables. The light moist sugars now so much employed for cooking purposes are refined sugar of insufficient purity to be crystallised into loaves. Cube-sugar, on the other hand, which is so fashionable that it can afford to present the country with new National Galleries of British Art, is made from the most crystallisable syrup, which runs away earliest from the charcoal cisterns of the refineries; but it is specially treated in peculiar moulds, from which the remaining molasses is driven off with rude violence by centrifugal machines. The result is pure grains of transparent crystal.

Sugar, you will thus perceive, is by no means a special or unusual compound. Its raw material exists everywhere in the air and water. It can be easily manufactured by the aid of sunlight, in the leaves of trees, shrubs, herbs, and weeds generally. It is diffused in greater or less quantities through the most various plant tissues. It may appear in root, stem, branches, leaves, flower, fruit, seed-vessel; in grain, sap, pulp, bulb, shoot, or tuber. It is the basis of almost all the sweet things known to humanity. It makes the nectar of flowers, and the honey in the honeycomb; it sweetens our fruits; it is present in most of our edible roots and vegetables. It exists even in milk, and is more abundant in that of the frugivorous than of the herbivorous animals. Man, a descendant of forestine fruit-feeders, feels the want of it in most of his starchy food—bread, rice, tapioca—and supplies the need by artificially producing it from cane or beetroot. This need for sweets is most marked in childhood; and the child stands nearer by some steps than the adult to that 'hairy, arboreal quadrumanous ancestor' whom Darwin has given us as the main trunk in the family-tree of humanity. The child is also more frugivorous and graminivorous than the grown man and woman; he learns to be more and more of a carnivore as he approaches maturity. Need I point out, *per contra,* that childhood is essentially the age of lollipops?

We may note in passing that a taste for sugar has been developed in time among all fruit-eating and flower-feeding species. So also has a taste for bright hues and an advanced colour-sense. Wherever in the animal world you find high decoration and splendid or expanded ornamental adjuncts—as in the butterflies, the golden beetles, the humming-birds, the sun-birds, the toucans, the parrots—you will almost invariably find the species which display them are confirmed sugar-eaters. The love for colour and the love for sugar go hand in hand throughout the whole of creation. The birds of prey, the wolves, the carrion beetles have none of either. They are dull and dingy, or else protectively coloured. Strange as it may sound at first hearing to say so, sugar and the æsthetic sense are bound up closely together. Bright flowers are the coloured expansions which advertise honey to insects; bright fruits are the coloured pulps which advertise seeds and their sugary coating to birds and mammals. I do not think we can over-estimate the importance of this conjunction. And is it not even a significant fact that our lollipops themselves are rendered more attractive to the colour-loving eyes of ingenuous youth by banded streaks of red and blue and yellow?

Fruit, flowers, honey, sugar: these form the basis of all æsthetic development.

One word more. Admire my self-control. I have not once mentioned the existence of sugar bounties! Such reticence is rare. The man who can treat of sugar and yet hold his tongue on the subject of the bounty system might be safely trusted in the most mixed society to avoid saying anything either way on bimetallism.

LODGINGS IN THULE.

I.

In the year 18— I was at Shetland for the herring fishing, and one afternoon, when I was but newly risen from a sick-bed, I attempted a foolhardy feat by way of silencing the crew, who were making fun of me for my white face. I knew nothing more till I opened my eyes in the bunk, and saw my brother Joseph bending over me with the tears running down his cheeks.

'What's the maitter wi' ye, Joseph?' I said.

'Jeems,' said he, 'ye're lyin' there wi' a broken leg.'

They had turned shoreward on my account, and were making for the nearest village in a very surly humour. I was miserable at the prospect of having to dree the days in some lonely cot in Unst when my friends would be gone from the Shetland seas; but, sure enough, there was a ferry-boat on its way to us, and I was lifted to the deck. The ferrymen no sooner heard for what purpose they had been signalled than they muttered sullenly together, and began to put their oars in motion. It was all we could do to get them to argue the matter; nor would they as much as look at me till my brother had shown them a second half-crown. As they rowed me ashore I only saw that one was a grey man and the other a red man; it was gloaming, and my eyes were dim with tears.

For thirteen weeks I lay in the house of one John Thurson, a crofter; and it is what happened between me and that man, and my extraordinary experience as a fugitive on the sea, that I am going to relate.

On the night of my arrival my leg was set by the Free Kirk minister, a sickly man with a muffler of shepherd's tartan round his mouth. But the next day (which was Sabbath) a little red-nosed gentleman burst into the room, tore off the bandages, and probed about the breakage till I roared. This was the doctor. He had a good dram in him, and while he was doing up my leg he cursed and swore, seldom using the same oath twice. Mrs. Thurson, a big melancholy woman, returned an equal fire of texts, the first that came to hand.

'I'll have Dougan at the law, the sneck-drawing devil!'

'"Be still and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the heathen, I will be exalted on the earth."'

'Hold your tongue, you fool!'

'"How goodly are thy tents, O Zion, and thy tabernacles, O Israel."'

That was the way they went on; it was awful for the day of rest in a place like Unst.

For an hour afterwards the woman deaved me with abuse of the doctor; but I could see that the chief cause of her hatred was that he belonged to the Established Church. As for my leg, she said if I were ever able to walk with a crutch I might be thankful, and the crofter, when he came in, said the same thing. They advised me to get the doctor from T——, one Rose or Ross.

'What kirk does he go to?' I asked, winking to myself.

'The Free Kirk.'

'I was thinkin' that.'

They dropped the subject for that time.

My brother Joseph came to see me the day before our boat was to leave the Shetland waters. He brought me my chest, and handed me thirty-seven pounds nine shillings as my share of the season's profits. I saw the minister passing the window, and heard him going into the kitchen. The landlady called Joseph, and Joseph went out. In about ten minutes the three came to my bedside, and Joseph said:

'Yer leg's been bungl'd, Jeems, by that drucken doctor.'

'Weel,' I said, 'that's possible, Joseph; but in my opinion it's gaun on richt enough.'

'Bungled, bungled,' sounded from behind the tartan muffler.

'I've sent for the T—— doctor,' said Joseph; 'it's better to make sure.'

And before I could say a word the minister gave out the first sixteen lines of the eighth paraphrase. As my brother's voice joined in, I covered my face and wept. During the prayer I fell asleep, and when I awoke all were gone.

After two days Dr. Rose, a genteel young man with watery eyes, appeared on the scene. The first thing he did was to pray. Then, turning down the blankets, he said: 'Who did this?'

'Dr. Wilson,' said my landlady.

Shaking his head, he undid Dr. Wilson's work.

'Ay, yes,' he went on, 'it's as well you sent for me.'

So my leg was set for the third time.

The same day, in my landlady's absence, Dr. Wilson came in half-drunk. He looked a good while at my leg, and the more he looked the more he smiled.

'Good-bye,' he said. 'I'm s-sorry for you, my man. Mind, you owe me th-three guineas.'

The last remark gave me a fright at the time, but, as I discovered afterwards, it was a joke. That Dr. Wilson was my friend, and the only friend I had in that cursed village, will presently appear; yet whether he did well or ill for me (albeit I am a living man) I cannot be certain.

Before I got upon my feet it was wearing on to Christmas. For a week or two I walked a bit every day with the help of two sticks, fretting sorely for home, especially when my eye caught some south-going sail. And then I began to think that I was fit to travel. One thing I was resolved upon—that New Year's Day would see me at a tolerable distance from the Thursons. My purpose was like to be thwarted by the frost, which was so intense at Christmas that my thigh ached whenever I ventured out of doors; nor was it owing to any change in the weather, or any foolhardiness in me, that I was quit of the place before the year ended.

The crofter, you are to understand, was a man that made a great show of religion. There was not a night but he held family worship in my room, and he would talk by the hour about predestination, effectual calling, and so forth. Still, I never believed in the man. In his prayers he said that our hearts were deceitful above all things and desperately wicked; yet he himself wished to be taken for a pattern of holiness: and I can picture the rage that would have wrinkled his face had I charged him with any particular fault, such as malice or love of money, which I knew him to be guilty of. He was no man to look at. I was a good head taller even when resting on my sticks; and for the matter of weight, I suppose I could have given him a couple of stone. His face was just a cat's face, hairs and all. Night after night that man would sit at my fireside, trying to pick a quarrel on some matter of religion.

It happened that on Christmas night we had a very hot dispute on the subject of baptism. I asked him at least a dozen times to give me chapter and verse for the sprinkling of infants; and, at last, irritated by the man's preposterous evasions—

'Answer that,' said I, 'or haud yer tongue.'

He was sore put-to, and sat dumb for a while with an ugly grin on his face. I was quite scunnered to look at him, and wondered that God should suffer such a professor.

'There's nae Scripture for haein' a tank in the kirk,' he said.

But I was past arguing.

'Are ye for worship the nicht?' I asked.

'To be sure,' said he.

'Weel,' I said, 'it'll no be in this room. John Thurson,' I went on, 'ye're a man I cannae thole. Ma hert turns at the very sicht o' ye,—wi' yer mooth open, an' yer teeth glarin' thro' spokes o' white hairs. God forgi'e me! but if the likes o' you get saved, Heaven's no the place it used to be,' I said.

The man turned as white as death, and what was he doing with his hands behind his back? He coughed, slipped something into his pocket, and left the room. From what occurred next day, I make no doubt that he had taken out his gully.

Shortly afterwards, as I was seeking comfort in my hymn-book, a tap came to the door, and in walked my landlady. She lectured me in such a fine strain of sorrow, with so many tears and texts, that I felt myself in the wrong, and had it in my heart to apologise. But suddenly she put her arms akimbo and said:

'And it's the last nicht ye'll sleep under this roof, Mr. Murra.'

She threw a pass-book on the table.

'There, settle that!' she said. 'It's less than it should be; but yer brither Joseph was a nice man.'

As I was getting back my breath and making to speak, she lifted up her hands and cried:

'Nae words! Ill or weel, sail or wheel, aff ye go the morn.'

Now that was the coldest night but one of a famous season of cold. Your hands got quite numb if exposed for five minutes. You sat before the fire with your great-coat on: your face and legs would be scorching and your back like ice. The thought of being on the sea next day in an open boat like Mattha Harwick's made me shudder. How was I to stand the weather, or who would sail me far in a polar frost? There was nothing for it but to beg old David Inkster to take me in till the spell of cold was over. I was thinking thus when the door was opened, and my landlady, not showing her face, bawled out that Mattha Harwick and Tam Inkster were willing to convey me to Lerwick, and that they were in the kitchen.

'Send them in,' I said.

Harwick was a fat man for a fisher. He had grey whiskers, but on his head, which he always kept covered, there was scarcely a hair; you would see the ends of a red napkin sticking out from his bonnet. Inkster was the handsomest man I ever saw; he was about six feet high, and had yellow curls and large eyes of the deepest blue. I gave them a dram, and after a good deal of talk we made a bargain. They were to take me to Lerwick for thirty shillings, and we were to start the next day at noon. I thought them daring men to propose such a sail, but it was not for an exile like me to stick at dangers which they were ready to face for a fare.

And now for the pass-book.

Several times during my sojourn I had asked for my account, but I had always been put off with a laugh or a compliment, and now I was a little afraid of it. I would not open the book till I had made some hypothetical calculations of my debt. Thirteen weeks at five shillings a week, I began—three pound five; so much for lodgings. As for board, having my experience at various places to go by, and considering that the gain from my smaller appetite would compensate the loss from daintier fare, I concluded that eight or nine pounds would cover it. I was thus prepared to see the figure twelve, and 'I'll not jump at thirteen,' I said to myself. 'No,' I added, brightening with the thought of home, 'nor, bedad! at fourteen.' I opened the pass-book. *The account was nineteen pounds ten shillings and twopence!* My lodgings were put down at five shillings and sixpence a week, instead of five shillings. I had lent the wife sums amounting to thirty-three shillings, and the man on one occasion ten shillings. Only the thirty-three were entered. From Inkster and Harwick I had received sundry presents of fish. These were all charged for, and at pretty stiff rates. But the tale of meat and liquor fairly took away my breath. I sat lost in horror at the moral condition of a man and wife that could swindle the stranger that was within their gates and yet profess the utmost godliness, and that between the cliffs and the heather of a lonely shore.

I burst into the kitchen. There were the two fishermen on their legs, as if about to depart. Mrs. Thurson was clearing away the supper things; her husband was sitting at the fire.

'What kin' o' accoont is this?' I exclaimed, holding out the pass-book.

'Well, good-night to ye a',' cried Inkster, nudging his neighbour, and taking a step towards the door.

Old Harwick plainly refused the hint; he stood still, wearing an expression I did not like. I began to pour out my complaint, but had scarcely touched the first particular when the woman, feigning the utmost consternation, drew a long sigh and set up a gabble that might have been heard at sea. With her way of it, I had been thrown upon their hands for their sins (though for what sins they knew not), and all the days of my sojourn they had served me even to the mortifying of the flesh, hoping thereby for acceptance at a throne of grace. She gave me a character that nobody in Buckie would have recognised as 'Giesie's,' and, with her apron at one eye, enlarged on what they had done and endured for my sake, making a fine story, and with the other eye watching the effect on the fishermen. Not a word could I get in, for if I roared she yelled, and at my loudest I was as one bawling in a hurricane. As a sensible man I gave up the job, though to stand and listen was yet harder, when I could have throttled her for her lies and her hypocrisy. Down came my fist upon the table with a report like a cannon. Her tongue stopped; Harwick made a threatening movement, and my landlord jumped out of his chair.

'Staun there an' answer ma questions,' I said to the woman. 'Didnae we agree that ma ludgins were to be five shillins a week?'

'O the lee!' she exclaimed; 'it was five an' sixpence.'

'Ay, five an' six,' said Thurson.

'Ma brither'll hae something to say to that, if there's law in Shetland.'

She was going off in another rant.

'Silence! Hoo much money did ye borrow frae me?'

'I borrowed in a' thirty-dree shillins. Der was dree shillins, an' five shillins, an' twice half-a-croon, an' on the rent-day a pound; an' if ye say I borrowed mair, may the Lord hadd His hand frae strikin' ye deid.'

Thurson was fidgetting under my eye.

'What aboot the ten shillins I lent yer man the day he went to Lerwick?'

The woman stared.

'I paid it,' said Thurson hoarsely.

Ye paid it! The lie sticks in yer throat, man.'

I dared him to make his asseveration good by giving particulars. My hand was going at the time, and I happened in my anger to twitch his jacket. Instantly he retorted like a wild cat, and but for the scream of his wife, and Harwick pulling my sleeve, there might have been a nasty tussle.

'If ye paid the money, John,' said that honest man Inkster, 'try an' mind the day.'

'Tam, you hadd yer tongue!' said Harwick

'I'm tryin' to mind,' said Thurson, appearing to be in deep thought; and after some inarticulate mutterings he whispered into the coals:

'Was it yon Tuesday?'

'He's preparin' his story,' I put in.

'I paid that ten shillins,' he continued, shaking his head over the fire.

Harwick winced at the exhibition.

'Yer freen's a man o' sma' invention,' I submitted.

The old man gave me a black look, and, drawing himself up, said: 'I've kent the Scotch for forty year, and albeit their country is outlandish, they're a damned upsettin' breed. But it's not a Harwick that'll stand to hear ane o' them revile a Thurson, or the wife o' a Thurson, especially when she hersel's a Baikie——'

'Thou sayest weel, Mattha,' the woman observed, 'save for ae word, which the Lord'll forgi'e ye.'

'The Murras,' he continued, 'may be great in their ain country, but when they come among the folk o' Shetland they maun learn to respect a better bluid than their ain. In the days o' our faiders this fellow would have been dragged to the rocks and cast into the sea.'

'Yea, doubtless,' muttered the crofter.

'Concernin' the ten shillins, the truth may be here or there, an' nae man a liar; but forasmuch as John cannae show that he paid the money, tak' it aff, tak' it aff, Teenie.'

'Ay, an' what 'll she tak' aff,' I broke in, 'for the drink an' victuals that I never got, eh, Solomon? In this accoont there's bottles o' whisky, an' bottles o' brandy, an' bottles o' wine never drunk by me; there's punds an' punds o' meat that never saw ma stomach——'

'To the rocks with him—to the rocks!' shouted Thurson, springing towards me with hands in the act to clutch, and darting glances between me and his companions.

I looked at the creature, and was inclined to twist his neck; but as he slunk to his seat, abashed by the grave silence with which his outbreak was met, I felt a kind of pity for him, and my anger turned against Harwick.

'This is what comes o' yer blawin' aboot the ways o' yer forefaithers. Ye micht have had mair sense, an auld man like you. What have I dune wrang? Was I to say naething aboot the intak'? Was I to pay nineteen pound ten an' tippence when I saw as plain as a herrin'-heid that the accoont was swalled up by the maist terrible cheatery? Wha was it advised the takkin' aff o' the ten shillins, for a' his blusterin'? Ay, the ten shillins 'll come aff, an' the six an' sixpence 'll come aff; an' what's mair, for goods never consumed an' never ordered by me, a maitter o' four or five pound 'll come aff, afore they see the colour o' ma money.'

With an evil smile and signing to his partner, Harwick moved towards the door. At the same time my landlady broke out with another speech, something about my washing, the hire of a lass Manson, and I know not what.

'O me, me!' she wailed, 'that I should live to see this night.'

'It's the damndest waup that was ever seen in these pairts,' said Inkster.

'Before ye go, you fishermen, I ask ye this: Thae fish that ye gied me, were they praisents, or were they no praisents?'

'Praisents,' replied Inkster, almost angrily.

'They 're cherged for to the last fin,' said I.

Knitting his great yellow eyebrows wistfully, he put it to the other in a tone of expostulation:

'They were praisents, Mattha!'

Harwick, looking straight before him, with his thumbs in the arm-holes of his waistcoat and a cutty-pipe in his mouth, remained silent.

'Praisents!' gasped Mrs. Thurson, as if ready to faint.

Harwick blew a cloud and said, 'They were praisents'—(He spat, resumed his pipe, and added)—'an' they werena praisents.'

When the chief man in the hamlet could say the like of that, I thought it was time for me to be going. So I marched from the scene, bidding Inkster good-night, and to the others waving my hand, and crying—

'If there's a sheriff onywhere in these blessed islands, I'll see his wig.'

II.

An hour later I found myself sitting by an empty grate, with the teeth chattering in my head. I had been lost in visions of uncertain morrows, picturing the fights and shifts and travels that might befall me yet in Shetland; and again, forgetting these, had seen away across the dark wintry sea the lights of Buckie harbour and the red lamp of Bell Bowie's inn. Should I pay the money after all? I knew a crew that could avenge me on the swindlers.

Suddenly my door—it had been off the latch—was blown open, and the blast that came in was loaded with snow. The house-door closed with a bang: Harwick and Inkster had passed out. Fine weather, thought I, for a sail of fifty miles in a wherry! And all at once I was seized with the suspicion that the fellows, in offering to take me to Lerwick, had counted on our being driven in by the cold before we were long at sea, and I saw myself landed a little way down the coast, or at some adjacent isle, the victim of a trap. Would God I had been of simpler wits! for then perhaps I had yielded to the sore stress of my situation, and sailed away from those cliffs, though in bitterness, yet not in terror and alone, and reached Lerwick, if not according to the compact, at least without dead men for company. As it was, my back stiffened: I would not have paid my bill to save my life. But with my landlady's 'aff ye go the morn' sticking in my mind, and knowing that every house in the village would be shut against me, I did not see my course as far as another might, let alone the times beyond. I resolved to take counsel with Dr. Wilson at once, and as soon as I heard the sound of psalm-singing, for which I had waited, I slipped out into the storm.

It was no easy job to round the gable, which was to the sea. Blown about and blinded by the snow, I struck against the corner, and had to feel along the wall with my hands. In this way I saw my room through the spy-window. A figure swoops to my trunk, opens it, glances in, locks it, and is gone! Ay, my money is there, Thurson. They resumed their singing, and I my battle with the storm.

Going all the way with my shoulder to the wind, I did not see the doctor's house till I was at the very gate. Save for a glimmer in the upper story, it was dark. My heart sank, for the doctor's habit was to go to bed in the small hours, and if he was not sitting up he must be either ill with the drink, or away from home. I hung about the spot, feeding my sense of loneliness, and letting the snow freeze in my hair, that I might pity myself the more. Then I remembered that the housekeeper was no Shetlander, but a native of Laurencekirk. Bent on telling my story to Mrs. Gillanders, if her master was not to be seen, I boldly rang the bell. The door was opened immediately, and there stood the doctor himself. When he heard my voice, he told me to come in; and I was no sooner in the lobby than he pulled me to the light, and just looked at my face.

'Doctor,' I said, 'I'm needin' a freen, and if you're not the man, God help me!'

'Take off that coat,' said he, 'and your boots,' he added, glancing down.

There never was such a gentleman when he was sober, and he was noticeably sober that night. He set me in an easy-chair by the fire, and brought me a pair of slippers. I told him everything; but, though he listened to my words and now and then put a question, he took most interest in the pass-book. As he went through the pages he would smile and talk to himself. 'Kidneys,' I heard him saying,—'kidneys. . . . kidneys. Ay, John's fond of kidneys.' When at length he handed me the book, he remarked that the addition was correct.

'Well,' said I, 'there's no much else correct,' and I was going into matters when the doctor said quietly:

'I'm sorry for you, Murray, but my advice to you is to pay the account.'

'I tell ye, doctor, it's a d——'

'I know. Still, you must pay it.'

He made toddy for us both, and over the glass gave his arguments, mixed with queer stories of the place I was in and the folk I was amongst.

'What have you to expect from a lawsuit? You have no case; you can prove nothing; all the witnesses would be on the other side. Wait on the law, Murray, and it's not nineteen, but ninety, pounds you'll be in for, before all's done. And meanwhile there will be sore times for you. You're not in Scotland, my friend; nor yet in Lerwick.'

After thinking for a while I said, sullenly enough:

'Well, doctor, I'll give the money to you, and you can pay them. To tell the truth, it's not in my blood to pass them their blackmail; I'm afraid of what I might do with that hand. If your lad can give me a lift as far as T——, I'm off to-morrow. And ye may tell them they'll be speired for next season by the Buckie crews.'

'I'm surprised, Murray, at your taking a matter of a few pounds so much to heart.'

'Ah! ye wouldnae say that if ye had to depend on the herrin'. But it's not the money: it's the imposition—the imposition!' I repeated, all my anger coming back at the word. 'I suppose I must submit, but I have a mind to see them damned first.'

And with that I rose to go.

The doctor smiled, and began to stir his liquor absently.

'There's one other way,' he said, with some hesitation.

He was silent for a time. I saw there was something working in his mind. At last he muttered over his glass: 'It's a pity about that trunk of yours,' and, flashing a look in my face, spoke out:

'You may fly. If you don't like my advice, there's my boat.'

I sprang to the doctor and shook his hand, saying:

'I'll do them yet.'

As for my trunk, I told him I could put upon my person nearly all that was in it, and would willingly leave the rest as a present to my landlord. After some contention (carried on by the doctor in order to test my spirit, perhaps), we soon found ourselves concocting a plan of escape.

The doctor made it a point that I should attempt nothing till the extreme cold relaxed, as my system had got a shake. The Thursons, he said, had doubtless already altered their vow to be quit of me next day; they would certainly not let me go with my bill unpaid, and to seize my cash and turn me out they would hardly venture. But he would give orders for my confinement to the house; and on the first favourable night, leaving behind me so many pounds for the debt, and an additional one for the doubt, I was to take French-leave of the Thursons.

As the doctor was not sure about the condition of the boat, and frost and snow pass quickly off in Shetland, he called in young Gillanders, the housekeeper's son, who served as groom, gardener, and fisherman. The lad was made privy to the enterprise, and he informed us that, as he had been at the cod the day before, the boat happened to be in the creek—sail, oars, and all.

'See to it, Peter,' said his master, 'and remember where you were born.'

As to the disposal of the boat at Lerwick I had definite instructions.

All things arranged, what with the toddy and the infection of my enthusiasm, the doctor positively exulted in the prospect of my outwitting the thieves after all. When we parted the storm was over, but the snow crackled underfoot, so deadly was the frost.

I thought I would have perished that night in bed, though I put on one thing after another till I was lying more than half-dressed under the blankets. Do what I might, heat would not come to my body, and the morning was well advanced before I got a wink of sleep. When I awoke it might have been late or early for all that the darkness told, and I might have fallen asleep again but for a great coming-and-going at the front-door. I lit my candle; it was ten o'clock by my watch; and inasmuch as, from the time of my recovery, I had usually taken my meals with the Thursons, and it had been my landlady's habit to call me to breakfast about half-past seven, I concluded that this would be a bad day for me if they got their will. There was one thing I could not do without, and that was a fire. The kitchen was filled with the neighbours; but, after hesitating once and again in the passage, I pushed the door open a few inches and asked Mrs. Thurson to speak to me for a minute. The talking ceased; Mrs. Thurson came out, and, fingering with her apron, followed me to my room.

'Am I to get nae fire, nae breakfast?'

'Ye'll get what ye pay for.'

I tossed her a couple of shillings.

Having gone outside to wait till things were ready, I noticed three or four men hanging about the house. They stamped, and swung their arms across their chests, to keep themselves warm. The company in the kitchen began to drop off, but no one spoke to me. Harwick passed, Inkster passed; they merely acknowledged my existence in the usual solemn manner of the Shetlanders. I could make nothing of all this, except that it boded no good to me; but I was soon to know as much as made me long for the doctor's arrival on the scene. As my landlady was taking away the last of the breakfast-things, she paused at the door, and said:

'About your debt, sir, we had your mind last night, and plenty o't; and if it's the same the day, there'll be a short packin' and a lang hurl for you afore ye lie in blankets.'

So they were prepared to seize my money and have me trepanned in the carrier's cart, and the loungers were for a sentry!

If the doctor would only come!

In spite of all my anxieties, however, I fell asleep over the fire, and, with intervals of dozing, slept for two hours. Twice at least I was visited: at one time I heard my landlady's voice in the room; at another, conscious of a creaking of the door, I knew, just as if I had seen him, that the man-cat had popped in his head. When I woke up the room was almost dark, owing to a heavy snow-shower. I had only to look throughthe window to lose all expectation of the doctor's coming. Was I to remain at the mercy of my enemies? I tore my hair; I struck the pocket where my money was, and squared my shoulders and set my teeth, mentally vowing resistance to the death; I threw myself on the bench, all but weeping; I walked up and down like a caged beast. But all that was over in a minute. The spies, I reflected, should now be gone to their firesides; at all events, the atmosphere was thick. I determined to slip over the window, and make a dash along the beach for the doctor's house. I put on my great-coat and muffler, and was hastily securing such of my belongings as lay to my hand when there was a knocking at the door! The rogues had doubtless been listening to my movements. Thrusting my bonnet into my pocket, I plumped into my chair. My landlady entered, with her husband behind her.

'Ye seem ready for a journey,' she began. 'Well, there's the door. Try and win to your freen. Maybe there's nae honest men roon the corner to catch the thief.'

The woman was too clever for once: I divined in a moment that the watch was gone.

'Journey! It's the cauld,' said I, bending closer over the fire, and pretending to shiver. I had meant to feign a broken spirit, and as much more as was needed to put them off their guard; but, taking exactly the opposite course by a reckless impulse, I added: 'I'll tak' aff ma coat when I hear ma murderers at the door.'

The pair exchanged looks. After a pause, the wife went into the kitchen, and the other spoke:

'What kind o' talk is that, man? There'll be nae murderin' in this hoose. I'll no alloo it.'

'Ye draw the line at assault an' robbery?—not even there.' I muttered to myself, 'I forgot I was to be flung into a waggon.'

While I was speaking I took up the poker, weighed it in my hands, and laid it across my knees.

Mrs. Thurson returned, bringing me a great bowl of mutton broth and some rye scones. But from her speedy retreat, I suspected that her purpose in this hospitality was to gain time to communicate with the hamlet. I fell-to with might and main, pleading the cold as my excuse. Presently the cottage door opened and closed, but had I not been listening intently I should not have heard it, the talebearer went out with such caution. My heart beat violently, and the blood mounted to my face. Thurson sat on.

'If you and I are to hae a crack,' I said, 'come ower to the fire.'

He took his old place on the bench. Between mouthfuls I talked to hide my excitement, saying one thing and another to conciliate my keeper; and when I judged that the moment had come, I rose slowly from the table, stumbled towards the door as if in the act of stretching myself, and, with the remark 'I'll just step oot an' see the weather,' lifted the latch, intending to run for my life.

Oh, the pride and folly of a young man matching himself against the odds of circumstance, and incurring terrible chances, for a comparatively trivial cause! How it all came to pass I cannot tell; but I was felled by the leap as it were of a tiger, two bodies writhed together on the floor of the entry—a knife swaying in four blood-wet hands; and there was my landlord, still as a corpse, his own gully sticking in his ribs!

I stood dazed with horror, staring at the lodged weapon and the rigid face, and uttering moan on moan. Then what a start I got!—the man was looking at me! The next instant I was on my knee, bending over him.

'O John! speak to me, John!'

Making a fearful face, 'Ugh!' he groaned, and with a jerk the knife was in his hand. How it ran blood!

Raising himself on his elbow, he tried to make a lunge at my heart. The knife dropped; and the last that I saw of John Thurson was his bald head sinking on the cold stone, and a grey lock dipping in a pool of blood.

III.

I can say before God that when I took to my heels my only clear intention was to inform the doctor; but once hearing sounds as of a woman summoning the world with shrieks, I grew wild with terror, and, weak and sore as I was from the fight, dashed over rock and boulder for the beach, shouting to young Gillanders, who was standing at gaze on the road:

'The creek! the creek!'

The lad was there first. What they called the creek was a large cave so deep in water that a boat could float in it at ebb-tide, and curving in such a way behind the buttress of the cliffs that it was out of the swirl of stormy seas. Returning nothing to Peter's questions, except some words of caution for his own safety, I bade him bustle and get the craft into the open. This he did with all dexterity and speed, while I retraced my steps along the ledge of rock to the mouth of the cave. There, when the mast was fixed, we exchanged positions (not without gold passing from my hand to his), and crying farewells to my fleeing pilot I began to pull out to the deep. I had several cuts in my hands from Thurson's knife, and, as I struggled on, a blur came over my sight, so that I dared not hoist the sail (the coast being noted for its dangers); and I would sit for a minute at a time, rubbing my eyes and taking in my position. At one of those intervals I happened to see, through an opening in the cliffs, a number of men, one after another, running in the direction of the doctor's house. I made a jump for the sail, dreading nothing but those men's hands; and as I was fumbling and stumbling at my job, I heard the cries of my pursuers, who were rushing down to the shore, and anon stood yelling at me from the water's edge. Mad hurry made me worse than blind, and there I was, ever striving, ever failing at the ropes—the angry canvas fluttering thunders about my ears, the wide sea before me with jets and ridges of white in the distance; behind me fatal rocks, raging enemies, and that dead man! I stopped to bethink myself, and wakened as from a nightmare. What was to hinder me from putting up that sail? It only needed a little coolness and the thing was done; and fierce was the howl from the land when the sail filled and the boat sped away.

Before I cleared the Skerries I had anxious moments, but once fairly off I burst out roaring and singing like a drunken man, and it was not till I caught myself in the middle of a certain ribald chorus (which I had never before breathed, and had always objected to) that I realised the ghastliness of my hilarity. When the fit was over, the sudden silence, broken only by the sound of the water lapping against the boat, brought me to my senses with a shock.

What was I doing there, away out on the sea, sailing in that cockle-shell on a winter's afternoon? I was he that sat the night before at the doctor's hearth, the very same man. If I struck a fellow-creature to the shedding of his life-blood, it was a blind blow in the heat of self-defence; and whose blame was it that there was a knife in the affair? I was no murderer to go fleeing from the face of man. Whither bound, O steersman? Put about and return to the creek. Knock, James Murray, at the doctor's door.

The coast was a white line in the dusk of sky and sea, and behind it was the sun—a mere patch of blood-red mist. As I gazed, the sudden recollection of my unpaid bill added to my horror of a shore where a man lay stabbed by my hand. And what were those pale lights that flashed and twinkled on the beach? They must be torches and lanterns in the hands of the villagers. I watched them till they disappeared, and before I turned my eyes away there shot into my field of vision a brown sail! At that I gave a sudden jerk to the tiller and held out to sea. It was a desperate course for a man in an open boat, in the worst of winter weather, and without either water or victuals. But what was I to do? With pursuers on my track Lerwick was no place for me. If I was to escape from Shetland it would not be by the steamer, but in that same cockle-shell. There was a chance for me if I could get landed at some out-of-the-way village, where I might pass the night, and whence on the morrow I should start for Orkney; and there was the hope of deterring my pursuers, who might not be willing to follow me far on the way, as it seemed, to no shore but death.

The horizon all round was one steep wall of grey and purple, within which the sea rolled black, with flashes of foam. The wind that sent my light craft flying was icy, piercing to the bones, numbing the hand at the tiller, and making my cheeks and ears smart as with pricks of steel. In my corner at the stern I sat drawn tightly together, and as my eye travelled between the pursuing sail and the dim shoreless verges beyond my plunging bows, a lone man on the ocean, fleeing from avengers, I lived in a wild dream, vaunting myself another Cain. Ah not for me, the customary round! Others might carry on the fishing, and bring up families, and go to the church; but I had always that within which told me I should burst my bonds and be hurled into the unknown, a dark wonder to my tribe! Theirs that winter night to sit around the fire with cheerful looks; mine to be out among the spray of the far North seas, a prisoner or a corpse! Away! good, comfortable souls! For me, I was with those on whose heads a price was set, and I saw, as flashes in darkness, the fear-drawn faces of my brother outlaws, flying on country roads, over moors, through city lanes and alleys, before chasing lanterns. Exulting in a common plight with these, I turned my bow still farther away from land, and, more like a demon than a man, sped on for the cloudy gates, shouting to the waves 'Ho! ho!'

I woke up, thinking I heard answering cries from my pursuers, and was startled to find that, with all my seeing, I had noticed their progress no more than if I had been in a trance. Fearful it was to me, that black mark growing in the gloom! They were now not above a mile away, and were bearing down at such a rate that I gave an involuntary heave to my shoulders, imagining hands at my collar. At the same time I was appalled by my outlook; in the direction in which I was going death stared me in the face. I began to fetch a compass landward, trusting to hold my own till the darkness should blot out our sails; and for a time my sufferings both of body and mind were forgotten in the excitement of the race. The cries came ever and again with terrifying distinctness, and there were breathless minutes when I felt as if some monstrous bird of prey were about my very head; but what with the better boat, and more skill at the tiller, I slipped from their clutches and steadily gained distance.

The night was dark, only from time to time there was a vague glimmer abroad, telling that there was a moon somewhere; and now there was no difference between sea and sky, and now there was a sail for a sign.

After a two-hours' run it was not capture I had to fear. The wind had risen, carrying flakes of snow, sharp and dry as powdered ice. The back of my head was as if grasped in an iron clamp; my hands were become powerless—the one at the tiller (though rolled in a handkerchief) being frost-bitten all over, and the other swollen with cold and wounds. There was the promise of a terrible night, and I was so far to the south-east that, with Fetlar Island cut off by the chase, I had no alternative but to make for Whalsey. It was a race against death, and never did my bloodguiltiness appear in such awful reality as when I thought of those men being free to put in at Fetlar, where they might have a good fire, a hot supper, and a bed to lie in, yet preferring to hunt on, in cold and darkness, over the deep.

When I found myself alone, it was woe to look upon the black desert of waters, with its sudden ridges flaring white. Even the furrow cut by my little boat was a sight that made me quake. Sounds I had never heeded in my life before—the creaking of ropes, the flapping of canvas, the splash of spray, the chuckle of the waves about the boat's sides—grew to be awful in my ears. Once I started up, hearing a dull thud in the sea. There was another, only more distinct. My heart beat fast, the perspiration broke out on my face. Suddenly there was a grunt and a hollow roar, accompanied by a crash and running of waters, and a whale disappeared beyond my bows. Thereafter through the eerie hours I thought of what was below the waves, swimming, swimming,—enormous bulks and fiercesome shapes, with all their slimy battles, and never a voice nor sound. I would sit in a kind of fearful enchantment, conjuring up unknown sea-monsters and searching the dark for glaring eyes. Or I would be haunted by dreams of my landlord lying in his blood, of my friends at their hearths at home, of the prison, of endless wanderings. All the while, I was perishing with cold. At last I wept like a child, breathing 'O mother! mother!' I prayed, and after long agony saw in my mind, against a twilight sky full of white stars, the cross, and heard a choir softly singing—

They looked to Him and lightened were,
Not shamed were their faces;
This poor man cried, God heard and saved
Him from all his distresses.

So I came within sight of the coast-line of Whalsey, and to me no prospect of time ever seemed so long as the hour I must yet dree on the water. I had no hope nor thought for this world but just to set my foot on earth. Yet I was to be denied a shore, even to rest my eyes on. The faint shine that was in the clouds went out, and the whirling spit became a regular snow-storm. I looked abroad—there was no sea, nothing but grey-thickened darkness, and within it, as it were, a furious pool. If I turned my head, the snow that was dashed in my face burned my eyes like pepper. Holding the tiller in my arm-pit I bowed myself, and just sat to the snow like a stone in a field. It came upon me that every man had his fate, and here was mine. In a vision I saw, through a screen of flying flakes, a small boat sailing on a pitch-dark sea, and at the stern a figure covered up as in a winding-sheet. That was James Murray, and he should never see land again, but be a fear to someone wandering by a shore, or a sight to some ship.

Then those thinking long at home should hear of me. My mother would sit wringing her hands at the fireside, with the women about her, and Joseph would have a set face of grief, and a lower voice among men. But my own folk and many besides would speak up for 'Giesie.' Oh they would sing the burial hymn, and there would be wails from the women and tears on the cheeks of the men when the chorus rose: 'For his Father has called him home.'

My left foot began to ache as if squeezed in a vice. I started with a cold stream trickling down my back, and found I had been on the point of falling asleep. I could not see my direction, and just went with the wind. My eyes would close, and stare ahead, and close again, and always I heard the noises of the boat, and felt the beating snow. I remember hearing the tiller bang. . . .

Next moment it is an umbrella that has fallen in the pew. I am sitting in the chapel at home. At the top of an open window the blind is flying in and out with a continual clatter. The folk are taking their places. Above me the gallery resounds with the rumble of heavy boots. My eyes follow particular persons in the throng, and, when all are seated, each familiar face is where I expect to see it. The bustle made by a woman among her children attracts attention, until the tailor, in all the dignity of broadcloth and creaking boots, marches up the aisle. In one part of the chapel a tumult arises. I come to know that a stranger is there who refuses to uncover his head. It is Mattha Harwick, and he is going up to the pulpit. He wears a broad bonnet, from under which hang the ends of a red napkin. He speaks, but I cannot hear a word for the clamour. Yet I know he is scoffing furiously at the people. I sit shrinking with vague terror. Now he is holding out over the pulpit Thurson's dead body. The tailor stands up and says, 'I rise to a point of order; the blood is dripping on the harmonium.' 'Ye can bury him, then,' roars Harwick, swinging his burden in the act to throw, and as the people babble and the blind thunders and the whole scene whirls, the corpse comes flying in my face, and I am sent rolling in the crash of things.

IV.

When I awoke I was sprawling in water, which was pouring in at the bow, and the boat was turning. As by painful stages I was getting to my feet, shiny black rocks reeled out of sight, then a dim shore swept past, and I was facing the sea. I looked behind, and was just in time to scramble out as the stern struck. One moment my cheek was upon the wet stone; the next I was crawling away on my hands and knees. There were detached rocks all about, but I was on a ridge that jutted from the land. It was a rough road I had for my sore and shaking limbs—a dyke of boulders and big stones, in some places with seams of sea between, and so full of little hollows and sharp points that almost with every movement I had to choose the spot on which my arms could rest. Sometimes I came down with my forehead on the rock, sometimes lay still, looking at the water or peering into the shadow of the lofty shore. How long my pauses may have lasted I know not, but once I caught myself watching a crab winding through a labyrinth of weeds. Of my past and future I had scarce a thought; my life consisted in sensations of pain and weakness, and the perception of rough and smooth, safe and dangerous, over weary inches of stone. At length instead of water there were pebbles. Raising my head, I looked into the dark mouth of a cave. My legs would not bear me, and I went crawling up the beach, like a wounded beast seeking only a den to die in.

What comfort to feel the soft earth under me, and how strange to be in quiet air and to hear an echo when I coughed! Getting well in to be out of the wind, I came upon a heap that was to the touch like dry heather, and there lay down in dire distress of body, yet grateful in my heart to God. Slowly the agony and trembling of my limbs subsided; but I no sooner found a kind of ease in my bed than I began to feel that I might fall asleep and never wake. For all that, it was long before I could summon resolution to bestir myself. I got out the old metal snuff-box in which I kept my matches, being in such darkness that it was rather by the stream of air and the sound of the sea than by any hint of colour that I knew the opening of the cave; but match after match, as I made to strike it, dropped from my half-dead fingers. Then I tried to walk, leaning against the wall. My knees gave way under me and, as I shuffled along, acute pains shot through every bone and fibre of my feet. Still I held on, taking so many steps for an imaginary wager—and that time after time—till I was able to walk without the support of the wall. By-and-by I carried an armful of the heather to some distance from the main heap and succeeded in lighting a fire. While eagerly I gazed at the kindling twigs and caught the heat in my face and hands, I was aware of great grim walls, fantastic pillars and mysterious corners, and thought of the open door and the sea beyond. Beside me was an old oar with one end charred and lying in a circle of ashes, and I had only to lift my eyes to be assured of plenty of fuel, the floor being strewn with the timbers of a wreck. I found also empty bottles and paper bags. Here excursionists had been; but upon what shore had I chanced? Stripped to my guernsey and with my sea-boots off, I suffered little from the wet, and, having spread out my things to dry, I lay down in the heat, with my face screened from the smoke.

I knew no more till I found myself in pitch darkness, sitting up, the cold in my marrow and the sweat on my brow, while the air rang with the awful echo of my own voice. One long minute of inexpressible horror elapsed before I could remember where I was. I got into my great-coat and groped my way to the mouth of the cave; but it was not till I had been for some time out under the sky that the terrific images of nightmare relaxed their hold upon my mind.

Not a star was to be seen, nor was anything visible beyond the beach save black spectres of rocks and the moving sea. After a breath of the open, I was forced by the cold to return to my heather. I could neither sleep nor rest, and was too feeble to set up another fire. Time after time I tottered to the beach, but there was never a glimpse of morning, and back to my bed, only to know the worm that dieth not.

Once, as at the flash of a lantern, I opened my eyes. The sun had come.

But there was no rushing out to see what shore I had been cast upon. I must have been asleep for hours, such a change had come over my condition. My bones were stiff as from the blows of a hammer, and I was so weak withal that, though trembling with cold, I had little will to stir. Half unconsciously I struggled to my knees; and with but dreamy eyes for the opening prospect I crawled to the mouth of the cave.

Suddenly against the red dawn, where it glared through a loop-hole of the rocky coast, appeared the black horror that had dogged me on the deep—Harwick's sail! My heart quaked with awe; for how came those men there, thought I, if not by a supernatural hand?

With one deep groan of pain I was on my feet. Staggering out I saw, a few miles to the north-west, an inhabited island adjacent to an indented coast-line. These could be no other than

Whalsey and the Mainland. I had only to clamber up a cliff to see the ring of foam around my desert rocks. If the cave was not to be my sepulchre, I must go with yonder men.

But what was the matter? Towards the point where I was wrecked the boat was sheering and jibing. Harwick's bald pate appeared above the gunwale; Inkster was in a corner of the stern, his yellow beard buried in his breast. I ran down the beach and out upon the ridge, hailing the men. There was no answer. I dashed through the water, and missing the gunwale, caught the rudder rope and got aboard; all without word or sign from the crew. Sick and dizzy, I struggled in beside Inkster, and with a groping hand touched the tiller. Then the light went out of my eyes.

When I came to myself I was lying half over the boat, choking with spray and crushed under the weight of my neighbour. I caught him fast and called to him by name imploringly; but getting a glimpse of the face that hung above me, I loosened my hold with a scream, and wriggled out of his clutches. Oh that ghastly pallor mingled with patches of dusky red! Oh those unwinking blue eyes! Harwick was reclining against the side of the boat, with an arm over a seat and his face to the sky; the mouth was wide open, the bald head all wet and shining. Fixed in terror, I lay on my face, and the waves raged around us, and the spray fell in showers, and again the sail clattered as the boat came to the wind. Thinking that the men whispered together and were about to fall upon me, I started up with a yell. Harwick seemed to be looking at me from under his eyelids, and Inkster's lips were set in a smile. In a sudden frenzy I threw myself on one and the other, shaking them and speaking loud in their ears. As suddenly I recoiled, and edged away towards the bow, where I sat moaning and casting scared glances at the still figures. The gold of morning was gone like a flash. Oh, it was pitiful to see the sleet dropping on the old man's face.

For all my terror I was not slow to break my long fast; but it was with my eyes ever on the men that I ate and drank. Dreadful as they were to behold, I durst not let them out of my sight, especially when their liquor was at my lips; for I could not help thinking that, alive or dead, they were aware of my presence. Once I let the bottle fall, as I heard what sounded like a cough from Inkster; and I was still alert and gaping when he came rolling against his partner, and there, cheek by jowl, were the red head and the bald! At that I laughed wildly and wept low by turns.

When the hysterical fit passed off I became conscious of a lowering sky and lashing seas. The boat, hitherto driven by wind and tide, had come perilously near the land, and was running before the gale at a great speed. The necessity for action cleared my mind, insomuch that I not only took my place at the tiller, but sat with an eye for my course alone. With such a wind, if all went well, I should make Lerwick in a couple of hours; and thither I resolved to steer my weird freight, come of me what might. But as the boat went splashing through the surge, how the frozen men tumbled and slid! Before long poor Inkster's curls were soaking in the lee scuppers, while the smooth skull of the other, dangling over the gunwale, was washed by the waves.

A sea swept over us, rousing me from a trance of horror. I had ceased to steer, and was now close upon the shore. Filled of a sudden with the idea of getting quit of my companions there and then, and strengthened by whisky and desperation, I hauled in the sail and took to the oars. At length, seizing my opportunity, I flung myself out upon a shelf of a cliff. Without resting a moment I crept along to the beach, ascended a grassy slope, and hurried on to a turn of the road. Not till then did I look back at the boat. The tide was carrying her out to sea.

At dusk I came to a village at the head of a bay. The folk were lighting their lamps, and as here and there the dim stars of gold appeared, such thoughts arose in me that my eyes streamed with tears. Few of the inhabitants were out of doors, but all that passed stopped and stared at me; and it was with a small crowd at my back that I made my way to the inn. I went straight to a room, and sat down before a blazing fire. The landlord, coming in at my heels, damned me for a street-singer, and ordered me to the bar; but when he saw my face he was silent. In a hoarse whisper, which was all the voice I had, I said I was a shipwrecked man, and asked for ham and eggs and a bed for the night, laying a pound note on the table to show that I was no beggar. The next minute (as it seemed to me) I felt myself violently shaken and heard loud calls; and there was the landlord holding a glass of brandy to my lips and a woman taking off my boots. They had me into a bedroom, and provided me with a complete change of clothing. When I was at supper one or other would come in to see to my welfare, and hear more of my story. All the news was carried to the bar, which was thronged with seafaring men; so for fear of an inquisition I hurriedly escaped to bed.

Next day, early in the forenoon, mounted on a farmer's dog-cart, I left the inn. The whole night long I had been sleepless and miserably ill. During the drive I was in a sort of stupor. At the sudden jar of the wheels as they rolled on to the causeway of the capital I woke up, and my heart began to faint and flutter with a manslayer's fears. There was a drizzle of rain from clouds that touched the steeples, and the dimness was such that in many of the shops and houses lights were burning. I had to turn away my face to hide my emotion, remembering a certain autumn evening when the bay, the shipping, the churches were all golden, and we sailed into the harbour singing songs.

I was set down at a hotel in the market-place among groups of farmers, and was no sooner on my legs than I sank to the ground with weakness. It was with difficulty that I got away from the kindly hands that came to my help. Apparently there was nothing publicly known about a murder in Unst; but the news should be on the road, and might even now be ringing in official ears hard by. My purpose was to go to the police-station, but my feet would be to and fro, and never just at the door. At one minute, thinking of the roguery of the couple and that man-tiger springing at me with a gully for a claw, I would make for my goal with a kind of angry pride; again, when I pictured the grey head lying on the bloody stone, I would turn into any obscure passage in a state of abject terror.

All the while I was going with bowed back and tottering limbs like a frail old man, and suddenly I was seized with a sharp pain that caught my breath. I might have died in the streets but for a woman calling to me as she passed:

'What are ye daein' there, sittin' in the rain?'

I rose from a door-step, and went on my way wailing, 'I maun get hame, I maun get hame.'

The next thing that I remember was my standing at the counter of a bank. The teller, who seemed far away in a kind of mist, was questioning me in loud and angry tones. I was holding a bundle of notes in a trembling hand. At last he caught the name I had been hoarsely murmuring, and as he repeated the words 'John Thurson,' my blood ran cold.

'The amount?'

'Thirteen pounds.'

A chair had to be brought for me, and soon there were two or three of the officials by my side. I was put into a cab, and before I knew rightly what had happened I was on the quay, and crossing the gangway into the Aberdeen steamer. Being recommended to the steward by the lad that accompanied me from the bank, I was at once conveyed between two of the sailors to a berth in the cabin.

How my heart bounded when, after a time that seemed endless, I heard the signal given! But just as the boat was moving the captain knocked again. The engine stopped. There was a mysterious silence, broken only by the rushing of feet and the subdued murmurs of a crowd. As I sat up shaking with fear, expecting every moment to see the police at the door, the boat with the frozen men, towed by a schooner, went past my little window. I fell back upon my pillow; and when next I opened my eyes a lamp was burning in my berth, and the vessel was speeding on its way.

During the voyage I was treated in the kindest manner by the captain and the steward, and when we arrived at Aberdeen they lost no time in sending me to the Infirmary. On the third day my brother, who had been summoned by the nurse, appeared at my bedside. He had received a letter from Dr. Wilson which contained the blessed assurance that Thurson was not only alive, but certain soon to recover from his wound.

DRESS.

If we begin at the top, and take a turban as the first word in our text, we realise at once that in attempting to review some thoughts about 'dress' we approach a question which not only concerns fashions of manifold fitness and variety, but suggests much that is perplexing and seemingly irrational. The turban is the head-gear of millions who are specially exposed to solar heat, and its thick folds are assumed to be their best protection against the rays of the sun. It is not worn by the Laplander. We might naturally conclude that it illustrates a survival of the fittest among hoods which are suited to a hot climate, and shows the good sense of the Turk, who, in the eyes of the world, is the representative turban-wearer. It certainly gives dignified completeness to an Oriental dress, and perhaps unconsciously suggests the ownership of more brains than are contained in the skull which it covers, since the impression it creates is felt to support the claims and character of the wise man and the prophet. At the same time it has two obvious defects. It is made by folding abundant material around a 'fez' (the basis of the structure), which is nothing else than a close-clinging unventilated cap of thick cloth. Thus it is inevitably so hot as to involve the shaving of the head before it can be worn with comfort. Then, too, it fails to shade and cover the nape of the neck (which is peculiarly sensitive to the rays of the sun) except, indeed, in those places and at those times when they are perpendicular. Possibly, however, the turban owes its use partly to its ritual convenience. The praying Turk repeatedly touches the ground with his forehead. Now, as he puts off his shoes, not his hat, when at worship, a stiff brim would be obviously embarrassing, but the soft folds of his turban lend themselves to these devotional gestures, and may even save the head of the enthusiastic devotee from being unexpectedly bumped.

I need not say that many other accepted 'fashions' are open to similar criticism. The Chinese 'pigtail' immediately suggests itself as affording a handle for something more than remarks. I do not know whether they are worn by the Celestial policeman, but if they are his effectiveness in an angry crowd must be annoyingly impeded; and in a social or domestic scrimmage tails offer themselves as irresistible conveniences. Indeed, I suspect that the adoption of the moustache only by most of our own constables is attributable partly to their consciousness that a long beard would be too inviting in the thick of a mob.

It is curious that China displays two extreme examples (one at each end of the person) of fashionable servility, men showing it in the length of their hair, and women in the shortness of their feet. But it is when we look at the supposed adornments of the uncivilised that we are amazed at what men and women will submit to in order to render themselves attractive. One would think that the presumable exigencies of courtship would have interdicted huge nose-rings and the insertion of a disc (like a thick penny-piece) into the middle of the lower lip, even if teeth filed sharp and stained red or black, along with tattoo to the tip of the nose, were felt to add charms to those of maiden beauty. But we dismiss the thought, as having no bearing upon civilised customs, with the remark that there is no accounting for the whims of savage taste. 'Poor ignorant creatures! they know no better. As they are reclaimed and taught by us they will learn to see the pitiable absurdity of their notions about personal adornment.'

But have we any right to be altogether sure of this? In one respect, indeed, there are savages who have seen fit to discontinue their decorative efforts after contact with civilised nations, and to transfer them from the flesh to the dress. The young Maori no longer tattoos his face. It is true that in this matter his ancestors so far set a suggestive example in displaying their superiority to the sudden changes which 'fashion' now demands of its followers. Having decided that certain patterns upon the skin were desirably effective, they had the courage of their convictions, and accepted them as permanent. The original inventor of this artistic ornamentation was felt to have got hold of a good idea, and society was determined not to let it go. It is probable, indeed, that many a New Zealander whose face proclaims him to have been a fop in his young days would be gladly rid of such an indelible witness to a departed taste. An old chief who was visiting England once asked me (through an interpreter) what I thought would be good for his rheumatism, and when I suggested a Turkish bath a look came over his decorated face which seemed to imply that there was more of the same tracery about him than he would care to exhibit in a place of public resort.

When, however, we affect to associate 'paint and feathers' with savagery we are not wholly without reason in taking care how we express ourselves. From the numerous advertisements of 'hair dyes,' 'poudre d'amour,' and the like, it would seem as if we did not confine our attentions to the covering of the body alone, and, indeed, since powder is only dry pigment, there is possibly as great a percentage of fashionable ladies who may be said to 'paint' their faces as would be found in a tribe of Chocktaws. The thing is managed better, no doubt; still, it is done, and there is a deceptive intention in the procedure of the civilised painters which cannot be laid to the charge of the squaw. She lays on the red ochre, or whatever it is, with a distinct purpose to have it perceived, and for this object restricts its application to, we will say, one side of her nose. There is no sham about the matter at all, but the lady who dabs her skin with the puff-ball is most conscious of her success when she fancies that her use of it will not be detected. To the wife of the 'South Wind' or 'Little Bear' her paint is no more an attempt at imposture than a coloured ribbon in a bonnet. She simply thinks that it is pretty to look at. Ladies hope that theirs will not be noticed; but 'powder' always betrays itself, and leaves the male imagination to suspect (sometimes to be sure) that its wearer is unpleasantly aware of external blemishes or defects in the face where it appears. Occasionally, its sole result is to draw attention to them, and to provoke the secret comment that the woman who uses it is trying to make herself agreeable by deception. And the prevalence of the practice, by which she seeks to justify herself, really does no more than add to the uncomfortableness of the impression which it produces upon the mind of the opposite sex.

Much the same may be said of male 'dye,' especially when applied to the beard. Those who shave their faces know how rapidly the stubble reappears upon the chin, but those who don't, seem to forget that the hair grows whether it be cut off with the razor or not, and that if the dyeing business is not repeated every morning a little tell-tale line of white, representing a day's growth, is drawn by the unfeeling finger of time between the dyed beard and the skin from which it springs. This, however, makes its most visible appearance below a man's ear, in a corner of the face's field which he does not see, except by a cunning arrangement of mirrors, but which is plainly open to the silent eyes of his friends.

These factors in the art of adornment—paint, powder, and dye—are, however, only what a farmer would call 'top-dressings,' though, happily, they do sink beneath the living surface on which they are laid, like 'nitrate of soda' sprinkled on a field. But they claim more than an indirect notice in considering the subject which provides a title for my remarks, since we must remember that a 'paint-pot' was once the only 'portmanteau' of our ancestors, and that where climate permits it the most admired covering is still put on by many with the brush alone. When the kraal of Cetewayo was searched it was found that his 'full-dress uniform' was made of 'gold,' not woven into a robe, but kept in a bottle, being the 'dust' of that metal. Thus, when the king had been well oiled, and powdered with it, even Solomon in all his glory could never have presented so splendid a result. We may talk of our 'gilded youth,' but they would have made a poor show at an African levee.

Let us turn our dazzled eyes from such a brilliant display and look at some features and uses of 'dress,' properly so called. With us, that of a man especially is said to 'fit' only when it adapts itself to the human shape. We are measured by the tailor, with a great display of nicety and a running commentary of precise numerical directions. The 'well-dressed' man is distinguished more by the 'cut' than the colour or material of his clothes. But in old days even the most sumptuous of these must have been 'ready-made.' When Joseph gave his brother Benjamin 'five changes of raiment' we have no reason to suppose that he first sent for the 'Poole' of his day, or that there was any trying of them on before the return journey to Canaan. We may be sure that they were of the best, but they were brought at once out of the stores already in the palace. And when Gehazi ran after Naaman and begged for 'two changes of garments,' they were produced at once from the supply which the great man had brought with him to be given to the prophet for a reward.

It is a question whether we gain much by a departure from or rejection of Oriental dress. Loose raiment is by no means necessarily unbecoming, and we all admit its comfort when we would take our ease or engage in any strenuous exercise. In one case the garment chosen is roomy, in the other elastic. Even in doing sedentary brain work we eschew tight-fitting clothes. It seems as if the head cannot exert itself rightly unless the body is unencumbered, and when the limbs are brought into special play they must obviously be free. The terms used respectively by the Oriental and the Western to express readiness for action sound, indeed, contradictory, since the one 'girds up his loins' and the other 'strips to his work,' but the same object is aimed at by both. Each seeks liberty of movement, and the modern athlete assimilates his dress as near as he can to that of the ancient, who appears to have dispensed with it altogether.

When, however, we ask which is the most 'becoming' costume, much plainly depends upon the shape of the body which it covers. In this respect if the Eastern gentleman has a poor figure he is fortunate in being able to conceal its imperfections by rich robes which hide his bandy legs or mitigate the lines of protuberance. On the other hand, if he resembles an Apollo the graceful proportions of his frame are unseen, while those of his European brother are displayed (to his own gratification) by close-clinging garments. It is perhaps almost a pity that freedom of choice between the two styles is not permissible, so that a man with an ungainly body should be at liberty to cover its defects, and one modelled to perfection might reveal the grace of his form. Only at a 'fancy' ball, however, can a bandy-legged cavalier make his appearance as a Turk and enjoy the consciousness of his disguise without being exposed to the charge of eccentricity.

It is, indeed, the fear of this which bars general reform or individual change more in 'dress' than in perhaps anything else. The present age having brought forth no special style of architecture, except such as is seen in Crystal Palaces, every man is at liberty to choose that of any period for his 'house' without ridicule or even comment. No doubt 'glass' is used only on a large scale, since a private dwelling constructed of it (however light and warm) would seem to invite proverbial remarks, even if it did not restrict action on the part of its inmate. But in seeking 'lodgment' we adopt Elizabethan, Grecian, Italian fashions at our will, affect the Norman or the Gothic as we please, or shelter ourselves under Queen Anne roofs without fear of deterrent criticism. If, however, a man dressed according to the style of the house he dwelt in, his friends would say that he had better take up his abode in Bedlam at once.

In the open adoption of our opinions we seem to have a wide choice without reproach. We may also clothe our thoughts in many fashions. Indeed, in this respect marked individuality may bring the flattering credit of genius, and yet, however theoretically desirable an unusual form of dress may be, neither man nor woman has the courage to use it except with the concurrence of society or at the risk of being thought 'odd.' We do not even dare to follow comparatively recent customs. What bishop would now venture to walk down Piccadilly in a wig, or young squire to enter the Carlton wearing Hessian boots? It might be easier, indeed, to inaugurate than to resume a fashion in clothes, but whatever a woman may be found to do, a man must needs be exceptionally circumspect, indifferent, or uniquely secure in social esteem before he could safely show himself at the theatre in knickerbockers, however comfortable or becoming they may be. As it is, in cities he repudiates their chief excellence, and sometimes even uses artificial means to prevent his trousers 'bagging' at the knee, reserving the looser garment for the country and the field, though he would be glad to wear it in the streets. In some respects the man is a greater slave to fashion than the woman, who displays a variety in dress which is forbidden to him.

It is, however, in the cut and colour of their clothes rather than their convenience that women assert a greater liberty of choice. The very nomenclature of feminine raiment is bewildering to the ordinary masculine mind. I suppose that there are some who can interpret and attach an intelligible meaning to the description of a fashionable bride's dress which follows a full record of her marriage in the newspapers. They never mention that of the bridegroom, who is assumed to be conventionally habited in a way which needs no definition, but that of hers suggests an immediate qualifying appendix to the last impressive sentences in the marriage service which indicate the fit equipment of Christian wives in reference to the 'outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel.'

It is not, however, in any diversity of ornamentation or multitude of words used to define the several articles of visible female attire, that we chiefly recognise feminine subjection to the prevailing laws which regulate a woman's dress. It is rather seen in her persistent tolerance of what is manifestly inconvenient or hurtful. Though men do not wear high heels which impede progress and distort the sinews of the ankle and the foot, a glance into any shoemaker's window reveals that fashionable servility (common to both sexes) which leads them to cramp their toes and provide a continuous harvest for the corn-cutter. Men do not, however, sweep the streets, except with brooms, and no tailor displays patterns of male corsets, nor indeed (though some foolish dandies are said to lace) do I believe that any of my readers have ever even seen one. But the frankly unreserved exhibition of 'stays' in shops, and the inhuman outlines of the female figure shown in dressmakers' pictorial advertisements (which affect no concealment from the masculine eye) reveal an ignoring of vertebrate anatomy and a defiance of physiological demands which would rouse the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals to action if detected in the treatment of a colt, a lapdog, or a costermonger's ass. The only approximate parallel to this procedure which occurs to me now in the ordering of the brute creation may be seen in the use of bearing reins for horses, and the artificial enlargement of goose livers. But in one case the animal is said to be prevented from catching the driving-rein dangerously on the pole as he jerks his head up and down, and, in the other, painful restraint produces results which win toothsome approval by society. But the process is not felt to be imperatively fashionable among the geese themselves. And horses, if consulted, would probably object to any patterns of harness at all.

It may be admitted that much improvement has been made lately in the adaptation of dress, especially inner garments, to the changes of a capricious climate. Skill is shown in the fabrication of textures which ward off chills when worn next to the skin. Flannel, though warm to the touch, is found to be more suitable wear in hot weather than cool linen. And gentlemen (here indeed following the fashion of ladies) have discarded the stiff and cumbrous coverings to the neck worn by their grandfathers. It is true that some modern collars show a tendency to imitate the old-fashioned hard stock, but as a rule fashion permits men to move their heads about freely.

In the choice, or rather combination, of colours to be worn, there is, however (to the lovers of harmony), sore and evident need of perception. Many ladies seem to forget that the fit arrangement or juxtaposition of these is subject to laws as inflexible as any in nature. There is a balance in the contiguity of colours which so resents any displacement of their order as to produce an undefined, but unnatural, impression on the eye when it is disregarded. A divinely apt sequence and mingling of tints is displayed in the heavens themselves, but there are some who perversely dislocate those of the rainbow when they would put on glorious apparel. We may, indeed, see the teaching of nature in this respect, even in the dark. If any one of my lady readers (should I have been so fortunate as to have held her attention so far) will glance at the sun and then close her eyes, she will see lustrous changes and combinations, which might indicate the most becoming harmony in the choice of her coloured clothes, and be helped to avoid committing those chromatic offences which some insistent dressmakers would lead her to be unwittingly guilty of. None of them should be permitted to follow their trade without first (like signalmen) producing a certificate that they are not 'colour blind.'

In thinking about what is pleasant to the eye in the matter of dress, we must not forget the important part which 'symbolism' plays in the effect produced by colour. There are books and treatises which profess to teach us what each represents, but the law by which it operates is mysteriously obscure. Why should 'red' (if it be so) rather than 'green' offend a bull? Is there any latent meaning in military tints? In these days when every recruit is taught how to 'find cover,' that of the English soldier serves to make him most visible as a mark. Does the blue of the sea determine that of the sailor's jacket? Are black trappings and clothes best fitted to express the feelings of the Christian mourner? The modern display of flowers at a funeral would seem to be a protest against such a supposition. Certainly there can be no greater contrast than that between the stubborn conservatism of the undertaker, and the beauty of the wreaths which are piled upon the coffin.

I will not meddle with the vexed question of ecclesiastical vestments, but it is fair to remark that what has been contemptuously stigmatised as a love of 'millinery' on the part of some clergy might as justly be charged against the defender of a flag. That is only so many yards of bunting, and yet men die in heaps around it as a symbol of their honour. We may differ as to what the token means, or the truth of what it professes to represent, but in either case it is significant. To many the 'colours' of a creed are as precious as those of a regiment, and the ecclesiastic is as conscientiously determined in defending them as the most loyal soldier can be in guarding his.

CHARACTER NOTE.

THE NURSE.

'Il y a de méchantes qualités qui font de grands talents.'

PEG has an excellent situation. Her mistress has often said so herself. And *she* ought to know. 'Eighteen pounds a year and all found is a great deal more, George, than most people give their nurses. And there isn't anyone else who would put up with what I do from Margaret.'

There is no doubt at all that Peg has a passionate temper, and, at times, it is to be feared, a coarse tongue. She is short, sturdy, and eminently plebeian, with little, quick, black, flashing eyes. She is ignorant. The culture and polish of the Board School are not upon her. But when Nellie, her eldest charge, dares to doubt the statements Peg has made to Jack, *à propos* of the story of Alfred and the cakes, Peg chases Nellie round the table and boxes her ears. It will thus be seen that Peg is no fool.

Jacky is her especial care. Jacky is a gay soul of four. To say that Peg is proud of him would be but a miserable half-truth. She flings, as it were, Jacky's charms of mind and person in the face of the Abigails of less favoured infants. She steadily exhibits every day, during a constitutional walk, Jack's sturdy limbs and premature conversation to nurses whose charges have vastly inferior limbs and no conversation at all. It is unnecessary to add that Peg is exceedingly unpopular.

Jack is being ruinously spoilt. Mamma says so. Mamma, however, is not a person of strong character, and Peg is of very strong character. So Mamma cannot possibly help the spoiling. Peg indeed makes Jack obey *her*, but does not particularly impress on him to obey anyone else. She has been known, on rare occasions, to administer correction to him with a hand which is not of the lightest. But when Mamma punishes him Peg appears in the drawing-room trembling and white with rage, to announce that she will not stay to see the child ill-used. 'This day month, if you please,' and a torrent of abuse.

Of course it is not this day month. Mamma says, 'I told you she would come round, George. Margaret is perfectly wide awake, I assure you, and knows a good place when she has it.'

So Peg keeps the good place—and Jack.

One summer she takes him down to a country manor to stay with his cousins. Before the end of the first week she has quarrelled with all the manor servants—especially the nurses. When Jacky, with a gay smile and guileless mien, puts out the eyes of cousin Nora's doll and Nora weeps thereat, Peg is seen smacking that infant in a corner. This is too much for the manor. And it is certain if Jacky had not most inconveniently fallen ill, the manor spare bedroom would have been wanted for other occupants, and Peg and Jacky would have returned home three weeks too soon.

There is not much the matter with Jacky. Only a croupy cold. And Peg knows all about these croupy colds. She tries upon it many terrible and ignorant remedies. Will not hear of the doctor being sent for, and one night suddenly sends for him herself. And the doctor sends for Jacky's parents. Peg is at the doorway to meet Mamma—hysterically reproachful from the cab window. Peg is quite white, with an odd glitter in her little eyes, and does not lose her temper. Before Mamma has been revived by sherry in the dining-room Peg is back again with the boy. She has scarcely left him for a week. He has already lost his pretty plumpness and roundness—a mere shadow of a child even now, with nothing left of his old self except a capacity for laughing—what a weak laugh!—and an odd sense of humour in grim satire to his wasted body and the grave faces round him. Only Peg laughs back at him; Mamma wonders how she can have the heart. But then, of course, one cannot expect a servant to feel what one does one's self. It may be because Peg is, after all, merely hired (eighteen pounds a year and all found), and is no sort of relation to Jack, that she can hold him in her arms, talk to him, sing to him by the hour together; that she can do with little rest and hurried meals; that she is always alert, sturdy, and competent.

Mamma thinks it is a blessed thing that the lower classes are not sensitive like we are. It *is* a very blessed thing—for Jack.

Papa is worn out with grief and anxiety before the colour has left Peg's homely face.

Mamma is incompetent and hysterical from the first, and is soon forbidden the sick-room altogether.

It is melancholy to record that when this mandate is issued a gleam of satisfaction—not to say triumph—steals over Peg's resolute countenance.

'He's getting on nicely, doctor, now, isn't he?' she inquires of the bigwig from Harley Street a day or two later. 'He' is Jack, of course. The large and pompous physician looks down at her through his gold-rimmed eye-glasses, and gives her to understand, not ungently—for though she is only the nurse, he thinks she has some real affection for the child—that Jack is dying.

'Dying!' Peg flashes out full of defiance, 'Then what's the use of your chattering and worriting and upsetting the place like this, if that's all you can do for him? Dying! We'll see about that.'

From that moment she defies them all. The consulting physicians, the ordinary practitioner, the night-nurse from Guy's, death itself, perhaps. She never leaves the child. The shadow of the old Jacky lies all day long on a pillow in her lap; sometimes all night too. When it is past saying anything else it says her name. It has its head so turned that it can see her face. When she smiles down at it, the forlornest ghost of a smile answers her back. She has an influence over it that would be magical if it were not most natural that devotion should be repaid by devotion, even from the heart of a child.

The consulting physician says one day that if there is a hope for the boy, that hope lies in Peg's nursing. It is the first time he has admitted that there can be a hope at all. Peg's face shines with an odd light which, if she were not wholly plain and plebeian, would make her beautiful.

One day, when the shadow is lying in her lap as usual, the night-nurse puts a telegram into her hand. When she has read it she lays Jacky on the bed and goes away. For the first time she does not heed his feeble cry of her name.

She finds the father and mother, and, with the pink paper shaking in her hand, says that her brother is dying; that she must go away. Blood is thicker than water, after all. She has but a few passions, but those few are strong; and the dying brother is one of them.

The father, broken down by the wretchedness of the past weeks, implores her to stay and save Jacky. But she is unmoved. Her brother is dying, and she must go.

The mother, abjectly miserable, entreats and prays, and offers her money, and Peg turns upon her with a flash of scorn far too grand for her stout and homely person.

And when she goes back to Jacky, a wan ghost of a smile breaks through the tears on his face and he lifts a wizened hand to stroke her cheek, and says that it was bad to go away and she is not to go away any more.

And she does not.

Jacky gets better. It is as if Peg has fought with Death—as she would fight for Jacky with anything in this world or in any other world—and conquered. Jacky's case appears in the 'Lancet,' and the medical bigwigs shake their heads over it and are fairly puzzled. They have not the cue to the whole matter—which is Peg.

When Jacky is past a woman's care, Peg goes away. Papa and mamma don't spare expense, and give her a fivepound note as a parting present.

But she has another reward, wholly unsubstantial and satisfactory. In an undergraduate's rooms at Christ Church—an idle dog of an undergraduate by the way—amid a galaxy of dramatic beauty and in a terrible plush frame presented by herself there is a photo—of Peg.

And it is believed that the undergraduate, who is not in any other way remarkable for domestic virtue, actually writes to her.

PAGANS AT PLAY.

It is probable that few of us who are in the habit of attending pantomimes, circuses, race-meetings, or athletic sports, ever take the trouble to glance backwards in order to compare these modern spectacles, their conduct and arrangements, with their prototypes of two thousand years ago. One thing is certain—namely, that if a Roman who had witnessed the shows organised by Julius Cæsar or Nero could have the opportunity of assisting at even the most thrilling of our nineteenth-century entertainments, he would be terribly bored, and would go away loudly lamenting the decadence of modern pleasures and the squeamishness of modern pleasure-seekers. He would look back with regretful longing to the splendid realism of the colossal spectacles that took place annually under the Empire—the large sums that were spent, the blood that was shed, and the lives that were sacrificed, in order 'to make a Roman holiday.'

It was easy for an emperor to achieve popularity in pagan Rome. Not freedom, not reform, not education, but 'bread and games' were all that the people demanded, and perhaps in their hearts the games were held more necessary than the bread. The crimes of Nero and Caligula did not prevent them from being the idols of the mob, owing to their genius for inventing new sensations and organising magnificent entertainments; while all the virtues of Marcus Aurelius scarcely won him forgiveness for the foolish humaneness shown by his desire that the gladiators should fight with blunted swords, and that a net should be placed beneath the rope-dancers. The most avaricious of the emperors poured out money like water upon the public spectacles, knowing well that the people would stand no reductions in the sums devoted to that department.

Under the Republic there were seven performances annually, lasting in all about sixty-six days. These were paid for by the State, and usually cost a couple of thousand pounds of our money. Sometimes, however, games were given by some public-spirited individual who desired to gain popularity, or by sorrowing mourners at the funeral of friends or relations. Under the Empire the time occupied by these spectacles was increased to a hundred and seventy-three days annually, and even more, while the cost of a brilliant show rose to seven or eight thousand pounds. The games, which usually began at sunrise and lasted till sunset, consisted of three distinct kinds: *i.e.* horse-and-chariot races, combats between gladiators, and combats between men and wild beasts; but into these many variations were introduced. The gladiators were, for the most part, criminals or prisoners of war; but a certain number of volunteers took part—patricians, and even emperors, occasionally appearing in the lists. After a time schools for gladiators were established in Rome, and the champions were exalted into public idols. Their *bonnes fortunes* were proverbial, their praises were sung by the poets, and their portraits appeared upon lamps and vases. The condemned criminals did not invariably meet their death in the arena. If they survived three years of fighting with men and beasts, they were released from their gladiatorial duties, while five years spent in the profession gave them their freedom.

The performances were advertised by means of *affiches* pasted on walls or buildings. On one of these placards, discovered at Pompeii, it is announced that shelter will be provided for the spectators in case of rain; in another that the arena will be well watered, in order that the dust may be laid. The night before the spectacle began a great banquet was given to the gladiators, presumably the volunteers or hired champions. At daybreak these heroes marched in procession to the amphitheatre, and after the signal had been given by a blast of trumpets, the fun began. The emperor and public officers attended in state, great ceremony was observed, and the citizens were expected to appear in their best attire. In rainy weather a mantle might be worn over the toga on condition that it was removed when the grandees arrived. In the intervals slaves staggered round laden with huge baskets of provisions, which were distributed gratuitously, while fruit, nuts, and small presents were scattered among the crowd by wealthy patricians.

The performance usually opened with horse-and-chariot races. The chariots were drawn by only two or three horses if the driver were a novice, and by six or eight if he were an accomplished whip. Each course lasted not less than half-an-hour, and was fourteen times round the lists. Race-horses were the objects of the most enthusiastic admiration, and their names and pedigrees were in everybody's mouth. Sometimes their hoofs were gilded;

while we read of one who was fed on almonds and raisins instead of hay and corn—an unsatisfying as well as indigestible regimen one would be inclined to think. Caligula owned a famous horse, to which he was so passionately attached that he built him a marble stable with an ivory manger, gave him purple harness with pearl collars, a gold vase for his oats, and a gold cup for his wine, and even went so far as to invite him to dinner at his own table. The night before the animal was to appear in the arena, the emperor ordered that perfect quiet should be preserved in the neighbourhood of his stable, in order that he might sleep undisturbed.

After the races came the gladiatorial contests. The prisoners of war, who were usually the chief combatants, came from all parts of the known world, and the variety of their costumes, arms, and methods of fighting gave additional interest to the scene. There were the men of Thrace with little round shields, the Samnites with large square shields, the Bretons with their chariots, and the Gauls laden with heavy armour. The gladiators fought sometimes in pairs, sometimes in troops of thirty on a side; but occasionally grand battles took place, in which thousands took part, and at the end of which the ground was covered with corpses. When a champion fell disabled he held up his finger to ask his life of the spectators. If these were in a merciful mood they, too, held up a finger; if not, they turned their thumbs down, and, according to contemporary writers, the ladies were usually the first to give the signal of death. Any symptom of fear on the part of a gladiator roused the fiercest wrath of the assembled multitudes, and the timid or hesitating were encouraged with whips and red-hot irons.

During the pauses for rest and refreshment, fresh sand was sprinkled on the blood-stained arena, and the dead were carried out by men wearing the mask of Mercury. Other officials, under the disguise of the Etruscan demon Charon, brought hot irons, with which they made sure that the apparent corpses were really dead, and not shirking. Biers were in readiness to carry the bodies to the mortuary chamber; and here, if a spark of life was found yet lingering in any poor mangled wretch, he was promptly put out of his misery.

New effects had constantly to be devised in order to stimulate the interest of the people, who became sated with blood and horrors. Combats by lamplight were organised, as well as contests between dwarfs and even women, but the latter were soon forbidden. The introduction of wild beasts into the arena added a fresh sensation to the public games. The first animal combat took place in the year B.C. 186. Bulls, bears, stags, and many other beasts, exotic or home-bred, fought together or with men, who were called *bestiares*. A hundred years later rarer creatures were introduced, such as crocodiles, hippopotami, rhinoceroses, and even the giraffe. The appearance of such animals says much for the cleverness of the hunters employed to cater for the Roman spectacles, since from gladiatorial days down to the early part of the present century no giraffes or hippopotami were brought to Europe owing to the extreme difficulty of capturing them alive.

At the *fête* of a hundred days given by Titus in the year 80, five thousand savage beasts of various kinds were shown in one day, and at the spectacle given by Trajan, which lasted four months, no less than eleven thousand animals were exhibited. Never was there such a splendid opportunity for the naturalist and the anatomist. The imperial menageries were, as might be expected, extraordinarily rich in rare creatures, and would quite have thrown our modern Zoological Gardens into the shade. The cost of the keep of so many carnivorous animals was enormous, and Caligula, in time of dearth, seriously considered the advisability of using criminals as fodder for his savage pets. The necessities of transport gave a wonderful stimulus to certain trades. The smiths and carpenters were kept hard at work making strong cages, while innumerable traps and lassoes had to be provided for the hunters who were employed in all parts of the world to take ferocious beasts alive. In spite of anxious care and vast expense, many were the disappointments caused by the non-arrival of eagerly expected living cargoes, owing to storms and contrary winds. During the long voyages, and the interminable journeys overland, when the heavy cages were dragged by slow bullocks, many of the animals died, and others arrived in so pitiable a plight that they were quite incapable of 'showing fight.'

The animals were usually introduced into the arena ornamented with variegated scarves, metal plaques, gold leaf, and tinsel. They were also painted in gaudy colours. Bulls were painted white, sheep purple, ostriches vermilion, and the lions had their manes gilded. The creatures were excited to fight by means of whips and darts, and sometimes two of different species were tied together, until, frantic with rage, they tore each other to pieces. Curious and unnatural contests were arranged, buffaloes being set to fight with bears, lions with giraffes, and tigers with rhinoceroses. *Chasseurs*, with English or Scotch hounds, fought the most savage beasts, and a distinguished champion could kill a bear with a blow of his fist, or vanquish a lion after blinding him by throwing a cloth over his eyes.

The Roman animal trainers must have been men of extraordinary genius, and would certainly have put our modern trainers to the blush. We hear of Julius Cæsar being lighted to his house by elephants carrying torches in their trunks, and Mark Antony being drawn through the streets by lions harnessed to his chariot. Unwieldy bulls learnt to walk on their hind-legs, stags were trained to obey the bit, and panthers to bear the yoke. Peaceable antelopes were taught to fight with their horns, and fierce lions were rendered as docile as dogs. In one of the spectacles given by Domitian a performing lion carried hares into the arena in his mouth without hurting them, let them go, and caught them again. Elephants wrote Latin verses, and danced on the tight-rope. Pliny tells of one of these animals who learnt less quickly than its fellows, and being anxious, presumably, to catch them up, or to escape punishment, was discovered rehearsing its lesson in the middle of the night.

Far more horrible and demoralising than the combats were the wholesale executions of prisoners, who were bound to posts in the middle of the arena, and devoured by the beasts that were let loose upon them. Sometimes the poor creatures were provided with arms, which only served to prolong their agonies for a few moments. In the year 47 multitudes of Breton prisoners were massacred in this fashion at Rome, while at the conclusion of the Jewish war 2,500 Jewish prisoners perished at Cæsarea during the public games. Pantomimes and *tableaux vivants* were terribly realistic entertainments under the Empire. Criminals appeared dressed in magnificent garments, from which flames suddenly burst forth and consumed the wearers. Ixion was shown on his wheel, and Mucius Scævola holding his hand in a brazier until it was reduced to ashes. Another poor wretch was supposed to represent Orpheus. He played upon the lute, and all nature seemed subjugated by his performance. Trees bowed down to listen to him, timid animals followed him, and birds perched on his head. Just as the spectators were beginning to weary of this innocent amusement, a bear rushed out, and being presumably insensible to the charms of music, devoured the unfortunate minstrel, amid general applause.

The first occasion on which the amphitheatre was flooded and a naval combat represented was at one of the triumphs of Julius Cæsar. A second, on a larger scale, was given by Augustus in the year 2 B.C., when a sea-fight between the Athenians and the Persians was acted by thirty battle-ships, equipped with 3,000 men. But this was far eclipsed by a naval battle given by Claudius in celebration of the completion of the canal which was intended to carry the waters of Lake Celano across a neighbouring mountain. Two enormous fleets, one supposed to be Sicilian, the other Rhodian, appeared on the lake, armed with 19,000 men. The banks of the lake and the hills in the neighbourhood were covered with immense crowds of spectators, who had come from all parts of the country. The combatants, though criminals, fought bravely, but as the ships were surrounded by rafts guarded by cohorts, there was no chance of escape. When the time came for the waters to be drawn off it was found that the channel of the canal was not deep enough, the work had to be continued, and the undertaking was not finally completed until many years later, when another gladiatorial contest took place. At one of the naval combats organised by Nero fish and marine monsters were introduced, while Titus had horses, bulls, and other animals trained to perform their circus exercises in the water.

The rise of Christianity, with its doctrines of the sanctity of human life and the universal brotherhood of men, gradually put an end to these barbarous spectacles, and now the vast ruins of the public spectacles are the only relics still remaining to us of the pastimes of pagan Rome.

WITH EDGED TOOLS.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

NO COMPROMISE.

Where he fixed his heart he set his hand
To do the thing he willed.

'My dear Sir John,—It is useless my pretending to ignore your views respecting Jack's marriage to Millicent; and I therefore take up my pen with regret to inform you that the two young people have now decided to make public their engagement. Moreover, I imagine it is their intention to get married very soon. You and I have been friends through a longer spell of years than many lives and most friendships extend, and at the risk of being considered inconsequent I must pause to thank you—well—to thank you for having been so true a friend to me all through my life. If that life were given to me to begin again, I should like to retrace the years back to a point when—little more than a child—I yielded to influence and made a great mistake. I should like to begin my life over again from there. When you first signified your disapproval of Millicent as a wife for Jack, I confess I was a little nettled; but on the strength of the friendship to which I have referred I must ask you to believe that never from the moment that I learnt your opinion have I by thought or action gone counter to it. This marriage is none of my doing. Jack is too good for her—I see that now. You are wiser than I—you always have been. If any word of mine can alleviate your distress at this unwelcome event, let it be that I am certain that Millicent has the right feeling for your boy; and from this knowledge I cannot but gather great hopes. All may yet come to your satisfaction. Millicent is young, and perhaps a little volatile, but Jack inherits your strength of character; he may mould her to better things than either you or I dream of. I hope sincerely that it may be so. If I have appeared passive in this matter it is not because I have been indifferent; but I know that my yea or nay could carry no weight.

'Your old friend,
'Caroline Cantourne.'

This letter reached Sir John Meredith while he was waiting for the announcement that dinner was ready. The announcement arrived immediately afterwards, but he did not go down to dinner until he had read the letter. He fumbled for his newly-purchased eyeglasses, because Lady Cantourne's handwriting was thin and spidery, as became a lady of standing; also the gas was so d——d bad. He used this expression somewhat freely, and usually put a 'Sir' after it as his father had done before him.

His eyes grew rather fierce as he read: then they suddenly softened, and he threw back his shoulders as he had done a thousand times on the threshold of Lady Cantourne's drawing-room. He read the whole letter very carefully and gravely, as if all that the writer had to say was worthy of his most respectful attention. Then he folded the paper and placed it in the breast pocket of his coat. He looked a little bowed and strangely old, as he stood for a moment on the hearthrug thinking. It was his practice to stand thus on the hearthrug from the time that he entered the drawing-room, dressed, until the announcement of dinner; and the cook far below in the basement was conscious of the attitude of the master as the pointer of the clock approached the hour.

Of late Sir John had felt a singular desire to sit down whenever opportunity should offer; but he had always been found standing on the hearthrug by the butler, and, hard old aristocrat that he was, he would not yield to the somewhat angular blandishments of the stiff-backed chair.

He stood for a few moments with his back to the smouldering fire, and, being quite alone, he perhaps forgot to stiffen his neck; for his head drooped, his lips were unsteady. He was a very old man.

A few minutes later, when he strode into the dining-room where butler and footman awaited him. he was erect, imperturbable, impenetrable.

At dinner it was evident that his keen brain was hard at work. He forgot one or two of the formalities which were religiously observed at that solitary table. He hastened over his wine, and then he went to the library. There he wrote a telegram, slowly, in his firm ornamental handwriting.

It was addressed to 'Gordon, Loango,' and the gist of it was—'Wire whereabouts of Oscard—when he may be expected home.'

The footman was despatched in a hansom cab, with instructions to take the telegram to the head office of the Submarine Telegraph Company, and there to arrange prepayment of the reply.

'I rather expect Mr. Meredith,' said Sir John to the butler, who was trimming the library lamp while the footman received his instructions. 'Do not bring coffee until he comes.'

And Sir John was right. At half-past eight Jack arrived. Sir John was awaiting him in the library, grimly sitting in his high-backed chair, as carefully dressed as for a great reception.

He rose when his son entered the room, and they shook hands. There was a certain air of concentration about both, as if they each intended to say more than they had ever said before. The coffee was duly brought. This was a revival of an old custom. In bygone days Jack had frequently come in thus, and they had taken coffee before going together in Sir John's carriage to one of the great social functions at which their presence was almost a necessity. Jack had always poured out the coffee—to-night he did not offer to do so.

'I came,' he said suddenly, 'to give you a piece of news which I am afraid will not be very welcome.'

Sir John bowed his head gravely.

'You need not temper it,' he said, 'to me.'

'Millicent and I have decided to make our engagement known,' retorted Jack at once.

Sir John bowed again. To anyone but his son his suave acquiescence would have been maddening.

'I should have liked,' continued Jack, 'to have done it with your consent.'

Sir John winced. He sat upright in his chair and threw back his shoulders. If Jack intended to continue in this way, there would be difficulties to face. Father and son were equally determined. Jack had proved too cunning a pupil. The old aristocrat's own lessons were being turned against him, and the younger man has, as it were, the light of the future shining upon his game in such a case as this, while the elder plays in the gathering gloom.

'You know,' said Sir John gravely, 'that I am not much given to altering my opinions. I do not say that they are of any value; but such as they are, I usually hold to them. When you did me the honour of mentioning this matter to me last year, I gave you my opinion.'

'And it has in no way altered?'

'In no way. I have found no reason to alter it.'

'Can you modify it?' asked Jack gently.

'No.'

'Not in any degree?'

Jack drew a deep breath.

'No.'

He emitted the breath slowly, making an effort so that it did not take the form of a sigh.

'Will you, at all events, give me your reasons?' he asked. 'I am not a child.'

Sir John fumbled at his lips—he glanced sharply at his son.

'I think,' he said, 'that it would be advisable not to ask them.'

'I should like to know why you object to my marrying Millicent,' persisted Jack.

'Simply because I know a bad woman when I see her,' retorted Sir John deliberately.

Jack raised his eyebrows. He glanced towards the door, as if contemplating leaving the room without further ado. But he sat quite still. It was wonderful how little it hurt him. It was more—it was significant. Sir John, who was watching, saw the glance and guessed the meaning of it. An iron self-control had been the first thing he had taught Jack—years before, when he was in his first knickerbockers. The lesson had not been forgotten.

'I am sorry you have said that,' said the son.

'Just,' continued the father, 'as I know a good one.'

He paused, and they were both thinking of the same woman—Jocelyn Gordon.

Sir John had said his say about Millicent Chyne; and his son knew that that was the last word. She was a bad woman. From that point he would never move.

'I think,' said Jack, 'that it is useless discussing that point any longer.'

'Quite. When do you intend getting married?'

'As soon as possible.'

'A mere question for the dressmaker?' suggested Sir John suavely.

‘Yes.’

Sir John nodded gravely.

‘Well,’ he said, ‘you are, as you say, no longer a child—perhaps I forget that sometimes. If I do, I must ask you to forgive me. I will not attempt to dissuade you. You probably know your own affairs best——’

He paused, drawing his two hands slowly back on his knees, looking into the fire as if his life was written there.

‘At all events,’ he continued, ‘it has the initial recommendation of a good motive. I imagine it is what is called a love-match. I don't know much about such matters. Your mother, my lamented wife, was an excellent woman—too excellent, I take it, to be able to inspire the feeling in a mere human being.—Perhaps the angels . . . she never inspired it in me, at all events. My own life has not been quite a success within this room; outside it has been brilliant, active, full of excitement. Engineers know of machines which will stay upright so long as the pace is kept up; some of us are like that. I am not complaining. I have had no worse a time than my neighbours, except that it has lasted longer.’

He leant back suddenly in his chair with a strange little laugh. Jack was leaning forward, listening with that respect which he always accorded to his father.

‘I imagine,’ went on Sir John, ‘that the novelists and poets are not very far wrong. It seems that there is such a thing as a humdrum happiness in marriage. I have seen quite elderly people who seemed still to take pleasure in each other's society. With the example of my own life before me, I wanted yours to be different. My motive was not entirely bad. But perhaps you know your own affairs best. What money have you?’

Jack moved uneasily in his chair.

‘I have completed the sale of the last consignment of Simiacine,’ he began categorically. ‘The demand for it has increased. We have now sold two hundred thousand pounds worth in England and America. My share is about sixty thousand pounds. I have invested most of that sum, and my present income is a little over two thousand a year.’

Sir John nodded gravely.

‘I congratulate you,’ he said; ‘you have done wonderfully well. It is satisfactory in one way, in that it shows that, if a gentleman chooses to go into these commercial affairs, he can do as well as the *bourgeoisie.* It leads one to believe that English gentlemen are not degenerating so rapidly as I am told the evening Radical newspapers demonstrate for the trifling consideration of one halfpenny. But'—he paused with an expressive gesture of the hand—'I should have preferred that this interesting truth had been proved by the son of someone else.'

'I think,' replied Jack, 'that our speculation hardly comes under the category of commerce. It was not money that was at risk, but our own lives.'

Sir John's eyes hardened.

'Adventure,' he suggested rather indistinctly, 'travel and adventure. There is a class of men one meets frequently who do a little exploring and a great deal of talking. *Faute de mieux,* they do not hesitate to interest one in the special pill to which they resort when indisposed, and they are not above advertising a soap. You are not going to write a book, I trust?'

'No. It would hardly serve our purpose to write a book.'

'In what way?' inquired Sir John.

'Our purpose is to conceal the whereabouts of the Simiacine Plateau.'

'But you are not going back there?' exclaimed Sir John unguardedly.

'We certainly do not intend to abandon it.'

Sir John leant forward again with his two hands open on his knees, thinking deeply.

'A married man,' he said, 'could hardly reconcile it with his conscience to undertake such a perilous expedition.'

'No,' replied Jack with quiet significance.

Sir John gave a forced laugh.

'I see,' he said, 'that you have outwitted me. If I do not give my consent to your marriage without further delay, you will go back to Africa.'

Jack bowed his head gravely.

There was a long silence, while the two men sat side by side, gazing into the fire.

'I cannot afford to do that,' said the father at length; 'I am getting too old to indulge in the luxury of pride. I will attend your marriage. I will smile and say pretty things to the bridesmaids. Before the world I will consent under the condition that the ceremony does not take place before two months from this date.'

'I agree to that,' put in Jack.

Sir John rose and stood on the hearthrug, looking down from his great height upon his son.

'But,' he continued, 'between us let it be understood that I move in no degree from my original position. I object to Millicent Chyne as your wife. But I bow to the force of circumstances. I admit that you have a perfect right to marry whom you choose—in two months' time.'

So Jack took his leave.

'In two months' time,' repeated Sir John, when he was alone, with one of his twisted, cynic smiles, 'in two months' time—*qui vivra verra*.'

CHAPTER XXXVII.

FOUL PLAY.

Oh, fairest of creation, last and best
Of all God's works!

For one or two days after the public announcement of her engagement Millicent was not quite free from care. She rather dreaded the posts. It was not that she feared one letter in particular, but the postman's disquietingly urgent rap caused her a vague uneasiness many times a day.

Sir John's reply to her appealing little letter came short and sharp. She showed it to no one.

'My dear Miss Chyne,—I hasten to reply to your kind letter of to-day announcing your approaching marriage with my son. There are a certain number of trinkets which have always been handed on from generation to generation. I will at once have these cleaned by the jeweller, in order that they may be presented to you immediately after the ceremony. Allow me to urge upon you the advisability of drawing up and signing a pre-nuptial marriage settlement.

'Yours sincerely,
'John Meredith.'

Millicent bit her pretty lip when she perused this note. She made two comments, at a considerable interval of time.

'Stupid old thing!' was the first; and then, after a pause, 'I *hope* they are all diamonds.'

Close upon the heels of this letter followed a host of others. There was the gushing, fervent letter of the friend whose joy was not marred by the knowledge that a wedding present must necessarily follow. Those among one's friends who are not called upon to offer a more substantial token of joy than a letter are always the most keenly pleased to hear the news of an engagement. There was the sober sheet (crossed) from the elderly relative living in the country, who, never having been married herself, takes the opportunity of giving four pages of advice to one about to enter that parlous state. There was the fatherly letter from the country rector who christened Millicent, and thinks that he may be asked to marry her in a fashionable London church—and so to a bishopric. On heavily-crested stationery follow the missives of the ladies whose daughters would make sweet bridesmaids. Also the hearty congratulations of the slight acquaintance who is going to Egypt for the winter, and being desirous of letting her house without having to pay one of those horrid agents, 'sees no harm in mentioning it.' The house being most singularly suitable for a young married couple. Besides these, the thousand and one who wished to be invited to the wedding in order to taste cake and champagne at the time, and thereafter the sweeter glory of seeing their names in the fashionable news.

All these Millicent read with little interest, and answered in that conveniently large caligraphy which made three lines look like a note and magnified a note into a four-page letter. The dressmakers' circulars—the tradesmen's illustrated catalogues of things she could not possibly want, and the jewellers' delicate photographs interested her a thousand times more. But even these did not satisfy her. All these people were glad—most of them were delighted. Millicent wanted to hear from those who were not delighted, nor even pleased, but in despair. She wanted to hear more of the broken-hearts. But somehow the broken-hearts were silent. Could it be that they did not care? Could it be that *they* were only flirting? She dismissed these silly questions with the promptness which they deserved. It was useless to think of it in that way—more useless, perhaps, than she suspected; for she was not deep enough, nor observant enough, to know that the broken-hearts in question had been much more influenced by the suspicion that she cared for them than by the thought that they cared for her. She did not know the lamentable, vulgar fact that any woman can be a flirt if she only degrade her womanhood to flattery. Men do not want to love so much as to be loved. Such is, moreover, their sublime vanity that they are ready to believe any one who tells them, however subtly—mesdames, you cannot be too subtle for a man's vanity to find your meaning—that they are not as other men.

To the commonplace observer it would, therefore, appear (erroneously, no doubt) that the broken-hearts, having been practically assured that Millicent Chyne did not care for them, promptly made the discovery that the lack of feeling was reciprocal. But Millicent did not, of course, adopt this theory. She knew better. She only wondered why several young men did not communicate, and she was slightly uneasy lest in their anger they should do or say something indiscreet.

There was no reason why the young people should wait. And when there is no reason why the young people should wait, there is every reason why they should not do so. Thus it came about that in a week or so Millicent was engaged in the happiest pursuit of her life. She was buying clothes without a thought of money. The full joy of the trousseau was hers. The wives of her guardians having been morally bought, dirt cheap, at the price of an anticipatory invitation to the wedding, those elderly gentlemen were with little difficulty won over to a pretty little femininely vague scheme of withdrawing just a little of the capital—said capital to be spent in the purchase of a really *good* trousseau, you know. The word 'good' emanating from such a source must, of course, be read as 'novel,' which in some circles means the same thing.

Millicent entered into the thing in the right spirit. Whatever the future might hold for her—and she trusted that it might be full of millinery—she was determined to enjoy the living present to its utmost. Her life at this time was a whirl of excitement—excitement of the keenest order—namely, trying on.

'You do not know what it is,' she said, with a happy little sigh, to those among her friends who probably never would, 'to stand the whole day long being pinned into linings by Madame Videpoche.'

And, despite the sigh, she did it with an angelic sweetness of temper which quite touched the heart of Madame Videpoche, while making no difference in the bill.

Lady Cantourne would not have been human had she assumed the neutral in this important matter. She frankly enjoyed it all immensely.

'You know, Sir John,' she said in confidence to him one day at Hurlingham, 'I have always dressed Millicent.'

'You need not tell me that,' he interrupted gracefully. '*On ne peut s'y tromper.*'

'And,' she went on almost apologetically, 'whatever my own feelings on the subject may be, I cannot abandon her now. The world expects much from Millicent Chyne. I have taught it to do so. It will expect more from Millicent—Meredith.'

The old gentleman bowed in his formal way.

'And the world must not be disappointed,' he suggested cynically.

'No,' she answered with an energetic little nod, 'it must not. That is the way to manage the world. Give it what it expects; and just a little more to keep its attention fixed.'

Sir John tapped with his gloved finger pensively on the knob of his silver-mounted cane.

'And may I ask your ladyship,' he inquired suavely, 'what the world expects of me?'

He knew her well enough to know that she never made use of the method epigrammatic without good reason.

'A diamond crescent,' she answered stoutly. 'The fashion papers must be able to write about the gift of the bridegroom's father.'

'Ah—and they prefer a diamond crescent?'

'Yes,' answered Lady Cantourne. 'That always seems to satisfy them.'

He bowed gravely and continued to watch the polo with that marvellously youthful interest which was his.

'Does the world expect anything else?' he asked presently.

'No, I think not,' replied Lady Cantourne, with a bright little absent smile. 'Not just now.'

'Will you tell me if it does?'

He had risen; for there were other great ladies on the ground to whom he must pay his old-fashioned respects.

'Certainly,' she answered, looking up at him.

'I should deem it a favour,' he continued. 'If the world does not get what it expects, I imagine it will begin to inquire why; and if it cannot find reasons it will make them.'

In due course the diamond crescent arrived.

'It is rather nice of the old thing,' was Millicent's comment.

She held the jewel at various angles in various lights. There was no doubt that this was the handsomest present she had received—sent direct from the jeweller's shop with an uncompromising card inside the case. She never saw the irony of it; but Sir John had probably not expected that she would. He enjoyed it alone—as he enjoyed or endured most things.

Lady Cantourne examined it with some curiosity.

'I have never seen such beautiful diamonds,' she said simply.

There were other presents to be opened and examined. For the invitations had not been sent out, and many were willing to pay handsomely for the privilege of being mentioned among the guests. It is, one finds, after the invitations have been issued that the presents begin to fall off.

But on this particular morning the other presents fell on barren ground. Millicent only half-heeded them. She could not lay the diamond crescent finally aside. Some people have the power of imparting a little piece of their individuality to their letters, and even to a commonplace gift. Sir John was beginning to have this power over Millicent. She was rapidly falling into a stupid habit of feeling uneasy whenever she thought of him. She was vaguely alarmed at his uncompromising adherence to the position he had assumed. She had never failed yet to work her will with men—young and old—by a pretty persistence, a steady flattery, a subtle pleading manner. But Sir John had met all her wiles with his adamantine smile. He would not openly declare himself an enemy—which she argued to herself would have been much nicer of him. He was merely a friend of her aunt's, and from that contemplative position he never stepped down. She could not quite make out what he was 'driving at,' as she herself put it. He never found fault, but she knew that his disapproval of her was the result of long and careful study. Perhaps in her heart—despite all her contradictory arguments—she knew that he was right.

'I wonder,' she said half-aloud, taking up the crescent again, 'why he sent it to me?'

Lady Cantourne, who was writing letters at a terrible rate, glanced sharply up. She was beginning to be aware of Millicent's unspoken fear of Sir John. Moreover, she was clever enough to connect it with her niece's daily increasing love for the man who was soon to be her husband.

'Well,' she answered, 'I should be rather suprised if he gave you nothing.'

There was a little pause, only broken by the scratching of Lady Cantourne's quill pen.

'Auntie!' exclaimed the girl suddenly, 'why does he hate me? You have known him all your life—you must know why he hates me so.'

Lady Cantourne shrugged her shoulders.

'I suppose,' went on Millicent with singular heat, 'that some one has been telling him things about me—horrid things—false things—that I am a flirt, or something like that. I am sure I'm not.'

Lady Cantourne was addressing an envelope, and did not make any reply.

'Has he said anything to you, Aunt Caroline?' asked Millicent in an aggrieved voice.

Lady Cantourne laid aside her letter.

'No,' she answered slowly, 'but I suppose there are things which he does not understand.'

'Things?'

Her ladyship looked up steadily.

'Guy Oscard, for instance,' she said; 'I don't quite understand Guy Oscard, Millicent.'

The girl turned away impatiently. She was keenly alive to the advantage of turning her face away. For in her pocket she had at that moment a letter from Guy Oscard—the last relic of the old excitement which was so dear to her, and which she was already beginning to miss. Joseph had posted this letter in Msala nearly two months before. It had travelled down from the Simiacine Plateau with others, in a parcel beneath the mattress of Jack Meredith's litter. It was a letter written in good faith by an honest, devoted man to the woman whom he looked upon already as almost his wife—a letter which no man need have been ashamed of writing, but which a woman ought not to have read unless she intended to be the writer's wife.

Millicent had read this letter more than once. She liked it because it was evidently sincere. The man's heart could be heard beating in every line of it. Moreover, she had made inquiries that very morning at the post-office about the African mail. She wanted the excitement of another letter like that.

'Oh, Guy Oscard!' she replied innocently to Lady Cantourne; 'that was nothing.'

Lady Cantourne kept silence, and presently she returned to her letters.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE ACCURSED CAMP.

Here—judge if hell, with all its power to damn,
Can add one curse to the foul thing I am——

There are some places in the world where a curse seems to brood in the atmosphere. Msala was one of these. Perhaps these places are accursed by the deeds that have been done there. Who can tell?

Could the trees—the two gigantic palms that stood by the river's edge—could these have spoken, they might perhaps have told the tale of this little inland station in that country where, as the founder of the hamlet was in the habit of saying, no one knows what is going on.

All went well with the retreating column until they were almost in sight of Msala, when the flotilla was attacked by no fewer than three hippopotamuses. One canoe was sunk, and four others were so badly damaged that they could not be kept afloat with their proper complement of men. There was nothing for it but to establish a camp at Msala, and wait there until the builders had repaired the damaged canoes.

The walls of Durnovo's house were still standing, and here Guy Oscard established himself with as much comfort as circumstances allowed. He caused a temporary roof of palm-leaves to be laid on the charred beams, and within the principal room—the very room where the three organisers of the great Simiacine scheme had first laid their plans—he set up his simple camp furniture.

Oscard was too great a traveller, too experienced a wanderer, to be put out of temper by this enforced rest. The men had worked very well hitherto. It had, in its way, been a great feat of generalship, this leading through a wild country of men unprepared for travel, scantily provisioned, disorganised by recent events. No accident had happened, no serious delay had been incurred, although the rate of progress had necessarily been very slow. Nearly six weeks had elapsed since Oscard with his little following had turned their backs for ever on the Simiacine Plateau. But now the period of acute danger had passed away. They had almost reached civilisation. Oscard was content.

When Oscard was content he smoked a slower pipe than usual —watching each cloud of smoke vanish into thin air. He was smoking very slowly, this, the third evening of their encampment at Msala. There had been heavy rain during the day, and the whole lifeless forest was dripping with a continuous, ceaseless clatter of heavy drops on tropic foliage; with a united sound like a widespread whisper.

Oscard was sitting in the windowless room without a light, for a light only attracted a myriad of heavy-winged moths. He was seated before the long French window, which, since the sash had gone, had been used as a door. Before him in the glimmering light of the mystic Southern Cross the great river crept unctuously, silently to the sea. It seemed to be stealing away surreptitiously while the forest whispered of it. On its surface the reflection of the great stars of the southern hemisphere ran into little streaks of silver, shimmering away into darkness.

All sound of human life was still. The natives were asleep. In the next room, Joseph in his hammock was just on the barrier between the waking and the sleeping life—as soldiers learn to be. Oscard would not have needed to raise his voice to call him to his side.

The leader of this hurried retreat had been sitting there for two hours. The slimy moving surface of the river had entered into his brain; the restless silence of the African forest alone kept him awake. He hardly realised that the sound momentarily gaining strength within his ears was that of a paddle—a single, weakly, irregular paddle. It was not a sound to wake a sleeping man. It came so slowly, so gently through the whisper of the dripping leaves that it would enter into his slumbers and make itself part of them.

Guy Oscard only realised the meaning of that sound when a black shadow crept on to the smooth evenness of the river's breast. Oscard was eminently a man of action. In a moment he was on his feet, and in the darkness of the room there was the gleam of a rifle-barrel. He came back to the window—watching.

He saw the canoe approach the bank. He heard the thud of the paddle as it was thrown upon the ground. In the gloom, to which his eyes were accustomed, he saw a man step from the boat to the shore and draw the canoe up. The silent midnight visitor then turned and walked up towards the house. There was something familiar in the gait—the legs were slightly bowed. The man was walking with great difficulty, staggering a little at each step. He seemed to be in great pain.

Guy Oscard laid aside the rifle. He stepped forward to the open window.

'Is that you, Durnovo?' he said without raising his voice.

'Yes,' replied the other. His voice was muffled, as if his tongue was swollen, and there was a startling break in it.

Oscard stepped aside, and Durnovo passed into his own house.

'Got a light?' he said in the same muffled way.

In the next room Joseph could be heard striking a match, and a moment later he entered the room, throwing a flood of light before him.

'*Good God!*' cried Guy Oscard. He stepped back as if he had been struck, with his hand shielding his eyes.

'Save us!' ejaculated Joseph in the same breath.

The thing that stood there—sickening their gaze—was not a human being at all. Take a man's eyelids away, leaving the round balls staring, blood-streaked; cut away his lips, leaving the grinning teeth and red gums; shear off his ears—that which is left is not a man at all. This had been done to Victor Durnovo. Truly the vengeance of man is crueller than the vengeance of God!

Could he have seen himself, Victor Durnovo would never have shown that face—or what remained of it—to a human being. He could only have killed himself. Who can tell what cruelties had been paid for, piece by piece, in this loathsome mutilation? The slaves had wreaked their terrible vengeance; but the greatest, the deepest, the most inhuman cruelty was in letting him go.

'They've made a pretty mess of me,' said Durnovo in a sickening, lifeless voice—and he stood there, with a terrible caricature of a grin.

Joseph set down the lamp with a groan, and went back into the dark room beyond, where he cast himself upon the ground and buried his face in his hands.

'Oh, Lord!' he muttered. 'Oh, God in heaven—kill it, kill it!'

Guy Oscard never attempted to run away from it. He stood slowly gulping down his nauseating horror. His teeth were clenched; his face, through the sunburn, livid; the blue of his eyes seemed to have faded into an ashen grey. The sight he was looking on would have sent three men out of five into gibbering idiocy.

Then at last he moved forward. With averted eyes he took Durnovo by the arm.

'Come,' he said, 'lie down upon my bed. I will try and help you. Can you take some food?'

Durnovo threw himself down heavily on the bed. There was a punishment sufficient to expiate all his sins in the effort he saw that Guy Oscard had had to make before he touched him. He turned his face away.

'I haven't eaten anything for twenty-four hours,' he said with a whistling intonation.

'Joseph,' said Oscard, returning to the door of the inner room—his voice sounded different, there was a metallic ring in it—'get something for Mr. Durnovo—some soup or something.'

Joseph obeyed, shaking as if ague were in his bones.

Oscard administered the soup. He tended Durnovo with all the gentleness of a woman, and a fortitude that was above the fortitude of men. Despite himself his hands trembled—big and strong as they were; his whole being was contracted with horror and pain. Whatever Victor Durnovo had been, he was now an object of such pity that before it all possible human sins faded into spotlessness. There was no crime in all that human nature has found to commit for which such cruelty as this would be justly meted out in punishment.

Durnovo spoke from time to time, but he could see the effect that his hissing speech had upon his companion, and in time he gave it up. He told haltingly of the horrors of the Simiacine Plateau—of the last grim tragedy acted there—how at last, blinded with his blood, maimed, stupefied by agony, he had been hounded down the slope by a yelling, laughing horde of torturers.

There was not much to be done, and presently Guy Oscard moved away to his camp-chair, where he sat staring into the night. Sleep was impossible. Strong, hardened, weather-beaten man that he was, his nerves were all a-tingle, his flesh creeping and jumping with horror. Gradually he collected his faculties enough to begin to think about the future. What was he to do with this man? He could not take him to Loango. He could not risk that Jocelyn or even Maurice Gordon should look upon this horror.

Joseph had crept back into the inner room, where he had no light, and could be heard breathing hard, wide awake in his hammock.

Suddenly the silence was broken by a loud cry:

'Oscard! Oscard!'

In a moment Joseph and Oscard were at the bedside.

Durnovo was sitting up, and he grabbed at Oscard's arms.

'For God's sake!' he cried. 'For God's sake, man, don't let me go to sleep!'

'What do you mean?' asked Oscard. They both thought that he had gone mad. Sleep had nothing more to do with Durnovo's eyes—protruding, staring, terrible to look at.

'Don't let me go to sleep,' he repeated. 'Don't! Don't!'

'All right,' said Oscard soothingly; 'all right! We'll look after you.'

He fell back on the bed. In the flickering light his eyeballs gleamed.

Then, quite suddenly, he rose to a sitting position again with a wild effort.

'I've got it! I've got it!' he cried.

'Got what?'

'The sleeping sickness!'

The two listeners knew of this strange disease. Oscard had seen a whole village devastated by it, the habitants lying about their own doors, stricken down by a deadly sleep, from which they never woke. It is known on the West Coast of Africa, and the cure for it is unknown.

'Hold me!' cried Durnovo. 'Don't let me sleep!'

His head fell forward even as he spoke, and he staring, wide-open eyes that could not sleep made a horror of him.

Oscard took him by the arms, and held him in a sitting position. Durnovo's fingers were clutching at his sleeve.

'Shake me! God! shake me!'

Then Oscard took him in his strong arms and set him on his feet. He shook him gently at first, but as the dread somnolence crept on he shook harder, until the mutilated inhuman head rolled upon the shoulders.

'It's a sin to let that man live,' exclaimed Joseph, turning away in horror.

'It's a sin to let *any* man die,' replied Oscard, and with his great strength he shook Durnovo like a garment.

And so Victor Durnovo died. His stained soul left his body in Guy Oscard's hands, and the big Englishman shook the corpse, trying to awake it from that sleep which knows no earthly waking.

So, after all, Heaven stepped in and laid its softening hand on the judgment of men. But there was a strange irony in the mode of death. It was strange that this man, who never could have closed his eyes again, should have been stricken down by the sleeping sickness.

They laid the body on the floor, and covered the face, which was less gruesome in death, for the pity of the eyes had given place to peace.

The morning light, bursting suddenly through the trees as it does in Equatorial Africa, showed the room set in order and Guy Oscard sleeping in his camp-chair. Behind him, on the floor, lay the form of Victor Durnovo. Joseph, less iron-nerved than the great big-game hunter, was awake and astir with the dawn. He, too, was calmer now. He had seen death face to face too often to be appalled by it in broad daylight.

So they buried Victor Durnovo between the two giant palms at Msala, with his feet turned towards the river which he had made his, as if ready to arise when the call comes and undertake one of those marvellous journeys of his which are yet a household word on the West Coast.

The cloth fluttered as they lowered him into his narrow resting-place, and the face they covered had a strange mystic grin, as if he saw something that they could not perceive. Perhaps he did. Perhaps he saw the Simiacine Plateau, and knew that, after all, he had won the last throw; for up there, far above the tablelands of Central Africa, there lay beneath high Heaven a charnel-house. Hounded down the slope by his tormentors, he had left a memento behind him surer than their torturing knives, keener than their sharpest steel—he had left the sleeping sickness behind him.

His last journey had been worthy of his reputation. In twenty days he had covered the distance between the Plateau and Msala, stumbling on alone, blinded, wounded, sore-stricken, through a thousand daily valleys of death. With wonderful endurance he had paddled night and day down the sleek river without rest, with the dread microbe of the sleeping sickness slowly creeping through his veins.

He had lived in dread of this disease, as men do of a sickness which clutches them at last; but when it came he did not recognise it. He was so racked by pain that he never recognised the symptoms; he was so panic-stricken, so paralysed by the nameless fear that lay behind him, that he could only think of pressing forward. In the night hours he would suddenly rise from his precarious bed under the shadow of a fallen tree and stagger on, haunted by a picture of his ruthless foes pressing through the jungle in pursuit. Thus he accomplished his wonderful journey alone through trackless forests; thus he fended off the sickness which gripped him the moment that he laid him down to rest.

He had left it—a grim legacy—to his torturers, and before he reached the river all was still on the Simiacine Plateau.

And so we leave Victor Durnovo. His sins are buried with him, and beneath the giant palms at Msala lies Maurice Gordon's secret.

And so we leave Msala, the accursed camp. Far up the Ogowe river, on the left bank, the giant palms still stand sentry, and beneath their shade the crumbling walls of a cursed house are slowly disappearing beneath luxuriant growths of grass and brushwood.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE EXTENUATING CIRCUMSTANCE.

Yet I think at God's Tribunal
Some large answer you shall hear.

In a dimly-lighted room in the bungalow at Loango two women had been astir all night. Now, as dawn approached, one of them, worn out with watching, wearied with that blessed fatigue of anxiety which dulls the senses, had laid her down on the curtain-covered bed to sleep.

While Marie slept Jocelyn Gordon walked softly backwards and forwards with Nestorius in her arms. Nestorius was probably dying. He lay in the Englishwoman's gentle arms—a little brown bundle of flexile limbs and cotton night-shirt. It was terribly hot. All day the rain had been pending; all night it had held off until the whole earth seemed to pulsate with the desire for relief. Jocelyn kept moving so that the changing air wafted over the little bare limbs might allay the fever. She was in evening dress, having, indeed, been called from the drawing-room by Marie; and the child's woolly black head was pressed against her breast as if to seek relief from the inward pressure on the awakening brain.

A missionary possessing some small knowledge of medicine had been with them until midnight, and, having done his best, had gone away leaving the child to the two women. Maurice had been in twice, clumsily, on tip-toe, to look with ill-concealed awe at the child, and to whisper hopes to Marie which displayed a ludicrous, if lamentable, ignorance of what he was talking about.

'Little chap's better,' he said; 'I'm sure of it. See, Marie, his eyes are brighter. Devilish hot, though, isn't he—poor little soul?'

Then he stood about, awkwardly sympathetic.

'Anything I can do for you, Jocelyn?' he asked, and then departed, only too pleased to get away from the impending calamity.

Marie was not emotional. She seemed to have left all emotion behind, in some other phase of her life which was shut off from the present by a thick curtain. She was patient and calm, but she was not so clever with the child as was Jocelyn. Perhaps her greater experience acted as a handicap in her execution of those small offices to the sick which may be rendered useless at any moment. Perhaps she knew that Nestorius was wanted elsewhere. Or it may only have been that Jocelyn was able to soothe him sooner, because there is an unwritten law that those who love us best are not always the best nurses for us.

When, at last, sleep came to the child, it was in Jocelyn's arms that he lay with that utter abandonment of pose which makes a sleeping infant and a sleeping kitten more graceful than any living thing. Marie leant over Nestorius until her dusky cheek almost touched Jocelyn's fair English one.

'He is asleep,' she whispered.

And her great dark eyes probed Jocelyn's face as if wondering whether her arms, bearing that burden, told her that this was the last sleep.

Jocelyn nodded gravely, and continued the gentle swaying motion affected by women under such circumstances.

Nestorius continued to sleep, and at last Marie, overcome by sleep herself, lay down on her bed.

Thus it came about that the dawn found Jocelyn moving softly in the room, with Nestorius asleep in her arms. A pink light came creeping through the trees, presently turning to a golden yellow, and, behold! it was light. It was a little cooler, for the sea-breeze had set in. The cool air from the surface of the water was rushing inland to supply the place of the heated atmosphere rising towards the sun. With the breeze came the increased murmur of the distant surf. The dull continuous sound seemed to live amidst the summits of the trees far above the low-built house. It rose and fell with a long-drawn, rhythmic swing. Already the sounds of life were mingling with it—the low of a cow—the crowing of the cocks—the hum of the noisier daylight insect-life.

Jocelyn moved to the window, and her heart suddenly leapt to her throat.

On the brown turf in front of the house were two men, stretched side by side, as if other hands had laid them there, dead. One man was much bigger than the other. He was of exceptional stature. Jocelyn recognised them almost immediately—Guy Oscard and Joseph. They had arrived during the night, and, not wishing to disturb the sleeping household, had lain them down in the front garden to sleep with a quiet conscience beneath the stars. The action was so startlingly characteristic, so suggestive of the primeval, simple man whom Oscard represented as one born out of time, that Jocelyn laughed suddenly.

While she was still at the window, Marie rose and came to her side. Nestorius was still sleeping. Following the direction of her mistress's eyes, Marie saw the two men. Joseph was sleeping on his face, after the manner of Thomas Atkins all the world over. Guy Oscard lay on his side, with his head on his arm.

'That is so like Mr. Oscard,' said Marie, with her patient smile, 'so like—so like. It could be no other man—to do a thing like that.'

Jocelyn gave Nestorius back to his mother, and the two women stood for a moment looking out at the sleepers, little knowing what the advent of these two men brought with it for one of them. Then the Englishwoman went to change her dress, awaking her brother as she passed his room.

It was not long before Maurice Gordon had hospitably awakened the travellers and brought them in to change their torn and ragged clothes for something more presentable. It would appear that Nestorius was not particular. He did not mind dying on the kitchen table if need be. His mother deposited him on this table on a pillow, while she prepared the breakfast with that patient resignation which seemed to emanate from having tasted of the worst that the world has to give.

Joseph was ready the first, and he promptly repaired to the kitchen, where he set to work to help Marie, with his customary energy.

It was Marie who first perceived a difference in Nestorius. His dusky little face was shining with a sudden, weakening perspiration, his limbs lay lifelessly, with a lack of their usual comfortable-looking grace.

'Go!' she said quickly. 'Fetch Miss Gordon!'

Jocelyn came, and Maurice and Guy Oscard; for they had been together in the dining-room when Joseph delivered Marie's message.

Nestorius was wide awake now. When he saw Oscard his small face suddenly expanded into a brilliant grin.

'Bad case!' he said.

It was rather startling, until Marie spoke.

'He thinks you are Mr. Meredith,' she said. 'Mr. Meredith taught him to say "bad case."'

Nestorius looked from one to the other with gravely speculative eyes, which presently closed.

'He is dying—yes!' said the mother, looking at Jocelyn.

Oscard knew more of this matter than any of them. He went forward and leant over the table. Marie removed a piece of salted bacon that was lying on the table near to the pillow. With the unconsciousness of long habit she swept some crumbs away with her apron. Oscard was trying to find the pulse in the tiny wrist, but there was not much to find.

'I am afraid he is very ill,' he said.

At this moment the kettle boiled over, and Marie had to turn away to attend to her duties.

When she came back Oscard was looking, not at Nestorius, but at her.

'We spent four days at Msala,' he said, in a tone that meant that he had more to tell her.

'Yes?'

'The place is in ruins, as you know.'

She nodded with a peculiar little twist of the lips as if he were hurting her.

'And I am afraid I have some bad news for you. Victor Durnovo, your master——'

'Yes—tell quickly!'

'He is dead. We buried him at Msala. He died—in my arms.'

At this moment Joseph gave a little gasp and turned away to the window, where he stood with his broad back turned towards them. Maurice Gordon, as white as death, was leaning against the table. He quite forgot himself. His lips were apart, his jaw had dropped; he was hanging breathlessly on Guy Oscard's next word.

'He died of the sleeping sickness,' said Oscard. 'We had come down to Msala before him—Joseph and I. I broke up the partnership, and we left him in possession of the Simiacine Plateau. But his men turned against him. For some reason his authority over them failed. He was obliged to make a dash for Msala, and he reached it, but the sickness was upon him.'

Maurice Gordon drew a sharp sigh of relief which was almost a sob. Marie was standing with her two hands on the pillow where Nestorius lay. Her deep eyes were fixed on the Englishman's sunburnt, strongly gentle face.

'Did he send a message for me—yes?' she said softly.

'No,' answered Oscard. 'He—there was no time.'

Joseph at the window had turned half round.

'He was my husband,' said Marie in her clear, deep tones: 'the father of this little one, which you call Nestorius.'

Oscard bowed his head without surprise. Jocelyn was standing still as a statue, with her hand on the dying infant's cheek. No one dared to look at her.

'It is all right,' said Marie bluntly. 'We were married at Sierra Leone by the English chaplain. My father, who is dead, kept a hotel at Sierra Leone, and he knew the ways of the—half-castes. He said that the Protestant church at Sierra Leone was good enough for him, and we were married there. And then Victor brought me away from my people to this place and to Msala. Then he got tired of me—he cared no more. He said I was ugly.'

She pronounced it 'ogly,' and seemed to think that the story finished there. At all events, she added nothing to it. But Joseph thought fit to contribute a *post scriptum*.

'You'd better tell 'em, mistress,' he said, 'that he tried to starve yer and them kids—that he wanted to leave yer at Msala to be massacred by the tribes, only Mr. Oscard sent yer down 'ere. You'd better tell 'em that.'

'No,' she replied, with a faint smile. 'No, because he was my husband.'

Guy Oscard was looking very hard at Joseph, and, catching his eye, made a little gesture commanding silence. He did not want him to say too much.

Joseph turned away again to the window, and stood thus, apart, till the end.

'I have no doubt,' said Oscard to Marie, 'that he would have sent some message to you had he been able; but he was very ill—he was dying—when he reached Msala. It was wonderful that he got there at all. We did what we could for him, but it was hopeless.'

Marie raised her shoulders with a pathetic gesture of resignation.

'The sleeping sickness,' she said, 'what will you? There is no remedy. He always said he would die of that. He feared it.'

In the greater sorrow she seemed to have forgotten her child, who was staring open-eyed at the ceiling. The two others—the boy and girl—were playing on the doorstep with some unconsidered trifles from the dust-heap—after the manner of children all the world over.

'He was not a good man,' said Marie, turning to Jocelyn, as if she alone of all present would understand. 'He was not a good husband, but——' she shrugged her shoulders with one of her patient, shadowy smiles—'it makes so little difference——yes?'

Jocelyn said nothing. None of them had aught to say to her. For each in that room could lay a separate sin at Victor Durnovo's door. He was gone beyond the reach of human justice to the Higher Court where the Extenuating Circumstance is fully understood. The generosity of that silence was infectious, and they told her nothing. Had they spoken she would perforce have believed them; but then, as she herself said, it would have made 'so little difference.' So Victor Durnovo leaves these pages, and all we can do is to remember the writing on the ground. Who amongst us dares to withhold the Extenuating Circumstance? Who is ready to leave this world without that crutch to lean upon? Given a mixed blood—evil black with evil white—and what can the result be but evil? Given the climate of Western

Africa and the mental irritation thereof, added to a lack of education and the natural vice inherent in man, and you have—Victor Durnovo.

Nestorius—the shameless—stretched out his little bare limbs and turned half over on his side. He looked from one face to the other with the grave wonder that was his. He had never been taken much notice of. His short walk in life had been very near the ground, where trifles look very large, and from whence those larger stumbling-blocks which occupy our attention are quite invisible. He had been the third—the solitary third child who usually makes his own interest in life, and is left by or leaves the rest of his family.

It was not quite clear to him why he was the centre of so much attention. His mind did not run to the comprehension of the fact that he was the wearer of borrowed plumes—the sable plumes of King Death.

He had always wanted to get on to the kitchen table—there was much there that interested him, and supplied him with food for thought. He had risked his life on more than one occasion in attempts to scale that height with the assistance of a saucepan that turned over and poured culinary delicacies on his toes, or perhaps a sleeping cat that got up and walked away much annoyed. And now that he was at last at this dizzy height he was sorry to find that he was too tired to crawl about and explore the vast possibilities of it. He was rather too tired to convey his forefinger to his mouth, and was forced to work out mental problems without that aid to thought.

Presently his eyes fell on Guy Oscard's face, and again his own small features expanded into a smile.

'Bad case!' he said, and, turning over, he nestled down into the pillow, and he had the answer to the many questions that puzzled his small brain.

(To be continued.)

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MATTHEW AUSTIN.[1]

BY W. E. NORRIS.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE DRAWBACKS OF PHILANTHROPY.

THE feeling of which Lilian Murray had spoken with some apprehension was experienced to the full by Matthew after she had left Wilverton and he had fallen back into the ordinary routine of his daily life. The events of the preceding week hardly seemed real to him; he had difficulty in believing that he was in sober earnest engaged to be married to the girl whom he had for so long been satisfied, or almost satisfied, to love without hope of return or reward. The engagement, to be sure, was but provisional and contingent; he frequently had to remind himself of that, lest he should lapse from scepticism into over-credulity; still the fact remained that one of the contracting parties did not so regard it, and he was clearly bound to respect her wishes in the matter of making the same known to a few sympathetic persons.

Accordingly, he wrote to Leonard Jerome, upon whose sympathy, to tell the truth, he did not count with implicit confidence, and he was agreeably surprised to receive by return of post a very hearty letter of congratulation from his young friend. Leonard was in London and thought it likely that he would remain there, off and on, for some months to come. He was once more, to use his own expression, 'as fit as a fiddle,' he was participating in the many forms of diversion which a community devoted rather to the development of physical than of mental perfection

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provides for its gilded youth, and he humbly trusted that his uncle would not be seized with any burning desire to see him again yet awhile. 'Though I should like well enough to see *you* and have a chat,' he added considerately. 'But you are sure to be coming up to town by-and-by, now that you have such a powerful magnet to attract you. Possibly I may come across Lady Sara and her fair daughter somewhere or other, and if I do, I shall not fail to tell them that in my opinion they are uncommonly lucky people. Don't you be afraid of being cut out. It is all right and highly magnanimous on your part to stand aside until the end of the season; but unless I am much mistaken in Miss Murray she knows her own mind as well as anybody. Besides, there aren't such an awful lot of real good fellows about, and to the best of my belief there is only one Matthew Austin.'

Well, that was satisfactory: it was to be hoped that the other friends whom Matthew had been specially instructed to inform of his engagement would take the news in a similar spirit of cordiality. For reasons to which he was unable to give any definite name, Matthew felt extremely reluctant to make confession to the Frere family; but there was no need for him to trouble himself about the matter, because they had heard the whole story some days before he drove out to Hayes Park with the intention of enlightening them. By what means is news, true and false, promulgated with such amazing rapidity? Nobody seems to know whence the Mrs. Jenningses derive their information; but there is no city, town, or village so ill provided for as to lack a Mrs. Jennings, and the Mrs. Jennings of Wilverton was in a position to state precisely what were the conditions under which the young doctor had been permitted to style himself Miss Murray's *fiancé*. Mrs. Frere, therefore, was quite ready with ungrudging felicitations, supplemented by warnings which only she knew how to offer without a shade of offensiveness.

'I shall rejoice for your sake if it does come off,' she said frankly, 'because I think the girl is nice, and she is so marvellously pretty that one would have to forgive her even if she wasn't nice. But considering how young she is and how queer some of her mother's people have been, I am sure you are quite right to leave the question open for the present. It will be so much more comfortable for you, in case of any hitch occurring, to be able to say that you anticipated it! And, if I were you, I *would* anticipate it. I always anticipate evil myself, and it is wonderful how seldom I am disappointed. Those new tea-roses, for instance: it was rather disgusting that every single one of them should die; but I had the comfort of knowing that I had never from the first expected them to thrive in that soil.'

Anne, who had been equally friendly, though less outspoken, in her reception of Matthew's tidings, interrupted these premature efforts at consolation.

'Do allow Mr. Austin credit for knowing better than to plant his roses where they can't be expected to thrive,' said she, laughing. 'I don't believe he anticipates any hitch at all, and I am sure there is no reason why his friends should.'

Anne was so pleasant and cheerful and spoke with so much kindness about Lilian that Matthew felt sincerely grateful to her; although, upon reflection, he scarcely knew what cause he had for particular gratitude. No doubt those silly children had said some silly things to her, but it was not to be supposed that she could feel even remotely aggrieved by the downfall of their castle in the air.

Nevertheless, her manner, in talking to him, had undergone a certain change, of which he became more sensible as time went on. Being now much less busy than he had been during the winter, he was able to see his friends with greater frequency, and to the Frere family he was always a welcome visitor. Consequently, he found himself pretty often at Hayes Park; and so it was that Anne, who no longer avoided his society, began to show herself to him under a new aspect. Her capricious moods, her alternations between shyness and expansiveness were things of the past; she always seemed pleased to see him and never forgot to inquire what news he had from London; but he had ceased to be her confidant. She made him aware of that in various ways, and he could not help suspecting that he had fallen a little in her esteem. Possibly she may have thought it rather silly of him to fix his affections upon a girl so much younger than himself and so unlikely to develop into the contented wife of a rural practitioner. Of Spencer she showed a marked reluctance to speak. In answer to his questions, she said that she occasionally heard from her brother and hoped all was going on well; but the obligation under which she had been laid by Matthew's intervention was so evidently burdensome to her that he felt a delicacy about alluding to the subject.

One morning, however, the subject was brought to his notice in a manner which, if it did not necessitate immediate communication with Anne, appeared to render prompt action on his part imperative. Sir Godfrey, whose letter was dated from the House of Commons and was couched in terms of injured remonstrance, wrote to say that he had just been made the recipient of exceedingly unpleasant information by Colonel Egerton.

'As far as I can make out, your *protégé* has been appropriating money belonging to the sergeants' mess. At any rate, a matter of fifty pounds is said to be missing, the man is under arrest, and Colonel Egerton seems to think he is doing me a favour by saying that the worst consequences may yet be averted if the deficit is made good within the next thirty-six hours. What leads him to suppose that I shall pay up a considerable sum for the benefit of a rascal whom I never saw in my life, but whom I have good-naturedly gone out of my way to befriend, I am at a loss to imagine. Certainly I shall do no such thing, and I much regret that your representations induced me to exert myself on behalf of so undeserving a person. I think it right to tell you of what has occurred; but if you move in the matter—beyond, perhaps, informing the man's relations—you will, in my opinion, be extremely ill-advised. I ought, perhaps, to mention that the 22nd Lancers are at present quartered at Lowcester; but of that you are probably already aware.'

Matthew sighed and unlocked his money-box to see whether he had as much as fifty pounds in hand. Fortunately or unfortunately, that amount was forthcoming, and his next act was to study 'Bradshaw,' with the result that he discovered a train, starting in about two hours' time, which would land him at Lowcester before nightfall. He had not the slightest doubt or hesitation as to the course which it behoved him to pursue. Ill-advised it might be, in the abstract, to fly to the aid of a hopeless young ne'er-do-well, who was probably a thief into the bargain, but it was altogether out of the question that Miss Frere's brother should be committed for trial and perhaps sentenced to penal servitude.

'All the same,' reflected Matthew ruefully, 'I am afraid the fellow has ruined himself. It is all very fine to make restitution, but I don't see how they are going to get over the fact of the arrest or how he can possibly be recommended for a commission after such an episode. Dear me, what a perverse world it is, and how uncalled for half the catastrophes that take place in it seem to be! It would have been so easy, one would have thought, to steer clear of criminal offences for one year! But the whole question, I suppose, is one of temptation and adequate power of resistance.'

That, no doubt, is the whole question, and a deeply discouraging one it is to ruminate upon. To give his thoughts a pleasanter turn, Matthew reverted to a long letter from Lilian which he had perused before opening his brother's, and which seemed to show that her powers of resistance, so far, were all that could be desired. She had passed through the formidable ceremony of presentation, she had been to half a dozen balls and was going to at least half a dozen more, engagements of every kind were multiplying, 'and I loathe it all!' she declared. 'It is quite as bad as I thought it would be—worse, in some ways—and my only wish is to get to the end of it. Can you look three months ahead? *I* can't; though I am always trying. I feel like Eurydice in the lower regions, and I know the last thing you would ever think of doing would be to come and play Orpheus to me. However, I shall emerge of my own accord when the time comes; you need have no fears on that score.'

It was in this strain that she habitually wrote, and many lovers would have detected an undertone of uneasiness in it. Why protest so much? Why anathematise what, after all, must needs be novel and exciting to every young girl? Lilian would have been more convincing if she had been less vehement. But Matthew was too loyal to seek for symptoms of disloyalty. Moreover, he said to himself that this preliminary petulance would soon give way to a more reasonable frame of mind. He did not want Lilian to be disgusted with the fashionable world, though of course he could not wish her to become enamoured of it.

Meanwhile, he had to pack up some clothes and make a few arrangements, because it was certain that he could not count upon being back before the following afternoon. There was nothing, he found, to prevent him from absenting himself for four and twenty hours, and, having told the servants that he had been unexpectedly called away—an incident which was not so uncommon as to give rise to conjecture—he set forth on his tedious cross-country railway journey.

Lowcester, a decorous, somnolent cathedral city, upon the outskirts of which the cavalry barracks were situated, boasted, as he was informed by a friendly porter, of two very excellent hotels. The porter was unwilling to draw invidious distinctions, but went so far as to say that he believed the Rose and Crown to be rather more extensively patronised by the nobility and gentry than the Golden Lion. Matthew therefore had himself and his modest belongings conveyed to the Rose and Crown, where he was shown into a vast, mouldy-smelling bedroom and was told that, by giving due notice, he could have anything he liked for dinner. He replied that, under those circumstances, he would have anything that the cook liked to give him; after which he requested to be furnished with Colonel Egerton's address. Rather to his surprise, the landlord denied all knowledge of such a person, remarking, with an air of lofty superiority, that he had never had any personal dealings with 'the military.' It is necessary to visit a country town, dominated by clerical influence, in order to arrive at any idea of the low esteem in which Her Majesty's forces are held by a section of Her Majesty's subjects. However, some less haughty and exclusive individual—possibly the ostler—was discovered about the premises, from whom it was ascertained that Colonel Egerton and his family resided at The White Lodge, a quarter of a mile or so away.

'Bother his family!' thought Matthew, as, in pursuance of instructions, he walked along the grass-grown High Street towards the suburb where Colonel Egerton had taken up his temporary abode; 'I never thought of his being a married man, and I would a little rather not have this surreptitious visit of mine talked about by inquisitive ladies. I suppose he will grant me a private audience, though, if I say I have come upon business.'

There was the less difficulty about that because Colonel Egerton's wife and daughters happened to be smart personages who had gone up to London for the season, leaving the head of the family to shift for himself at the post of duty during their absence. The Colonel, a dapper little good-humoured man, with a waxed grey moustache, stepped out into the hall, after Matthew's card had been carried to him, and shook his visitor cordially by the hand.

'Very glad to see you,' said he; 'I know what has brought you here; I've heard of the kind interest that you have taken in that confounded young jackanapes.'

He drew Matthew into the spacious, comfortably-furnished smoking-room which he was inhabiting during his period of enforced bachelorhood, pushed a box of cigars across the table, lighted one himself, sank into an easy chair, and began:

'Well, now, I had better tell you at once, Mr. Austin, that the money will have to be paid. I'm ready to do what I can, but unless the money is forthcoming, I shall be powerless.'

'Oh, I have brought the money,' said Matthew.

'You have, eh? Has his father been told, then?'

'Well, no. For many reasons, it would not have been advisable to tell his father.'

'Then who—but that's none of my business, you'll say. H'm!—well, if the amount missing is made good in time, nothing more need be said about it, and I can simply try the fellow on a charge of drunkenness and insubordination, for which he has been placed under arrest. Bad enough, of course, but a flea-bite compared with the other.'

'Drunkenness and insubordination!' echoed Matthew, in dismay.

'Oh, Lord, yes! your friend has been distinguishing himself, I can tell you. Wanted to be dismissed from the service, I dare say, and couldn't think of any better means than that of effecting his object. Always the way with these beggars!—sooner or later they're bound to get desperate and play Old Harry!'

'But I should have thought that he had the best of reasons for being anything but desperate just now.'

'Ah, I'm not so sure of that. If you or I had misappropriated money and didn't see our way to replace it, we should be rather near desperation, I suppose. Mind, I know nothing of this officially; I only learnt by a side-wind what was bound to come out at the court-martial, and that was why I wired to Sir Godfrey. Therefore, anything that I may tell you about young Frere—for I presume you haven't heard his story and would like to hear it?—must be regarded as strictly confidential, please.'

'I quite understand that,' answered Matthew, 'and I should certainly like to hear what has happened. I may say that I have no personal acquaintance with the culprit, although I know his people very well.'

Colonel Egerton glanced at the disinterested friend of the family with a half-humorous, half-compassionate twinkle in his eye. No doubt he was thinking to himself, 'Either this man is a misguided philanthropist or else he is in love with one of Frere's sisters.' So clever does a middle-aged man of the world and experienced commander of a regiment become. But if Mr. Austin liked to expend fifty pounds in rescuing a malefactor from the clutches of justice, that, after all, was Mr. Austin's affair; so the

Colonel cleared his voice and embarked upon his succinct narrative without irrelevant comments.

'I need hardly tell you that there's a woman in the business; I never knew a bad job yet but a woman was connected with it in some way or other, and Frere has been getting into scrapes of that kind ever since he did my regiment the honour to enlist in it. There is no occasion to trouble you with bygone histories, but I dare say you can guess the sort of troubles that are apt to arise when you have a good-looking, swaggering young sergeant, whom everybody knows to be a gentleman and who, I suspect, is a little bit given to romancing about his rank and prospects and so forth. The cause of the present calamity is a certain Mrs. Johnson, or Jackson, or Thompson—hanged if I remember the woman's name!—a vulgar little over-dressed, yellow-haired widow, whom several of our young fellows have been running after. She is said to be well off—whether truly or untruly I'm sure I can't say. She has chosen to take up Frere and make much of him; which, as you may imagine, has brought about a good deal of unpleasantness. There is some story about a jewelled bangle that he gave her, and about her wearing it ostentatiously at a race-meeting here the other day. Naturally, he couldn't have paid for it, and from what I hear, I fancy she must have run him into debt also for flowers and bonbons and other rubbish. The upshot of it all, I have no doubt, was that, being hardly pressed and having, unfortunately, access to money which didn't belong to him, he went to the races and failed to back winners. Anyhow, it was after the races that he was found reeling about the streets, and he wasn't got back to barracks without a scuffle, confound him! Now, have I made the situation clear to you?'

'As clear as is necessary, I think,' answered Matthew, with a mournful grimace. 'I suppose he may say good-bye to his chance of a commission after this?'

The colonel jerked up his shoulders. 'What can we do?' he asked. 'He has no defence, and discipline must be maintained. I tell you frankly that if I were his father, I should purchase his discharge; I don't believe he will ever do any good at soldiering now. One is sorry, of course, but one has done one's best. You would like to see him, I suppose?'

'Yes, I had better see him, if I may,' answered Matthew, without much alacrity. 'Where is he?—in solitary confinement?'

'No, he's in hospital at present—either sick or malingering.

I'll tell you what, Mr. Austin; if you'll do me the favour to dine with me at our mess to-night—I can't ask you to dine here, because my wife is away, and a kitchen-maid is considered good enough for the likes of me in her absence—I'll introduce you to Bowker, our medico, who will arrange for you to have a talk with the man either to-night or to-morrow morning.'

Matthew thanked the hospitable colonel, but begged to be excused. He was anxious, he said, to conceal the fact of his visit to Lowcester, if possible, and the fewer people who were made aware of it the better he would be pleased.

'All right,' answered Colonel Egerton, nodding good-naturedly; 'I understand. I'll say a word to Bowker, then, and he'll look you up the first thing in the morning. Very good fellow, Bowker, and no chatterbox. Now, Mr. Austin, I don't want to meddle with what doesn't concern me, but there is just one thing that I should like to say. Somebody, of course, has been and is helping Frere out with money, and I gather from what you tell me that it isn't his father. Well, I should strongly advise that person to cut off the supplies. He is one of those happy-go-lucky fellows who will take all he can get and never stop to say thank you. Sooner or later, the cost of supporting him must needs fall upon his father, and there's nothing to be gained by mystery and postponement. If he were my son, I should make him a small annual allowance, upon the condition that he sailed at once for Australia and stayed there. He'll never keep out of trouble in this country, you may depend upon it.'

'Thank you,' answered Matthew; 'you are probably right, and I will think over what you have said. All hope of a commission must be abandoned, I presume?'

'Oh, I don't say that he might not eventually get his commission, if he were to turn over a new leaf; but it stands to reason that he would have to wait a longish time for it, and I confess that I shouldn't feel at all sanguine on his behalf.'

There was nothing more to be said, and Matthew went away with a strong impression upon his mind that he was about to make a very unprofitable, though unavoidable, investment.

CHAPTER XVIII.

AN IMPENITENT SINNER.

MATTHEW had not finished his breakfast, on the following morning, when his military colleague called, in obedience to instructions, to conduct him to the hospital. There was very little to be got out of this tall, spare, saturnine personage, who appeared to merit the character given him by his colonel for being no chatterbox.

'Nothing of consequence,' he said, in reply to Matthew's inquiries. 'Effects of drink and a shock, that's all. Usual thing—nervous system all to pieces.'

'But I understand that he doesn't drink habitually,' Matthew said.

The taciturn Bowker made no answer until the remark had been repeated, when he observed, 'Well, you can look at him and form your own opinion. As a matter of fact, he is fit to go back to the cells; but I have kept him on the sick-list because——' He shrugged his shoulders slightly by way of completing the sentence.

On the road to the hospital Matthew thought it best to say a word or two upon a subject as to which his companion manifested no impertinent curiosity.

'I suppose you are acquainted with the circumstances?' he began.

'Yes, I have heard something, and the Colonel spoke to me last night. Glad to hear you have brought the money. I was to tell you that if you would hand it over to me, it should be placed where it ought to be. You can't very well give it to the man himself, you see.'

'I suppose not,' Matthew agreed. 'Here are ten five-pound notes, then, if you will kindly take charge of them. May I ask what punishment is likely to be inflicted upon him for the minor offence?'

'Oh, they'll have to reduce him to the ranks, I should say. Lucky fellow to get off so cheap!'

'Yes—only that means something very like ruin in his case, I am afraid.'

'Well, I take it that he was practically ruined some time ago.

Bound to go to the deuce sooner or later; men of that stamp invariably do. Can't afford to knock themselves about like the average Tommy—haven't the stamina.'

After a long pause, Matthew asked, 'Is he liked in the regiment?'

'I believe the men rather like him; he is a fine horseman and he knows how to use his fists. But he has made himself obnoxious to the officers in more ways than one. Pleasant fellow, too, in some respects; glad he is to escape the worst consequences of his tomfoolery.'

Tomfoolery seemed a lenient term to apply to the misdeeds of which Spencer Frere had presumably been guilty; yet when Matthew was brought face to face with the culprit, he almost believed it to be appropriate. For this long-legged, fair-complexioned fellow, in hospital clothes, who was found sitting on a sunny bench, with his back turned to the great, bare building, really did not look much like a hardened sinner. His manner, it is true, was defiant, not to say offensive; but that, Matthew thought, was only natural under the circumstances. Courage, the one good quality which sometimes survives self-respect, is apt to manifest itself after offensive fashions when left to stand alone.

'So you are Anne's friend the doctor,' said he, after the other doctor had discreetly withdrawn out of earshot. 'Very good of you to take all this trouble, I'm sure; but one must presume that you have your reasons. And you have brought the missing money with you, old Bowker tells me.'

'Yes; it will be all right, as far as the money is concerned,' Matthew answered, seating himself beside the subject of his benevolence, and endeavouring, by a sidelong scrutiny, to take his measure.

'Ah!—well, I didn't ask for it, you know, but I won't deny that I feel a little relieved. It's hard lines on poor old Anne to have to pay up fifty quid, though. How the dickens she managed to raise it is what beats me! She'll have to go tick for the rest of the year, I expect.'

'You might have thought of that before, might you not?' said Matthew, who had no wish to proclaim himself as Spencer's benefactor.

'I might—as you very sagaciously remark. But the unfortunate thing about me is that I am not much in the habit of thinking. By the way, I don't suppose for a moment that you'll believe me, but I didn't steal that money. At all events, I didn't steal it intentionally, and what has become of it I know no more than the man in the moon.'

'Since you tell me so, I believe you,' answered Matthew.

'The deuce you do! You must be a precious sight more credulous than doctors in general, then. My experience is that doctors, as a rule, won't believe you on your oath. Look at old Bowker, for instance, who will have it that I'm an habitual drunkard. As if I should mind owning to that, supposing it were true! All the same, it happens to be true that I'm not a thief, in the common sense of the word. I went to the races, not knowing how much I had in my pocket, backed the wrong ones, returned to barracks without a sixpence, and it wasn't until then that I found out what I had done.'

Well, this might be the truth; but certainly a robust faith was required in order to accept such an explanation of the disappearance of fifty pounds from the possession of a non-commissioned officer who, in all probability, could seldom have had fifty shillings to play with. Spencer must have felt that his story was a lame one, for presently he added, with a laugh:

'I believe I was robbed—if that improves matters. I'm sure I couldn't have staked the lot. But the fact is that I have never had any head for figures, and so I told those fellows when they insisted upon intrusting me with the mess-money. They ought never to have done such a thing.'

Matthew did not inquire how and why money belonging to the sergeants' mess had come to be in the pocket of the man with no head for figures at a race-meeting; he merely observed: 'Of course it would have been easy enough for any one to rob you while you were under the influence of liquor.'

'Perfectly easy. As far as that goes, there isn't any very great difficulty about robbing me even when I am sober. Well, it's useless to cry over spilt milk, but, as matters have turned out, I wish I had allowed them to arrest me without a row.'

'I wish with all my heart that you had. It is most unlucky.'

'Very unlucky indeed for me; I don't know that *you* have any special reason for pulling a long face over it. That is, unless you have already begun to associate yourself with the misfortunes of the family.' He stretched out his legs and indulged in a low laugh which was evidently intended to be insolent. 'The family is not looking up,' he resumed. 'I don't wish to breathe a word against your useful and admirable profession, but there was a time, not so very long ago, when we should have thought our womankind entitled to choose their husbands from a rather more exalted class.'

Matthew kept his temper. 'I am not going to quarrel with you,' said he good-humouredly; 'please make up your mind to that, and at the same time let me assure you that your family is in no danger of disgracing itself by a misalliance, so far as I am concerned. There is nothing of the kind that you imagine between your sister and me.'

'Really? Then why in the world are you here, I wonder?'

'Well, for a variety of reasons. Chiefly, I suppose, because somebody had to come, and because no one else happened to be available. I think I may venture to describe myself as your sister's friend, and it would simplify matters if you would accept me in that capacity. I should be very glad to act as your friend also, if I could see any way in which my friendship was likely to be of service to you; but, frankly speaking, I don't just at present.'

For a moment Spencer Frere looked almost ashamed of himself; but he had resumed his previous air of bravado before he returned: 'Oh, I'm much indebted to you, as it is. I know you have put yourself out to get the promise of a commission for me, and you must be wishing by this time that you had left the thing alone. Especially as you disclaim the only motive which, I should have thought, might account for your behaviour. I am sorry that you saw fit to interest yourself in so worthless a specimen of humanity, but—well, I never requested you to do so, did I?'

No reply was forthcoming to this pertinent or impertinent query; but after a pause of some moments, Matthew asked abruptly: 'How long have you been in the habit of taking morphia?'

His neighbour started and gave a low whistle. 'Now how the deuce,' he exclaimed, 'did you know that I have been taking morphia? Bowker never thought of that, though he was the first man to administer it to me.'

'I didn't know for certain; nobody could by looking at you, and of course it must be some days since you had your last dose. But there are several trifling symptoms which might possibly be due to that cause, and it is very evident to me that you have never been a tippler. Now, Frere, you had better take my word, as that of a medical man, for it that you must break yourself of this habit. It can hardly be a confirmed one yet, and unless you beat it, it will assuredly beat you. In which case, you might as well blow out your brains at once. You began in order to relieve some pain, no doubt—sciatica, perhaps?'

'No,' answered the other; 'what let me into the secret was that about a couple of months ago my horse trod pretty heavily on my foot while I was dressing him. They had to remove a toe-nail, and for a few days the place hurt like blazes. So old Bowker injected morphia—which suggested a happy thought to me. Since it was so easy and comparatively inexpensive a matter to get rid of all one's troubles, physical and mental, for a bit, why shouldn't I treat myself to the luxury when I felt inclined? You may think that my mental troubles don't press very severely upon me, but that's all you know about it! There are times, I can tell you, when life in the British army is a precious good imitation of a hell upon earth. It isn't so bad for N.C.O.'s, I admit; still I had worries of my own, independent of the service.'

He paused and twisted his fair moustache gloomily, while Matthew remarked, 'Worries connected with the other sex, I dare say.'

Spencer, who had been speaking without affectation and in almost penitent accents, instantly assumed an expression of fatuous self-complacency. 'Oh, the Colonel has been telling you tales, has he?' said he. 'Well, upon my word, I can't help it! Women are always getting me into a mess; but it's a great deal more their fault than mine. If they would only exercise a little common prudence, these encounters with irate husbands might be avoided, and——'

'But I thought the lady was a widow,' interrupted Matthew.

'What lady? Oh, little Mrs. Johnson. Yes, I believe Mr. Johnson is quite dead and buried, and, between ourselves, I have sometimes thought that it might be my destiny to replace him. I may do it yet—who knows? Beggars mustn't be choosers, and although the fair Arabella—her name is Arabella—is not precisely the incarnation of refinement, she has a snug little income of her own. Whether this business will put her off at all I don't know; but I shouldn't think it would. She has such a high respect for my ancestry.'

Matthew could not help for a moment regarding poor Mrs.

Johnson in the light of a possible *dea ex machinâ*; but he put the thought away, as being too cynical, and said rather severely:

'It would be no bad thing if you had a little more respect both for your ancestors and for yourself. What possessed you to go and get drunk after you had discovered that that money was missing? Was it sheer recklessness?'

'That would have been it, no doubt, if I had gone and got drunk; but, as a fact, I didn't. If you care to know what was the matter with me when I was collared, I don't mind telling you. I knew there was no chance of escape for me, and I made up my mind to chuck it. Life as a convict, or even as a ranker, isn't so delightful as to be worth preserving when you can put an end to yourself without pain. Only I suppose I didn't know how much morphia goes to a poison-dose, for all the effect it had upon me was to make me dazed and stupid. As soon as I found out that I wasn't going to die, off I started to the chemist's to buy some more, making fine zigzags on the way, I dare say. Anyhow, these blundering fools got hold of me and wanted to lock me up for being drunk in the streets. Some of them had a grudge against me, I believe; but whether that was so or not, I was bound to show fight. As I told you just now, I wish I hadn't; still, if I hadn't, I should have been charged with drunkenness all the same; so perhaps it doesn't make very much odds.'

'I am glad, at all events, that you were preserved from committing suicide,' Matthew remarked.

'It is very polite of you to say so; but my own impression is that my disappearance from these earthly scenes would have been a distinct advantage to some people and a misfortune for nobody. Will you please tell Anne that I am infinitely obliged to her, but that she had much better drop me for the future. I won't go so far as to admit that I have always been a blackguard, but nothing can be more positive than that I am an irreclaimable blackguard now. She will never get any comfort out of me, and if she persists in befriending me, I shall only get her into fresh trouble. The governor understands me a good deal better than she does.'

A hardened miscreant would scarcely have said that, Matthew thought. At all events, it seemed worth while to reason with him, and nobody could be more persuasive than Matthew, because nobody could have a wider range of sympathy with human nature in all its varying and contradictory phases. If, at the end of a somewhat protracted homily, Spencer Frere remained ostentatiously unrepentant, if he derided the popular axiom that it is never too late to mend, and if he refused to make any rash promises respecting his own future conduct, he nevertheless had the good grace to thank his mentor heartily.

'You mean well,' he said. 'I'm sorry I spoke so brutally about your profession—when a man is down on his luck he says all sorts of things that he doesn't mean, you know—and I'm really and truly grateful to you. What can I do to show my gratitude?'

'Well, you can do this,' Matthew answered: 'you can spare your sister as much as is possible. Of course, when you write to her, you will have to tell her about the court-martial and its results, but you need not say anything about the pecuniary part of the business. I am sure she would rather that you didn't, and I ask you, as a personal favour, not to do so. As regards the future, I hope I may trust you to refrain from appealing to her for pecuniary help again.'

'Upon my oath, I never will; I don't mind binding myself to that extent.'

'Very well. Then, as regards the present, I have one thing more to say. I don't feel at liberty to explain exactly how I am situated, but so it is that I have a little money still left at your disposal, and the wish of your friends is that all outstanding bills should be paid. Will you tell me honestly how much you owe and to whom you owe it?'

Spencer complied with this request, naming a sum which fell short of Matthew's anticipations, and soon afterwards the two men parted. It was agreed that the younger should submit to the punishment which was his due, and possess his soul in patience for the time being. As to his ultimate destiny he seemed to be curiously indifferent.

'Oh, I shall live or die; sink or swim,' said he, with a laugh; 'it will be all the same a hundred years hence, anyhow. But if ever I have it in my power to do you a good turn, Mr. Austin, you'll find that I haven't forgotten you.'

CHAPTER XIX.

HUMBLE PIE.

Many plausible arguments may be adduced in favour of hard-heartedness, but that to which the fullest support is lent by experience is that helping a lame dog over a stile means acquiring possession of that dog, together with the privilege of paying for his annual licence until the end of his earthly career. Now, one really cannot be expected to stock one's premises with curs, even if one could afford to do so. There are Homes for Lost Dogs (in which a well-appointed lethal chamber is provided), so that a man who is at once wise and humane will avert his gaze when he sees a luckless specimen of the canine race in difficulties. Who has not received those dreadful letters which begin, 'Relying upon your kindness to me in the past, I feel encouraged to hope that you will assist me in the present emergency'? And who does not know that 'the present emergency' implies future emergencies and many of them? 'You have been fool enough to help me once,' the writer seems to say, with pitiless logic; 'it is therefore reasonable to believe that you will remain a fool to the end of the chapter.' And the writer's sagacity seldom misleads him.

It was something of this sort that Matthew was saying to himself as he sat in the railway carriage, on his return journey to Wilverton. He had chosen to rush in where persons more legitimately concerned might very well have feared to tread; he had in a certain sense made himself responsible for Spencer Frere, and his responsibility could hardly end with the payment of that worthy's bills. The payment of the bills had in itself been a somewhat unpleasant job, exposing him to queries from inquisitive tradesmen and altogether rendering him more conspicuous than he could have wished. Colonel Egerton, moreover, though declaring emphatically that, upon his word, 'the fellow ought to be devilish grateful to you, sir,' had allowed it to be inferred that he did not personally anticipate that result; while the taciturn Bowker had summed up the situation with the concise remark of 'Mere question of time, you'll find.'

'Still,' reflected Matthew, 'I don't see how I could have acted otherwise. It *is* on the cards that he may turn over a new leaf; it *is* on the cards that I may eventually be able to discover some opening for him; and even if I can't, there's no particular harm done. The most awkward thing of all will be my first interview with his sister. Whatever happens, she must not suspect that he has been charged with stealing, or that I have mixed myself up in the business. One comfort is that the story of drunkenness and insubordination will scarcely surprise her; she has had so many misgivings from the outset.'

Nevertheless, he had a powerful and pusillanimous longing to defer that necessary conversation with Anne, and much relieved was he to hear, on the morrow, that circumstances had granted him a respite. The Frere family—so he was informed—had departed to the sea-side for a few weeks, leaving Hayes Park in the hands of painters and paper-hangers; so that, unless he wrote to Spencer's sister—which he did not feel called upon to do—he might look forward to a period of tranquil and uninterrupted attention to his own affairs.

These were, for the moment, of a recreative rather than a professional nature. Wilverton was at its dullest and emptiest, patients were few, while well-ordered gardens might be said to be almost at their best. To breakfast leisurely and late, to saunter out into the sunshine, to count the buds upon the rose-bushes, to note with thankfulness the absence of green-fly and maggots, to hold long colloquies with the gardener, afterwards, perhaps, to loll for half an hour or so in a hammock beneath the great copper-beech, with a book and a cigarette—all this was delightful to Matthew, who, unlike the majority of hard-working men, secretly adored laziness. Then, too, his letters were so pleasant to read that they could well bear a second and a third perusal. By degrees, and almost imperceptibly, the tone of Lilian's correspondence was changing, and the change, he thought, was decidedly for the better. There had been something unnatural, something almost insincere—though he did not make use of that term—in the vehement dislike which she had begun by expressing for London and its society, but which she had now suffered to drop into abeyance.

'After all,' she said, in one of her voluminous, hastily scribbled epistles, 'I am glad to have seen what the smart world is like. I don't want to live in it; still I can quite understand there being people who would rather not live at all than live out of it. Sometimes I wish you were here—no, I don't mean that; of course I *always* wish you were here—but I sometimes wish you could look on at my little triumphs. Would you utterly despise them, I wonder, or would you think there was rather more in me than you used to imagine? I feel hundreds and hundreds of years older than I did in those days, and Mamma would tell you that I have immensely improved. I haven't changed, though—no, not the least little bit!—and if she thinks I have, she is very much mistaken.'

'But of course she must have changed in some respects,' was Matthew's inward comment; 'it would be against nature if she hadn't. Besides, she admits it.' And always, in answering her letters, he was careful to say how little he grudged her the triumphs of which she spoke. Perhaps also he would not have minded looking on at them; certainly he would have liked very much to run up to London for a week or ten days. But he felt that he would hardly be fulfilling his part of the compact were he to yield to that temptation. Lady Sara had treated him fairly, not to say generously, and the least he could do was to remain in the background until the stipulated truce should have expired.

Thus in unbroken quietude and almost unbroken solitude those warm days of early summer passed away for him pleasantly enough—blue, hazy days, during which light breezes from every point of the compass rose and fell, and the air was full of the song of birds, and fleecy clouds melted into mist towards sunset. A few lines from Colonel Egerton, who had good-naturedly asked for his address, informed him of Spencer Frere's sentence, which indeed had been a foregone conclusion. 'It's bad, but it might have been a great deal worse,' the Colonel wrote. 'Perhaps the loss of his gold lace and a taste of the bread and water of affliction may bring him to his senses; still I can only repeat that I believe the best thing his father can do with him now is to take him out of this and pack him off to the Colonies.'

At any rate, Matthew could take no step at present; so he laid the subject aside for future consideration, as doctors, lawyers, and other men whose duty it is to consider a variety of puzzling cases soon acquire a faculty for doing at will.

The end of this period of repose and seclusion was reached one afternoon when Mrs. Jennings stopped her carriage to beckon to him and express a gracious wish that he would show himself at her garden-party on the following day.

'I forget whether I sent you a card or not,' said she. 'If I didn't, it was only because I know that you eschew daylight entertainments. Of course you are quite right, and during the busy season Dr. Jennings will only accept even dinner invitation provisionally; but just now you must have a good deal of spar time on your hands, so I hope you will come to us. You wil meet your friends the Freres if you do; I dare say you have hear that they returned home yesterday.'

Matthew had not heard of that circumstance, but now tha it had been made known to him, he felt compelled to swallo down the excuse which he had already opened his lips to formulate. Since Anne was once more within reach, it would not d for him to shirk an occasion of meeting her, nor was he sorry tha their first meeting was to be a quasi-public one. A crowde garden-party—and Mrs. Jennings would have deemed hersel socially disgraced if any party of hers had not been crowded— would afford better opportunities for the exercise of duplicity tha could be hoped for from the afternoon call which politeness woul render it incumbent upon him to pay ere long.

What disconcerted, and even alarmed, him a little was th manner of his reception by the lady whom he proposed to deceive Soon after his arrival upon the scene of festivity he made his wa to her side through an intervening throng of Browns, Joneses, an Robinsons, and it was without the faintest smile that she returned his greeting. Anne was looking very handsome, in a new French-grey costume which fitted her to perfection; she was also looking very grave, and she was so evidently displeased with him that he displeasure could scarcely be ignored. Did she think that he ought to have written to her?—or had she, by means of one o those strange feminine processes of reasoning which must remain for ever inscrutable to the male mind, arrived at the conclusion that he was in some way to blame for the catastrophe that had overtaken Spencer? The only way to find out what was the matter was to ask her; so he began, without preface:

'You have heard from your brother?'

'Yes,' she answered, 'I have heard from him; I must speak to you about it. I am afraid,' she added, looking round her with an irritated frown, 'there is no secluded place to which we can go; but if we were to get behind that brass band which is making such a horrible noise, we should at least run no risk of being overheard.'

The fact was that Mrs. Jennings's pleasure-grounds were of somewhat circumscribed area, and her invitation had been responded to by about three hundred people. These, however, in accordance with the national habit, had packed themselves closely together on the terrace fronting the house; so that comparative solitude was obtainable at a reasonable distance from the braying band and on the further side of the screen afforded by a clump of rhododendrons.

'Godfrey wrote to tell me of your brother's—misfortune,' Matthew said. 'Of course I would have let you know of it, only I felt sure that you would hear, and—and there wasn't much to be said, unluckily.'

'There was nothing to be said,' assented Anne; 'I never expected you to write.' She added, with an obvious effort, 'I am extremely grateful to you for all that you have done for Spencer.'

Neither her face nor her voice conveyed the impression of extreme gratitude; but Matthew hastened to assure her that nothing of the sort was owing to him.

'There was no great trouble involved in writing a few letters and calling at the War Office,' he remarked; 'I only wish the result had been more successful. As it is, I am afraid our hopes of getting a commission must be laid aside for some little time to come.'

'He will never get his commission now; I was not thinking of that,' Anne rejoined. 'Of course we are very much indebted to you for having secured him the chance; but debts of that kind may be submitted to, I suppose, without—without downright humiliation. What I cannot understand your having imagined is that we could allow you to pay a large sum of money for us secretly.'

Matthew's jaw fell. 'Confound the stupid idiot!' he ejaculated inwardly. Aloud he said, 'I am afraid your brother must have broken his word. He promised me that that part of the business should be between ourselves.'

'Have I not always warned you,' returned Anne, with a dreary little laugh, 'that there is no dependence to be placed upon Spencer? He did not betray you in his first letter, but I knew, from the way in which he expressed himself, that there must be more behind, and by degrees the whole story came out. I am glad it has come out; though I can't pretend to be glad that you should have——'

'Been so impertinent and officious?' suggested Matthew, since she seemed at a loss for words to conclude her sentence.

She neither confirmed nor disputed the sentiments ascribed to her; so he went on: 'I am very sorry that you have heard of this, and still more sorry to have offended you; but I am sure, if you will think of it, you will see that I couldn't have acted in any other way. It was absolutely necessary that the money should be paid, and there was no time to consult anybody. If I had driven out to Hayes Park, upon the chance of seeing you, after Godfrey's letter reached me, I should have been too late.'

Anne had pulled one of the tough leaves off the shrub beside which she was standing, and had begun to tear it into strips. 'I know that you saved him, and I know that we can never be thankful enough to you for your promptitude,' she answered slowly. 'But why did you make a secret of it? Why did you leave me to find out for myself what you had done?'

'Was it so very unpardonable that I should wish to spare you all the distress I could?'

'Oh, not unpardonable, perhaps; but I think—well, I think it was rather a mistake. I suppose you would not quite like it if you were to discover that I had been paying your tradesmen's bills for you?'

'My dear Miss Frere, I have not been paying any bill for you, and it would never occur to me to take such a liberty. Surely, if I feel inclined to give or lend fifty pounds to a man of my acquaintance, that is a matter which only concerns him and me.'

'It was a good deal more than fifty pounds; but the question, as you know, was not one between you and a man of your acquaintance. You gave Spencer to understand that the money came from me; how can you tell that he would have accepted it if you had spoken the truth?'

Matthew wished with all his heart that he had told the truth; for he felt very sure that Spencer's scruples would have been easily overcome. All he could find to say for himself was, 'I acted for the best.'

'I quite believe that you did,' Anne replied, in somewhat less severe accents; 'only—however, there is no use in saying any more about it. Of course you must be repaid.'

This was exceedingly painful, and the worst of it was that refusals or protests could only give additional offence.

'What have I done,' Matthew exclaimed, after a rather long pause, 'that you should treat me with such unfriendliness? Why may I not remain your brother's creditor for a time? Indeed it is not at all an uncommon thing for a man to borrow a small sum from a friend in an emergency. If I have never done it myself, that is simply owing to the accident of my never having been hard up; I should be afraid to say how many times I have lent money to other people.'

'And how many times have you received your money back? But nothing was said about a loan in this case. You represented to Spencer that the money came from me, and it is I who am responsible to you for it.'

In vain Matthew declared that, to the best of his recollection and belief, he had made no such misrepresentation. He had, he candidly owned, allowed her brother to form his own conclusions, but that had been merely as a measure of expediency and to avoid needless discussion. For the rest, he would, if she wished it, write a few lines to Lowcester that evening and explain.

Anne would have none of these specious excuses. Her name had been made use of, she said, and Mr. Austin must surely understand that it was impossible for her to accept either a loan or a gift of money from him. This was very dignified and quite unanswerable; but poor Anne, to her shame and sorrow, was unable to follow up her declaration of independence by practical proof of it. Her pale face flushed distressingly, and she had to clear away an obstruction in her throat before she could continue:

'Unfortunately, I must ask you to allow me a little time and to let me discharge my debt by instalments. My allowance, as I think I have told you before, is not a large one, and I have had a good many unforeseen expenses lately. I do not see how it can be less than a year——'

'Miss Frere,' interrupted Matthew, 'I think you are behaving most unkindly and ungenerously, and it doesn't seem to me that I have deserved such treatment. However, since you will have it so, let it be so; I do not wish you to feel that you are under any obligation—even an imaginary one—to me. But at least I may be allowed to mention that it will make not the slightest difference to me whether I am repaid to-day or ten years hence. The only doubt in my mind is whether I am justified in keeping all this from your father's knowledge any longer.'

'Ah, you are determined to spare me nothing!' exclaimed Anne, clasping her hands together. 'But of course you are quite right; I have no business to assume false airs of pride when I ought to be humbling myself in the dust before you. If you tell my father—and that, I have no doubt, would be the proper thing to do—you will be thanked as you deserve, and Spencer's debts will be paid once more.'

'Only you would rather that I did not tell?'

Anne looked down. 'It would be the last straw,' she said. 'Spencer would never be forgiven—never! Oh, I know I am ungenerous and ungracious—I can't help it. You must think what you please of me, but I do *hate* to have to ask this additional favour!'

'Then you shall not ask it. From purely selfish motives, I am reluctant to let Mr. Frere know that I have been busying myself on the sly with his family affairs, and I don't intend to do so. I must admit, too, that allowing your name to be dragged into this business was both stupid and unwarrantable on my part. Your brother, by my way of thinking, might very well have accepted a little temporary aid from me, but I quite understand that you cannot—or will not. Will you accept my sincere apologies, and believe that, however thoughtless and clumsy I may have been, the last thing that I meant, or could have meant, was to humiliate you?'

He extended his hand half involuntarily, and Anne's gloved fingers advanced to meet it. 'You are as generous as I am the reverse,' she said constrainedly. 'One is what one is—there is no help for it. Still I don't think I am altogether in the wrong.'

Matthew, to tell the honest truth, thought she was; so he held his peace. He did not venture to inquire whether she had formed any fresh project on her brother's behalf; still less could he think of proffering assistance. It was just as well that the colloquy was now broken off by the appearance of Mrs. Frere, and before long he made his escape.

'It is what I foresaw from the outset,' his hostess remarked to her spouse later in the day; 'that foolish young man has been jilted already, and I must say that it serves him right.'

'Eh?—jilted?' echoed Dr. Jennings, not ill-pleased at the supposed discomfiture of his ambitious rival. 'Who told you that?'

'There are things,' replied the good lady oracularly, 'which one doesn't require to be told, if one has eyes in one's head. He only came here because he was afraid it would create remark if he didn't; he scarcely spoke to anybody, and when I inquired, before he left, what news he had of Lady Sara Murray, he was downright sulky. Well, well! I really can't pity him; he should have more common sense.'

CHAPTER XX.

LILIAN MEETS AN OLD ACQUAINTANCE.

WHATEVER assertions may be made to the contrary, there never yet lived the woman to whom admiration was unwelcome. They are so fond of saying this about themselves—or at least about one another—that it is safe to accept the accuracy of the statement upon such unimpeachable authority; and indeed, *mutatis mutandis*, it applies to ourselves as much as to them. We all want to succeed, we all like applause; the only difference between us and the ladies in that respect being that our opportunities of attaining pre-eminence are far more varied than theirs. Consequently, there was nothing surprising in Lilian Murray's gradual reconcilement to a notoriety which many of her compeers would have given ten years of life to share. She was probably the most beautiful girl in London, she was admitted to be the most beautiful in that small section of the community which is styled great by reason of its rank or riches, and everything leads the unprejudiced looker-on to believe that that position must be delightful and intoxicating while it lasts.

That it cannot, in the nature of things, last long was what Miss Murray's experienced relatives were never weary of impressing upon her. They added (in case she should not know it) that the glory of being a reigning unmarried beauty is not so much valuable for its own sake as for what it may be expected to bring, and when she told them that she was engaged to be married to a country doctor, they only laughed, affecting to treat so absurd a statement as a good joke. She began by telling everybody that her heart and her hand had already been disposed of; but after a time she ceased to thrust unasked-for information down the throats of the indifferent. If everybody likes to be admired, nobody likes to be laughed at, and it was perhaps sufficient to have perfect confidence in one's own immutability.

At all events, there was no treachery to Matthew in enjoying the whirl of gaiety and excitement into which she was plunged almost from the very beginning of her fashionable career. She might have retorted '*Tu l'as voulu, Georges Dandin*,' if he had displayed any epistolary uneasiness; but, on the contrary, he seemed not only contented but glad that she should see as much as possible of contemporary society. And she took to it all (notwithstanding the recalcitrancy exhibited in her earlier letters to her betrothed) as a duck takes to water. In a very short space of time she heard and saw a great deal; she soon picked up current phraseology, possibly also current notions of morality; there was not nearly as much difficulty about teaching her her lesson as there is about drawing out the hereditary instincts of a thoroughbred horse or a setter of high pedigree. It is true that she maintained certain mental reservations; but these she now knew how to keep to herself.

It was on a Sunday afternoon when the season was at its height that she was taken to Tattersall's by some of those good-natured kinsmen and kinswomen of hers who were wont to relieve Lady Sara of the burden of chaperonage. On a Sunday afternoon at Tattersall's in the month of June one meets, if not quite everybody, at least a large proportion of the illustrious beings who are thus designated amongst themselves, and Miss Murray was speedily surrounded by the usual throng of smooth-shaven young men in long frock-coats. She was entirely at her ease with these gilded youths; her aversion for them, as a class, was a thing of the past, and although she snubbed some of them, she was amiable enough with others. The truth is that they were by no means disagreeable young men, while the remarks of some of their number with regard to horseflesh and racing were worthy of being listened to. Lilian, to be sure, was not specially interested in either subject; still she allowed herself to be conducted by a sporting peer in close proximity to the heels of a long string of hunters and, when he indicated their several blemishes, nodded her head confirmatively. Most of us can contrive to detect the obvious as soon as it has been clearly pointed out, and there is a distinct satisfaction in feeling that we know a little more than other people, to whom that advantage has been denied.

Lilian, therefore, was thinking to herself that, although it was very hot and there was a dense crowd and the stable was not quite as well ventilated as it might have been, she was better off, upon the whole, than if she had stayed at home or gone to church, when she suddenly became aware of a smartly-attired gentleman who was not only taking off his hat but holding out his hand to her. Over the wrist which he was not holding out hung a slim umbrella with a large crook handle, and to this she pointed, as she returned his greeting, remarking, with a smile:

'Out of the sling, I see. I congratulate you.'

'Oh, I threw away my sling ages ago,' answered Leonard Jerome. 'Thanks for your congratulations, all the same. Allow me, in return, to congratulate you very sincerely.'

'Upon what?'

'Well, I suppose I might congratulate you upon a heap of things—at any rate, the society papers tell me so—but only one of them is worth mentioning. Dear old Austin may be a lucky beggar, and I believe he is, but I'm bound to say that I think you are in luck too.'

'I think I am,' answered Lilian gravely.

She would have had some difficulty in explaining why Mr. Jerome's frankness of speech irritated her: perhaps it is never very pleasant to be called lucky; perhaps also she doubted the honesty of his felicitations upon an engagement which everybody else had agreed to regard as a matter for condolence or ridicule. Instead, however, of manifesting her feelings, as she would have done a few months earlier, she passed on through the throng with Leonard Jerome, deserting her sporting nobleman, who was at that moment anxiously examining the bruised stifle of a weight-carrier.

'I have seen you more than once from afar,' Leonard resumed, 'but you are rather unapproachable in these days. Would it be permitted to a humble rustic acquaintance to call upon Lady Sara? She told me I might, you know.'

'We shall be charmed,' answered Lilian, furnishing him with her address, which he at once wrote down.

'And may I hope that you will be a little less savage with me now than you used to be when I was so constantly and so unfortunately in the way?'

'Was I savage? Well, I dare say you were rather in the way sometimes at Wilverton; but you won't be in anybody's way here; there isn't room. One doesn't notice the elbows of one neighbour in particular amongst such a host of elbows and neighbours.'

'I suppose not. And how do you like London, as compared with Wilverton? It's absurd to ask, though. London must be Paradise to a few privileged folks, and I presume it won't be very long before the sole attraction of Wilverton takes his ticket for the metropolis. Please, when you write to Austin, tell him from me that I'm looking out for him.'

'I am afraid even that inducement would not persuade him to leave his work,' answered Lilian, with the smiling, inattentive look which women are fond of putting on when they wish to annoy their male companions. 'He does not talk of coming up to London.'

'Then,' rejoined Leonard emphatically, 'all I can say is he is a duffer. He ought to be here.'

They were standing in the glazed central yard, and Miss Murray's brown eyes, which had been roving towards distant corners, were now slowly turned upon Mr. Jerome, with an air of disdainful interrogation. 'Do you mean to be impertinent?' they seemed to say. 'Possibly you do; but it is of no consequence. Your impertinence would be scarcely worth noticing.'

Relations might have become strained if Lilian's cousins had not just then hastened up to take her away to a tea-crush. After hesitating for a moment, she introduced him to them, and so took leave of him, without repeating the hand-shaking ceremony.

A few days later he called at the tiny house in Mayfair which Lady Sara had hired for the season, and was received with the prompt 'Not at 'ome' that might have been anticipated at five o'clock in the afternoon.

'Jerome?' said Lady Sara, when she picked up his card out of a number of others and scrutinised it through her glasses; 'is not that the young man who broke some of his bones down at Wilverton last winter?'

Her ladyship's memory, it will be perceived, could no longer retain the names of such insignificant persons as the heirs-presumptive of obscure country gentlemen, and in truth she had clean forgotten having ever contemplated Leonard Jerome as a potential son-in-law. She now dreamt, and was to all appearance justified in dreaming, of far more exalted connections.

Bitter disappointment was, however, in store for her. What was the use of having achieved a brilliant, an almost unprecedented success if nothing was to come of it? And Lilian seemed determined that nothing should come of it. One of the saddest days of poor Lady Sara's life was that on which her daughter quietly informed her that she had just refused the eldest son of a prodigiously wealthy contractor, whose virtues and riches had recently met with deserved recognition in the form of a peerage.

‘It is sheer, downright madness!’ the unhappy lady exclaimed. ‘This makes the fourth, and much the best, chance that you have thrown away. Anybody—anybody in England might have been proud and thankful to make such a match! Lilian, dear, what *can* you expect?’

‘I expect to marry the man of my choice some day,’ the girl responded composedly.

‘Oh, poor dear Mr. Austin! Of course he is very nice and very good; but really——’

‘Really what?’

‘I hoped you had given up thinking of him, that was all. You haven't spoken about him for such a long time.’

It was true that Lilian had given up speaking about the subject, because she knew that it was one upon which her mother's sympathies could not be with her; but she had never wavered in her allegiance, nor did she for a moment distrust herself. Only she did, every now and then, wish that there were somebody to whom Matthew's name might be mentioned without fear of ridicule. And perhaps it was because Mr. Jerome was always willing, and even eager, to expatiate upon the manifold merits of his medical friend that she learnt to look with pleasurable anticipations for the sight of Leonard's handsome face.

The sight was seldom denied to her, after that preliminary encounter at Tattersall's which had so nearly terminated in a quarrel. Whether by accident or by design, Mr. Jerome was at almost all the resorts of public and private amusement to which she was taken, and it soon became a matter of course that he should lose no time in making his way to her side.

‘You are a sort of safety-valve,’ she told him one evening, when he had taken the liberty of thanking her for her softened demeanour towards him; ‘I can say things to you which I am not allowed to say to anybody else in London. Besides, you dance beautifully.’

They frequently met at balls, and it was only natural that, having one important bond of union, they should proceed to discover others. Lilian's early prejudice against the man who was now her favourite partner had quite disappeared; she began to feel a sincere interest in him and his affairs, about which he was always ready to discourse openly, and she acknowledged to herself that Matthew had not been far wrong in calling him manly and unaffected. For the rest, their intercourse was not uninterruptedly friendly. Leonard, in his jealous zeal for his absent friend, occasionally took the liberty of remonstrating with her upon what he was pleased to call her flirtations, and when he ventured to do this he was promptly sent to Coventry until he saw the error of his ways and came, with deep humility, to implore forgiveness.

'I know I am officious and impertinent,' he told her once, 'but sometimes it is out of my power to hold my tongue. You have a way of looking at men—I dare say it means nothing—I'm sure it means nothing; but there are moments when—well, when I simply can't stand it!'

He had to make his apologies a good deal more abject than that before they were accepted; but the period of estrangement seldom lasted for more than forty-eight hours. The truth was that he had gradually become essential to Lilian's comfort, and, after all, since her conscience did not accuse her, why should she make such a fuss about a little vicarious jealousy? Leonard heard of some of the advantageous proposals which she had declined, and great was his joy on being made aware of them. He could not have displayed more satisfaction if he had been Matthew himself. Indeed, she often wondered whether Matthew would have displayed half as much.

Now, it came to pass, one fine afternoon in the beginning of July, that Lady Sara and her daughter drove to the mansions near Albert Gate where Mr. Jerome rented a flat, having been invited by that gentleman to take tea with him and meet his sister, Lady Bannock. He had before this been several times admitted to the Murrays' little house in Tilney Street, where he had been made welcome by Lilian's mother, who had always thought him a pleasant sort of young man and was quite willing to be introduced to his bachelor abode and his influential relatives.

Lady Bannock was really influential, being the wife of a Scotch peer whose means were abundant and who was given to hospitality. She was a plump, good-natured little woman, without any vestige of her brother's comeliness of form and feature—which may have been one reason why her admiration and affection for her brother knew no bounds. Doubtless she had been instructed to be particularly agreeable to her brother's friends; for she greeted the two ladies with effusion on their entrance, saying that she had heard so much about them from Leonard and had been wishing for a long time past to make their personal acquaintance. Lady Sara and she were soon deep in one of those conversations relating to common friends which are so engrossing to the persons concerned and so desperately uninteresting to everybody else. Lilian, meanwhile, took a leisurely survey of Mr. Jerome's reception-room, which was lofty and sunny, which commanded a prospect of green trees and of the crowded Park beyond them, and which was furnished in admirable taste.

'You know how to make yourself comfortable, I see,' she remarked to her entertainer, when he brought her a cup of tea.

'Do you like these rooms?' he asked. 'Well, if one must needs live in London, I dare say one is as well off here as anywhere else, and I thought, upon the whole, I would rather make my home in a few small rooms amongst other civilised beings than shiver in one corner of a great empty house on the north-east coast. They only just hold me, though.'

'I should have thought you might have been contained in a smaller space than this; but perhaps you have large ideas. What do you consist of here?—drawing-room, dining-room, bedroom, and bathroom?'

'Yes; and I have one small spare room and a smoking-den.'

'What more can you possibly want? In our wretched little bandbox we are obliged to turn round with precaution, lest we should break through the outer wall and tumble out into the street. Is it allowable to inspect your premises?'

Leonard made the only reply that could be made; but it struck her at once that he did not make it with much alacrity, and she said no more. After a time, however, he complied with her wish of his own accord, and conducted her into his dining-room, which was of ample dimensions and was rendered attractive by Chippendale chairs, a fine old oak sideboard, and a few excellent etchings. When she had examined and expressed her approbation of these, he turned back into the corridor and, throwing open the door of a small room adjoining the drawing-room—

'This is my private dog-kennel,' he said, without entering. 'There's nothing to see in it.'

He could hardly have adopted a surer method of convincing her that there *was* something to see in it, and, being a woman, she was unable to resist the temptation of pushing past him.

A moment later she regretted her curiosity; for there, staring her in the face, was only too evidently the thing which he had not desired to exhibit to her—namely a full-length photograph of herself in a heavy silver frame. It stood upon the writing-table near the window, and was much too big and conspicuous to be ignored. Lilian pointed to it with her forefinger.

'I don't remember giving you that,' she said quietly, yet in a voice which boded no good to the unlicensed proprietor. 'Where did you get it?'

Leonard, who had become very red in the face, made a somewhat unsuccessful effort to recover his *aplomb*.

'I got it from the photographer,' he confessed; 'please don't kill him. He was most unwilling to part with it, and only yielded when I had recourse to subterfuges. In fact, I am afraid I left him with the impression that I was an authorised person.'

'I see,' said Lilian. 'Well, as you are not an authorised person, and as you seem to have come into possession of this work of art by means of what you prettily call a subterfuge, it can hardly be considered your property.'

She picked up the frame, withdrew the photograph from it, and, tearing the latter across, put the pieces in her pocket.

'You will have to find a substitute,' she remarked. 'There are plenty of actresses and other celebrities whose portraits you can purchase without any need for subterfuge or any breach of the law.'

He tried in vain to make his peace with her; he affirmed—truly or untruly, and in any case very ill-advisedly—that his intention had been to procure a likeness of Matthew, as a *pendant* to that of which he had been deprived, and he assured her, with equal clumsiness, that nobody, except herself and his man-servant, was aware of his indiscretion. The only reply that she vouchsafed to him was a contemptuous shrug of the shoulders, and her immediate return to the drawing-room robbed him of all opportunity for further allusion to the matter.

'Lady Bannock is quite charming,' Lady Sara remarked to her daughter on the way home. 'She wants us to stay with them in Scotland towards the end of next month, and if she repeats her invitation, I think we may as well accept it. We shall be in their neighbourhood, you know.'

'Shall we?' asked Lilian absently.

'Why, my dear child, have you forgotten that we have been asked to stay at three houses.'

'Oh, of course; but you said it would have to depend upon your health, and Scotland is so cold! Don't you think you would be better at Wilverton?'

'In August!' Lady Sara paused for a moment and then said emphatically, 'I hope and believe that there will never be any necessity for us to return to that place.'

Probably she expected some rejoinder, but she received none. Only Lilian, who knew that her will was stronger than her mother's, said to herself, 'It may not be Wilverton, but it shall not be Lady Bannock's. I can answer for that!'

(*To be continued.*)

THE CARNARVON PENINSULA.

To the dispassionate Englishman the Welsh people do not seem anything like as interesting as their country. But that is, no doubt, because their beloved land is quite exceptionally attractive.

I was driven to an even harsher conclusion than this during my walks and residence in that somewhat benighted district of North Wales known as the Carnarvon Peninsula. Look at it on the map, and see what a long headland it is, with the islet of Bardsey at the toe, like Sicily in its relation to Italy. When you are at Aberdaron, the little village nearest Bardsey, you are about sixteen miles from the railway. That, for Great Britain, is pretty good. One may therefore expect a little roughness in this part of the realm, especially when it is remembered that the inhabitants all speak Welsh, and those of them who retain school history in their minds have still strong views about Edward the Conqueror, and think Owen Glendower one of the great figures in the world's gallery of immortals.

The Welsh of the Peninsula (it is called the Lleyn, which means the Peninsula) do not pretend to have many graces of manner. The majority of them are much like those very ugly chapels of theirs—Salems, Zoars, Moriahs, Jerusalems, Bethels, &c.—which stare with their rectangular or polygonal faces at the Saxon stranger as if they thoroughly resented his intrusion into their domain of influence. If, being thirsty, you ask them for a beverage, they tender you spring water. If, having lost your way, you inquire for a direction, you are either misunderstood and therefore misdirected, or you are treated with calm sniggers which prove you are in a foreign land to which your homebred tongue is an object of ridicule. If, after much persuasion, you induce the mistress of one of the nice, snug-looking white cottages which pervade the landscape to take you in and bed you, unless you have a contempt for fleas you shall pass a wild night. I know well that the general character of the Welsh includes cleanliness in its list of attributes. This, however, does not apply to the Welsh of the Peninsula. They are a people apart, living in the dust of their ancient habits. England seems as remote from them as Germany seems from us. What have they to do with it and its people? they not unnaturally ask themselves. They are not like the degenerate Kelts of such places of tourist resort as Llanberis, Beddgelert, or Llandudno. These recreants actually talk English over their tea-cups, and attend chapel to hear English sermons. The Peninsula Welsh are of a stouter and more national heart. Their morals are of a high order. They would consider the publican who sold beer on a Sunday as a child of perdition, and the tourist who demanded it as equally lost. They would have entire sympathy with the lady who the other day wrote plaintively to a journal of the Principality asking advice about the spiritual state of a relative who had backslided so far as to spend an evening in a circus.

They are not all like this, but the majority certainly are. I know nothing more depressing to the unprejudiced traveller than his experiences in the Peninsula during a brief restrained tour among the people on Sunday. They all look as if they yearned to attend the funeral of a very near relative. The boys do not whistle. The maidens are more than demure. The older folk are reputed to go to bed between morning service and evening service, having, I suppose, learnt a little of the philosophy of life. And even the young men wear black. Their ministers are, of course, mainly of the unrelenting school, which cannot promote vivacity. Calvin has much to answer for in Wales as well as in the Lowlands of Scotland.

The few exceptions are those who have journeyed into England and stayed there long enough to be inoculated with a little of our own proverbial liveliness and good sense. But even these people keep a tight hold upon their imported notions and convictions. For dear life's sake they must conform to the conduct of their neighbours; else they will be indicted at one or other of the terrible, miscalled social evening meetings, when the flock attend chapel simply and solely, as it seems, to publicly pick holes in the characters of each other. If, on such an occasion, a case is established against them, the minister has it in his prerogative to excommunicate them, pending repentance and confession as public as the charges brought against them.

I have in my mind one such exception. She is a girl to make the heroine of a novel—young, fair, amiability itself, educated in England yet patriotic to the backbone, and whose sweet English lisp and occasional misuse of tenses and prepositions are seducing lures for the susceptible British male. When I, a stranger, besought shelter in her mother's house, she it was who pleaded for me with the obdurate dame. Later, she waited on me for three days with her own fair hands, sat with me when I was solitary, unfolded her simple sweet young life to me while she leaned her cheek upon her palm, and apologised so prettily for her mother's many fleas and abundant dirt that I began to regard both these defects as domestic qualities of distinction—in the Peninsula. She told me more of her soul, I surmise, than she has told to the grim-faced, tawny-bearded person who stalks up and down the village under his halo of 'the minister.' Her nature seems to me quite spotless. Even the shred of native-born superstition which she retained was comely in her. She told me how her belief in the spirit-world had made her over and over again leave her warm bed in the dead of night and kneel just as she was in the middle of the room, appealing to her deceased father to give her a sign there and then that he was watching over her. No sign had been given, but still she believed.

I find I have commemorated this pretty girl in my notebook in these words: 'I could love this girl: what a white soul she has!' My confession may argue me a simpleton, but that does not distress me in the least.

Such visitors as do find their way to the toe of the Lleyn take the coach from Pwllheli. That is a tolerable route, though not the best. It is more enlightening, if more laborious, to don thick boots and walk by the coast through Llanbedrog and Rhiw. One thus sees a surprising number of bulls and sagacious colley dogs, a sufficiency of white Welsh cottages, in the proper season myriads of primroses and hyacinths, as well as gorse-crowned hills, and (most cheerful sight of all) the superb breakers of the Atlantic combing into Hell's Mouth Bay in a line more than three miles long. Also the landscapes over the Principality must be mentioned. These are not to be matched anywhere. One looks south to St. David's Head, and all the cumber of Snowdonia is seen to the north.

The route is distinctly unhackneyed. The Welsh urchins regard you as a marvel, to be reverenced or mocked according to their temperament. Of houses of entertainment throughout the sixteen miles there may be two, and bread and cheese and ale is all these can afford the traveller. The one at Rhiw is quite remarkable—small and unassuming, on the top of the ridge between Hell's Mouth Bay and Aberdaron, and any number of centuries old. Here, while I rested in the big chimney-corner of the common room, I learnt something of the famous astuteness of the Welshmen of the Peninsula. A couple of them entered, weatherworn and ragged. They talked a species of English. 'We are poor chaps, sir, we are,' said the spokesman of the two. 'But your glass is empty, what will you drink?' Their innocent ruse succeeded, of course, as it deserved to succeed. The large-bodied Welsh woman who served the ale pretended she knew no English, but there was the ghost of a gleam in her stolid eyes as she brought in another quart—at my expense.

The two hills of Llanbedrog and Rhiw are so steep that few vehicles care to tackle them. The coach goes by a circuitous inland way. Still, one cart passed me in the broad lowlands beneath Rhiw. It contained three servant-maids and a red-haired man with a protrusive beard which betokened his ancient lineage. To the wise this indicated hiring-time. So in effect it was. The girls were changing their 'missuses,' and seemed finely elated about it. At the invitation of the man I mounted a large tin box in the rear of the cart for a short rest. The box, however, was grievously aslant, the road was strewn with new stones, and the quadruped trotted clankingly. Ten minutes of this exercise more than sufficed. Once I was constrained to clutch at the neck of the nearest maid to keep myself from going, and all the while I had to hold on grimly to the edge of the box. They laughed rarely when I at length slid off and pantomimically signified both my thanks and the discomfort their civility had occasioned to me. But I caught them up at the Rhiw Hill, where the woods looking seawards were blue with hyacinths, and in which cuckoo and thrush seemed to be vying with each other in sweet suggestive song. A squirrel also ran up an elm-tree by my side and shook his pretty tail in defiance or appreciation of me.

One is astonished at the amount of population this headland supports. Land's End in Cornwall is desolation to it. True, there are not here two or three hotels, each claiming to be the first and last in England. But tiny homesteads dot the uneven land high up the hills which finally close the Peninsula with their abrupt reddish cliffs laved by the blue sea. They are queer, prim little dwellings, with neat enclosed fields around them and banked walls between, so broad that the people use their summits as thoroughfares, even as the dogs of the district use them for perches whence to assail the stranger when in the mood. These Welsh dogs are unmannerly brutes. One of them speedily tore out a mouthful from my knickerbockers, and the precedent once established, I came to expect an attack from them as regularly as I espied them in front of me.

I had the luck to be in Aberdaron during the spring hiring-day. This great domestic festival—or otherwise—took place at Sarn, a market village six miles away. It upset the economy of a multitude of homes far and wide. From an early hour the lanes were thick with flighty young women who had given their mistresses notice, and meant to lease themselves out for the coming six months at largely enhanced wages; with carts containing farmers and their wives in quest of servants and farm hands; and with loose-limbed men in black carrying boxes under their arms which held all their worldly kit, and which, with themselves, they were anxious to transfer to a new *régime.* The fair sex without exception were imposingly attired. I cannot say they were dressed up to date. They told me in Aberdaron at the millinery shop that the servant-girls of the district do not care for a fashion until it is two or three years old, somewhat crusted in fact. But there was no doubting their taste in bonnets. They wore them as large nearly as the narrowness of the district lanes would permit. Seen in the Sarn market-place the damsels were suggestive of nothing so much as a grove of palm trees with rather short trunks.

The evening of this important day was devoted to revelry of a kind scandalous to the stricter Welsh people. There was a slip of a circus in the village, and some ginger-bread stalls. These, with beer, made up a gala occasion of a very emphatic kind. The carts reeled home through the night. Their noise and that of their occupants awoke me several times during the dark hours. And the next day those of the servant-girls who had got their wages in advance (a five-pound note or so for the half-year) trooped into the village and indulged themselves *en masse* with new gowns and bonnets.

In my innocence I had hoped that the Peninsula world would abound in Welsh women wearing their ancestral sugar-loaf hats. No such thing. Even the most old-fashioned of crones here would have elevated her nose at the idea. At the millinery shop there were none such on view, though at my request they searched a loft to which the dregs of the market long long ago had been ignominiously consigned, and thence they brought two mournful time-stained hats a foot and a half high. The people of the house laughed at the things much as you or I might ridicule a Cromwellian leathern jacket. The words 'Paris make' inscribed within seemed to fully entitle the hats to all the scoffs they excited.

Life in Aberdaron cannot claim to be furious in pace at any time. The two score white houses of the village seem to hob-a-nob amiably, though in a drowsy manner. It is the same with the villagers themselves. They keep a few boats, three or four public-houses, and as many shops. These last are for the seduction of the people from the country round, who sidle hither at all hours of the day for a spell of *dolce far niente* or some beer. There is a venerable church hard by the sands of the Bay; indeed, it is held to be about the oldest building of the kind in Wales. Its aisle-walls are pleasantly decorated with coffin-plates. In its churchyard, which has been picked at by the spring tides much as little boys and girls 'sample' the loaves for which their parents send them to the bakers' shops, are a number of elegant slate monumental slabs, vertical and recumbent. Upon these the more reflective (and perhaps poetical) of the villagers love to recline while they pass spasmodic remarks. Their eyes roam over the confined waters of their little Bay, with the steep cliffs of Pen-y-kil away to the right. Thus they spend agreeable if inactive hours, moving their quids from one corner of their mouths to the other. Their wives and daughters may be heard bustling about with pots and pans and basins in the backyards of the cottages behind them. At times the women break into shrill song. The waves and the wind are an accompaniment to it. And when dinner is ready the gentle idlers among the tombs lurch heavily homewards to satisfy nature's cravings, resolved, however, to return to the churchyard as soon as possible for digestive purposes.

It is a tranquillising little place, quaint and secluded rather than beautiful. Yet its sands are of the right kind for children, with fantastic red boulders embedded in them, and, in a southerly wind, with substantial waves bowling after each other into the Bay. Its dearth of social diversion is only what you would expect. That accounts for the otherwise culpable manner in which the people lounge from door to door in quest of morsels of piquant gossip. Much of this gossip came to my ears while I lodged at the millinery shop. It was transparently trivial for the most part: about the approaching death of some old inhabitant, or the near advent of a new inhabitant; the brisk interchange of ill words between two ladies, mistresses of adjacent houses; or the absurdity of the bonnets in which the two twelve-year-old Owen girls (just out to service) had invested on the strength of their hire-money. There was also, as there was bound to be, no small amount of undisguised flirtation between the swarthy young men with rings in their ears and the somewhat pretty girl who kept the millinery shop. Swarthy young men with rings in their ears ought not to want articles of millinery, but they seemed to. And while I sat in my dusty parlour—with divers stiff, uninteresting, clerical gentlemen on the walls—quite late of an evening, these lazy young seafaring fellows cracked their jokes with the girl till the laughter became loud enough to distract me. I dare say the maiden was well endowed with tact. At any rate, she came to see me periodically, and told, with deep sighs, of the weariness of spirit the young men and their inanity brought upon her. For all that, I have little doubt she will marry one of them some day.

In at least one respect I was foolish ere exiling myself at the toe of the Lleyn. I carried with me no more cigars than my case held. These went in a day. Then I made such an outcry for more that the village was requisitioned for cigars. The millinery girl conjured her swarthy friends to see if they hadn't a box or two of 'smuggled smokes' in their houses. The inns, too, were searched. But it was to no purpose. Aberdaron does not favour cigars. It likes a black sort of tobacco with a very strong smell, and so cheap that I am ashamed to mention the price. To this I was compelled to turn my attention. A pair of simple unwaxed clay pipes were provided at the same time. I am somewhat infatuated with nicotine, but never was the strength of my infatuation more severely tried. I smoked myself into a series of mad headaches, and wondered what the brains and stomachs of the Welshmen of the Peninsula could be made of.

Further, I had few books with me—by no means enough to carry through the evenings of my stay. This cast me upon the local literature even as I was thrown upon the local tobacco. The majority of the books that were offered me were in Welsh. But also there were divers volumes of sermons in English by a famous Keltic Calvinist. These were fine reading for wet, stormy nights. Were I of a more convertible disposition than I am, I should have been won by the preacher's eloquence to a complete assurance that I had not two chances in a thousand of escaping eternal damnation after death. The odds are long, but they seemed to me enough, sinner though I am.

Add to these comparative deprivations the fact that there are no French cooks in Aberdaron, and that my meals were eked out methodically between eggs and bacon, tea, bad beer, and the potted contents of the general store of the village, and you might suppose I was not at all happy, but was rather of my own free will suffering penance for some notable misdeed.

That, however, were a very erroneous view of the matter. Even Aberdaron and its roughnesses were entertaining—for a time. But Aberdaron was only the stake to which I had tied my tether, and to which I reverted towards nightfall when I had had a surfeit of the cliffs and gorse hills and primrosy lanes of the neighbourhood. I never heard so many larks sing at once as here, over the fields east of the hills which end the Peninsula. I never smelt so sweet an open-air perfume as that from the hyacinths on the sloping meadows under the lee of the great turf walls which here divide property from property. I will not say I never saw fairer prospects than that from the Anelwog mountain (some seven or eight hundred feet high) which falls precipitously towards the western sea; but it would not be gross exaggeration if I did say so. Thus the three noblest of the senses were satiated; this, too, under a warm May sky, with caressing zephyrs from the Atlantic, and a pleasurable feeling that, had I tried ever so, I could hardly anywhere in the realm have got more effectually away from ‘the madding crowd’ without crossing the sea.

Was it a wonder that when I had made myself drowsy with the scented air, and had seen the sun vanish beneath the transfigured Atlantic, I was not in the humour to find fault inordinately with poor little Aberdaron for lacking theatres and concert-halls—for being, in short, the vacuous, somnolent little village it is?

But another object of interest must be mentioned. From Anelwog, and much more from the extreme cliffs of Braich-y-Pwll, Bardsey seems very near to the mainland. It really is only about two miles from Braich-y-Pwll. But there is no port here. From Aberdaron the island is about five miles—of roughish current, which very little wind makes the mariners of the village shake their wise heads at.

It is rather a sacred and mysterious little isle, this of Bardsey. I had been led to believe its inhabitants were as irreproachable as if they were in Paradise. This illusion was dispelled one evening. A sudden noise of voices broke into the house from the domestic—not the shop—entrance. The shrill tones of women clashed with the deep and very thick broken utterances of a man. They talked, or rather clamoured, Welsh, so I had no conception what was in the wind. Curiosity was not to be resisted. I left my room and saw my pretty milliner, her mother, and the maid-servant all heavily impelling up the narrow stairs an aged man whose white hair tossed almost to his shoulders, and whose semicircle of snowy whiskers and beard made him look like Moses or Abraham in the picture-books. The man was loth to ascend, and resisted. But the women all had him hard in the small of the back and declined to give way. Thus they urged him to the first floor and into a bed-chamber, where he collapsed immediately upon a bed. They locked the door and left him, heedless of his monstrous cries for a supper to consist of roast beef, porridge, and tea.

This was a Bardsey islander over for the day, or the week, as the weather might please. He was a relation of the shop, but had spent his best hours at one of the inns. This same venerable reveller astonished me on the stairs the next morning by greeting me civilly in English, and wondering (in a dubious manner) if he could have a soda-and-brandy. They sent him up a teacupful of milk instead.

Bardsey is the property of Lord Newborough, who owns so much territory in the north-west of Wales. It is a possession full of honour, if we are to believe the accepted tradition that twenty thousand saints lie buried in it. The lord of the isle has erected a monument to their memory in the precincts of the old ruined Abbey; nor does he reduce the number of them by a single one. At first sight you might doubt the island's ability to hold the bones of so many mortals; but really it has a circumference of about three miles, which, manifestly, may suffice. The modern islanders are, as they ought to be, a byword of integrity and sobriety at home; but perhaps it is a pity the righteous influence of their native place does not cling to them more effectually when they are away from it.

This legend of Bardsey's saints demands explicit recognition. Out of question, there is a measure of truth in it. The ruins of the Abbey at this day are a witness to the importance of the little island many centuries ago. The Abbey has been associated with Dubricius, Archbishop of Caerleon, who died in Bardsey in A.D. 522. Rather less than a hundred years later occurred that outrage by King Ethelred upon the monks of Bangor-is-coed in Flintshire, which seems to have spread panic among the Christians of the northern part of the Principality. These disestablished believers fled to Anglesey in thousands. Many of their names are preserved for us in the names of the churches which succeeded the remote hermitages in which they ensconced themselves. Llanflewyn, Llanbeulan, Llanrhwydrys, &c., are but the churches of Flewyn, Beulan, Rhwydrys—holy men who never expected thus to go down the avenue of time memorialised for posterity. But the monks also fled down the Carnarvon Peninsula, striving to get as far as possible from the cruel hands of the Pagan marauders. They were stopped temporarily by the reddish cliffs of Braich-y-Pwll.

On a level plateau of grass and heather here where the land looks towards Bardsey, only two miles away (though with a strong tide between), and about a hundred and fifty feet above the sea, there may still be discerned the outline of an embanked enclosure within which buildings formerly existed. This locally goes by the name of Eglwys Fair, or Our Lady's Chapel. That is all that tradition tells us on the subject. It may have been a chapel like those so common in the south of Europe on marine headlands—beacons of hope and safety for Christian sailors ; or merely a place of pilgrimage. But also it may have been founded and supported by these exiled 'religious' from Bangor-is-coed *en route* for Bardsey. It is enough that it is there. We may frame various interesting conjectures about it. For my part, I would fain imagine that the chapel of Our Lady of Braich-y-Pwll had a considerable existence and was incorporated with a monastery; and, further, that after the death of the successive inmates they were ferried over the flood to their last resting-place in Bardsey. It is quite credible that a thousand or two of the Bangor-is-coed monks and their Christian flock sheltered and died in the island, even though common sense puts the question, 'How could they exist here ere they died ?' With the dead bodies of these Christians and those of the monastery of Our Lady of Braich-y-Pwll we may readily justify the later chroniclers (who were seldom good at arithmetic) in telling of the twenty thousand Bardsey saints.

Thus may be explained this unique characteristic of the little island. The subject has been provocative of a host of scoffs—so much so that the islanders themselves have given up defending their country's reputation in the matter and shake their heads with the majority. But it does not deserve to be smothered in ridicule as a mere lying tale.

The modern folk of Bardsey cannot but be influenced more or less by the halo that is about their land. They are a simple, law abiding community—the women in particular being engagingl ignorant about events in the great world of which they are a par though a small one. They have not much to commend them t admiration externally. Constant exposure gives them very tawn complexions, and though they have strength they have few of th graces that on the mainland often accompany strength. They ar thick-limbed, heavy-featured, and rather dull to the eye. But a this is of scant account to their discredit in comparison with th homely virtues that are certainly theirs. A person of experienc could recognise them at a glance as inhabitants of a remot island.

Among the men, not a few have travelled far and wide a sailors and fisherfolk ere settling down on this gorse-clad roc They find the island thoroughly congenial. It is a sort of compromise for them. They are on dry land, and yet it is as if the were on the ocean that has endeared itself to them. You woul expect these superannuated mariners to be rather heedless of th dangers attendant upon the sea and its currents. In the Faro Islands and elsewhere there is an annual and relatively larg mortality due to storms and capsizes. But here at Bardsey yea pass and there is no death from natural or accidental cause The islanders are not to be bribed to cross to Aberdaron or fro Aberdaron when the weather is risky. A sovereign or two more o less can make but little difference to their material prosperity, an they seem sufficiently philosophic to perceive it. Much mor to their taste is it to stand at the doors of their cottages an prattle about past times. These travelled ones talk very passable English, though they interlard it with Welsh mannerism which may well make the Londoner smile. They have adventure enough to relate about storms and fanatic foreigners; nor does i signify overmuch that they strain at the long-bow to excite th interest of the ladies. There is something taking about th hard-featured but placid old fellows, with their lurching gait fluent if rather laboured speech, and their simple clay pipes i which they smoke the disagreeable black tobacco of the mainland

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I walked to Aberdaron from Pwllheli, but returned by the coach. This was an amusingly odd final experience of the ways of life in the Peninsula. We were packed so tight about the vehicle, even at the start, that there was a difficulty in breathing. This, however, was nothing to the afterwards. A variety of old ladies in archaic bonnets, with bundles and umbrellas, also young women in feathers, and males of all kinds stopped us in the lanes and must needs mount how and where they could. I never was so squeezed in all my days. The more obliging young men took the comelier of the maidens upon their knees. It was really false kindness, since it only enabled the driver to cram another old lady or two into our midst. Thus after a while we rattled along with people clinging upon all sides like limpets to a rock. Our horses were of the large, loose, lean kind, two white and two brown. For an hour it was quite laughable. Then it began to rain, and for the remaining three hours of the ride the heavens pelted us without mercy. Between us we absorbed so much moisture that the weight of the coach was considerably increased ere Pwllheli was reached. One of the old school of caricaturists would have made a very great deal of this eccentric vehicle and its picturesque freight. For my part, I bore a memento of the ride in the impress of a button which a stout farmer lady had driven as far into my arm as it would go. If she had been a criminal with the law at her heels, my arm could have given circumstantial evidence against her hours after we parted company.

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CHARACTER NOTE.

THE CHILD.

'Plus on aime, plus on souffre.'

Barbara is six years old. She has stout cheeks, stout legs, and a temper. She has a sister called Pollie, who is sweet and seven, and a brother in button-up shoes and a frock. Pollie and Bab and Tom spend nearly all their days in the nursery. Mamma has a taste for society, and has not much time to play maternity.

'Children are a great deal happier left to themselves,' she says comfortably. Mamma is constantly announcing such convenient axioms, and believing them.

The children are indeed very happy by themselves. Bab particularly perhaps, because Bab has thoughts, and lives, with the dolls, in a fair world of her own. She has, perhaps, five-and-twenty children, who are dressed, taught, and amused, put to bed, and nursed through dire diseases. Matilda is the eldest of them. Matilda has black hair, large, beautiful staring eyes, and the loveliest vermilion complexion. She accompanies Bab everywhere. When Papa takes the children a trip in his yacht, Bab refuses, with much temper and firmness, to go without her child. Bab, lying prone on the deck, when the chops of the Channel have become too much for her inner woman, holds Matilda's kid paw tightly in her own moist hand. She feels as if she were dying, but even in death she will not desert Matilda. Matilda's perambulator has always to accompany the party. It is considered by Bab too precious to be packed up, and if she loses sight of it she roars.

Bab has indeed a fine pair of lungs, to which it must be confessed she gives plenty of exercise. The potency of her emotions will not allow her to weep gentle tears like Pollie. A rising colour in Bab's fat face, and the slow opening of Bab's particularly competent mouth, are perfectly reliable signals to Mamma to ring the bell and have Bab forcibly ejected from the room by a muscular nursery-maid.

In the nursery the children play at House. The enterprising Pollie is generally abroad catering for the family. Tom goes out hunting on the rocking-horse. But Bab sits at home surrounded by her children. Sometimes they have to be corrected, but more often to be hushed and loved on Bab's maternal breast. Anyhow, they always need her. Her sense of responsibility is perhaps, in its childish way, as great as that of many real mothers. She has at least so far the true maternal feeling that, though she has so many children, she loves each as singly and devotedly as if she had but that one alone.

On Sundays the children play Church. Pollie, correct and officious in a night-gown, is the clergyman. Tom plays the organ on a penny whistle in a handy cupboard. Bab and the dolls form the congregation. At a certain signal, Bab causes Matilda to faint with a scream. And Tom removes the prostrate body with great zest and enjoyment. Tom and Pollie indeed sometimes forget the solemnity of the occasion and laugh. But Bab is always serious and tranquil. She is a mother. She has to set an example to the children.

'Bab thinks dolls is real,' lisps Tom.

'No, I don't,' says Bab, her face getting very red and holding Matilda very tight indeed. But it is a story. They are real—to her.

Bab reads. She reads all the books she can find, whether she understands them or not. She reproduces the long words she encounters in her conversation afterwards, with a perfectly original pronunciation and adapted to a meaning of her own.

Mamma says, 'What a queer child!'—a trifle scornfully. And Bab goes back to her book-world—so much simpler and easier than the real one—with that disparaging accent lingering somehow about her small heart.

Pollie is a much more successful child than Bab. Bab knows that Mamma thinks so. Bab thinks so herself. Pollie is very courageous, for instance. Pollie climbs trees in the garden—quite high trees. She puts her heroic countenance through the branches and calls to Bab, fat and timid, beneath: 'You're afraid.'

Bab says, 'No, I'm not. I don't want to climb trees. It's stupid,' with quite unnecessary vehemence. But in Bab's heart her greatest ambition is to be like Pollie in everything. Bab has indeed for Pollie one of those blind, faithful devotions which seldom survive childhood. Bab is not angry with Pollie for being so much prettier than she is herself. Bab thinks that Pollie, dressed in white muslin and a pink sash to go out to a party, is just like an angel. Bab smooths Pollie's white silk legs with a small, reverent paw. She loves Pollie, and loves to see her beautiful.

Mamma likes Pollie best. Who could help it? It is at least a preference against which Bab herself makes no appeal. And if there is a little wistfulness in her fat face when Mamma kisses Pollie and looks at her with admiring eyes before she starts for the party, it is a wistfulness in which there is no shadow of bitterness or disloyalty to Pollie.

Bab sometimes goes to parties, too. Not very often, because Bab is not a party child or likely to do Mamma any particular credit. Bab outsits all the other guests at tea. She is calmly consuming her tenth piece of bread and butter in the dining-room long after the other children have retired to play games in the hall. When the lady of the house, affable and gracious, inquires if Bab has enjoyed herself, Bab replies with grave simplicity, 'A little, thank you, but not very much.'

Bab is, indeed, fatally honest. When she is sent down to the drawing-room to be looked at by the afternoon visitors, Bab surveys those visitors with so calm and direct a gaze as to sometimes quite embarrass them. No wonder Pollie is the show child. Bab is quite plain and fat and simple. She hugs Matilda and speaks the truth.

Mamma is never unkind to Bab. Bab has every opportunity of indulging a fine appetite for bread and butter. She is suitably clothed. When Mamma says Bab has a passionate temper and an obstinate will, Mamma is perfectly right. And Mamma is so constituted that she cannot love—particularly—a child who gives her trouble, and upon whose appearance and manners she is never complimented.

It happens, therefore, that Bab's small life has many dark moments. She does not understand exactly why Mamma is not fond of her. For herself, it is to the ugliest and forlornest of her children that her deepest tenderness goes out. A faded infant with a squint, and pale hair mostly pulled out by Tom, appeals by its very misfortunes to Bab's sweetest love and compassion.

When Mamma invites Pollie to go with her to evening church, Bab, standing unnoticed in the background, bursts into a terrible howl. It is not that Bab particularly wants to go to church, which has always seemed to her a dull function of unnecessary length. But she wants to be asked to go. The background is such a cold place in which to spend one's poor little life.

Bab strokes Mamma's delicate hand, not the less lovingly because her own little paw is grubby with recent excavations in the garden. And Mamma says sharply:

'Really, Bab, what have I told you about your hands? Go away directly, child!'

Bab forgives—is there any forgiveness like a child's?—a thousand sharp speeches and hasty words. But she does not forget, or repeat her small overtures of love and devotion.

Mamma teaches Bab music—for a week. She smacks Bab's fat stupid fingers when Bab, whose genius does not lie in the direction of music, is more exasperating than usual. She says hard things too, and Bab carries them away to a dull lumber-room where she is used to fight out her small tragedies alone. The lumber-room has a very narrow window, affording just a glimpse of sky. It has a very old carpet, whose faded pattern Bab has often studied dully through hot tears. Bab sits on a trunk, and rocks the forlorn doll to her heart. She does not know what is the matter with her life. Her griefs do not, indeed, last long. But while they last they are very bitter. And Tom's little button-up shoes patter up the staircase, and Tom, standing at the door in his insufficient frock, says—

'Don't cry, Bab. There's jam for tea, and Nurse is going to take us to see the postman's funeral.'

The prospect of jam or a funeral cheers Bab considerably. But she is too little to remember when troubles come again the next day, or the day after that, how soon and how simply they are consoled.

It happens that Pollie and Bab go to stay one summer with Mamma's sister-in-law. In-Law is not quite so young and so pretty as Mamma herself. Moreover, Mamma has married In-Law's favourite brother. It will therefore be readily understood that there is no love lost between the ladies.

In-Law takes to Bab very kindly. Bab, indeed, though not pretty like Polly, has a red healthful countenance and a comfortable person not unprepossessing. And In-Law has discovered that Bab is not Mamma's favourite. Bab, lying awake in her cot the first night and contemplating life through its green bars, overhears In-Law, who has come to kiss Bab in bed, say to a lady friend who is with her—

'Dreadful injustice, you know. Lena's favouritism makes one quite dislike her. This child—nothing, I assure you, and the other brought forward and indulged in every way.'

Bab does not know what this speech means at the time; later she finds out. In-Law is always giving Bab kisses and presents. Bab transfers the giant's share of each to Pollie.

'Auntie likes you best, Bab,' says Pollie, a little cloud on her pretty face.

'Does she?' says Bab wistfully, with a kind of apology to Pollie in her small voice.

No one, it seems, has ever liked Bab best before. Bab feels a little disturbed that it should be so now. But In-Law's preference remains manifest. In-Law asks Bab all about her home. They are taking a walk together, and Bab has been very conversational indeed.

'Is Pollie kind?' Pollie is very kind indeed. Pollie is clever too. She climbs trees and goes to a dancing class.

'Who does mamma like best—you or Pollie?' Bab's fat face grows a little serious. Mamma likes Pollie best. So does everybody. Pollie is pretty, and her hair curls. 'Mine is rats' tails,' adds Bab, regretfully.

'Do you like Mamma, Bab?' Bab's red cheeks grow redder.

'I like Mamma,' she answers sturdily. But after that, for no reason of which she knows, she likes In-Law less.

One day, in the garden, In-Law calls Bab to her. Pollie has gone out for a walk with Nurse, and Bab has been amusing herself with Matilda.

'I've had a letter from Mamma,' says In-Law; 'she wants Pollie home. She does not want you. What do you say to that, Bab?'

Bab does not say anything because she cannot. There is a large lump in her throat, and a great slow tear falls on Matilda's staring face.

'Mamma is cross to you, isn't she, Bab?' says In-Law insinuatingly.

A second tear falls on Matilda, but Bab says 'No, she isn't,' with a red passionate face, and pushes away In-Law's arm which is round her.

'But you would rather stay here, Bab? Mamma only loves Pollie and *is* cross to you, you know she is, and——'

And Bab, with a substantial boot, designed expressly for muddy country lanes, inflicts a fierce kick upon In-Law's ankle and bursts into a roar.

In-Law is laid up for three weeks. Bab has disgraced herself for ever. She is whipped, removed to the nursery, and allowed no jam. She is severely reprimanded several times a day by

Nurse for her wicked conduct to her kind aunt. Perhaps Bab has a private consolation in the depths of her own loyal soul. She thrives, anyhow, amazingly on jamless bread and butter. She croons Matilda contentedly to sleep. She is a little quieter than usual, but not unhappy. Then she is taken home, with Pollie. Mamma is in the hall, and Bab runs up to her. Bab's stout face is quite red with pleasure. She is less afraid of Mamma than she has been for a long time. Perhaps there is a sense of faith and loyalty in her heart which makes her bold. She knows In-Law has told Mamma the story. But then In-Law's version has been carefully revised.

'Bab, what a naughty girl you have been!' says Mamma. 'I'm ashamed of you.'

Mamma is kissing Pollie as Bab falls back blind with a sudden rush of tears. Pollie and the fuss of the arrival of luggage and nurses keep Mamma's attention. And Bab stumbles up unnoticed with heavy steps to the old lumber-room. She has not even the forlorn doll to clasp to her heart. But she has come perhaps to a grief in which even the dearest of her make-believe children could not console her. She has been true, has lied to keep faith, and her reward has missed her. She has hurt In-Law—who has, after all, been kind, and given her many sweets and kisses—for Mamma, who is only angry with her after all. Bab wipes away heavy tears with her black paw until her round face has dismal streaks on it, and is swollen and red. She traces blindly the worn pattern on the carpet with a wet forefinger. Her small figure is shaken by long-drawn sobs. Perhaps her grief is very much like a grown-up grief, after all, only she has not the reason and experience of age to help her in it. She has found out—too early—that the world is hard, and that love given does not mean love returned. And she sobs hot miserable sobs until she is tired out. Though everyone else has forgotten her, some tender Providence remembers her still, for when Nurse comes to fetch her to bed she is already asleep in the darkness, with stained cheeks, tumbled hair, and heavy breathing.

Who shall wonder that faith and love such as Bab's so seldom survive childhood? And yet there are some small loyal hearts in whom grown-up wisdom and prudence cannot destroy those better things which are revealed unto babes.

Perhaps Bab has such a heart as this.

And she is no longer a Child.

HACHISCH EATING.

We were five comrades, seated on a circular divan around a richly served table. A pile of cushions was at the disposal of each, a circumstance which, joined to the unusual width of the divan, tended to favour at need a complete horizontal position.

The windows of the apartment, which was situated in the second storey of the Boulevard, were framed by the delicate verdure of acacias, while the whole front of the opposite house seemed lighted up by the reflection of the sun, which fell full on to these panes of glass. The blue of heaven, washed by a hasty shower which had fallen in the night, was almost as pure as that of an Italian sky. In short, one has rarely seen so beautiful a morning.

In each corner of the room where we were seated blossomed, in Japanese vases, enormous clusters of flowers; one was composed entirely of lilacs, a second of wallflowers, a third of hyacinths, and a fourth of hawthorn—that essential basis of the odour which accompanies the suave renewal of the vitality of the year.

Thanks to the emanations from these perfumes of Jouvence, the spring seemed to filter and permeate through all our pores. One felt proud and happy to be of this world; one appreciated the bounty of the God who created us, with all our accessories, and, with one's heart teeming with gratitude, one felt a sort of confused need to give a penny to a beggar, and even a vague desire to become virtuous.

The breakfast, which had been the means of bringing us together, was not, as our readers have foreseen, an ordinary breakfast. Scarcely were we seated when two lackeys entered the room, one carrying a quaintly chased silver coffer, which he placed on the table before our host and his master, the celebrated Dr. M——; the other bore a tray on which were placed tiny cups of Turkish coffee, in their outer cups of filigree silver.

The doctor drew the coffer towards him and gravely opened it. He took therefrom several small boxes of rock crystal, one of which was half full of a greenish sort of compound.

'Here,' said he, 'we have the substance in question in all its possible forms—in powder for the Narghily smoker, in an oily extract, in a spirituous one, and even cleverly disguised in sweets and conserves. It is under the latter cloak that I recommend it to you as being more pleasant to swallow; its taste is sufficiently agreeable when prepared with pistachio nuts, like that which I procured yesterday. Here,' he said, producing a second box, 'is some which came from Alexandria twelve years ago; it has lost nothing of its strength, but has become somewhat rancid. As to the pure extract,' said he, opening another box which held a blackish-green substance, 'a pill of the usual size would be a sufficient dose.'

Coffee—which it is usual to drink at the same time—tends to ameliorate and develop the effects of the drug, which effects would be uncertain, and might be null, if the hachisch were not taken on an empty stomach.

'And is it long before one is under its influence?' inquired a guest.

'Ordinarily in about three-quarters of an hour, but I have seen some rare instances where it has only acted on the following day, and then it burst forth with extreme violence.'

'Is the effect always agreeable, doctor?'

'On the contrary, it is often most *dis*agreeable, but is always excessively curious. At other times,' continued the doctor, 'it produces exquisite enjoyment—it is either paradise, or the infernal regions. In short, it is with hachisch as with play, one gains often, but one may lose.'

'But how do you account for these opposite effects from the same drug?'

'Oh, as to that, it may depend on divers circumstances which it is difficult to determine—the dose, the temperament of the individual, the electricity of the atmosphere, the phase of the moon. For instance, when the moon is at her apogee, I feel certain that the effect produces a greater shock.'

'You believe then in the influence of this planet?'

'Most assuredly. Do you wish for one proof of its action? If you plant garlic when the moon is in the full, the root will be round like an onion, instead of its being composed, as it usually is, of several *cloves*. Any gardener will tell you this. As to the action of the moon on individuals, that is undeniable.'

'Does one run no risk, or danger, by using this drug?'

'By some learned men it is asserted to be quite innoxious, but it would be difficult for me to share their conviction, for I think that a too frequent use of it would induce cerebral congestion, and certainly the pitiable condition of those individuals who are given up to this passion, seems to me sufficiently instructive. But I believe that one may occasionally use it without any marked ill effect. I, who am speaking to you, have taken it close on two hundred times, and I am none the worse for it. Even if disagreeable experiences *do* follow, they are, I repeat, so very curious that he who has not exposed himself to them, once at least, can scarcely say that he has lived. And now, gentlemen, if you please, let me offer a dose of hachisch to each of you.'

So saying he gave to us a small teaspoonful of the conserve.

'Doctor,' said I, 'as I wish to be completely under the influence of the drug, will you please to increase the dose for me?'

'If you wish it I will do so. There, you can take that quantity with impunity, I often give double such a dose to my patients.'

'To your patients?'

'Without doubt, hachisch is often given with marked success in cases of mental alienation; it is useful in nervous affections, and is a sovereign remedy for epilepsy.'

Here the servants brought in the different dishes, and as our host has the reputation of being a *gourmet*, it is needless to say that the breakfast was exquisite. We were also surrounded with agreeable objects to look upon, so that our impressions might be influenced by pleasant pictures.

Each and all did honour to the repast, and, during quite a good half-hour, I felt nothing in any way abnormal, but when the meal was drawing to its close, a subtle warmth, which came as it were in gusts to my head and chest, seemed to permeate my body with a singular emotion. Later on the conversation around me reached my understanding charged with droll significance. The noise of a fork tapped against a glass struck my ear as a most harmonious vibration. The faces of my companions were transformed. The particular animal type—which, according to Lavater, is the basis of every human countenance—appeared to me strikingly clear. My right-hand neighbour became an eagle; he on my left grew into an owl, with full projecting eyes; immediately in front of me the man was a lion; while the doctor himself was metamorphosed into a fox.

But the most extraordinary circumstance was, that I read, or seemed to read, their thoughts, and penetrate the depth of their intelligence, as easily as one deciphers a page printed in large type. Like an experienced phrenologist, I could indicate accurately the force and quality of their endowments, and the nature of their sentiments; in this analysis I discovered affinities and contrasts which would have escaped one in a normal state.

Objects around me seemed, little by little, to clothe themselves in fantastic garb, the arabesques on the walls revealed themselves to me in rich rhymes of attractive poesy—sometimes melancholy, but more generally rising to an exaggerated lyrism, or to transcendent buffoonery.

The porcelain vases, the bottles, the glasses sparkling on the table, all took the most ludicrous forms. At the same time I felt creeping all around the region of my heart a tickling pressure, to squeeze out, as it were, with gentle force, a laugh which burst forth with noisy violence.

My neighbours, too, seemed subjected to an identical influence, for I saw their faces unfold like peonies—victims of boisterous hilarity, holding their sides and rolling about from right to left, their countenances swollen like Titans!

My voice seemed to have gained considerable strength, for when I spoke it was as if it were a discharge of cannon, and long after I had uttered a sentence I heard in my brain the reverberation, as it were, of distant thunder.

Thoughts seized on me with fury, and unchained and disentangled themselves by torrents in my brain, and developed a rapid succession of geometrical combinations which appeared to be the simplest, as well as the most exact, expression of those ideas which one is obliged to render in an approximate manner by prolix words of gross moulding. I should have liked to fix on paper these fugitive figures of my *visible* thoughts, but the rapidity of their succession absolutely excluded me from this complicated operation. My head became as it were the burning source of fireworks, throwing up bouquets of stars, in dazzling forms, but of perfect design, of a light so intense and of colours so brilliant that nothing in nature had ever equalled them.

My brain was doubtless the theatre of this prodigious spectacle, but in virtue of the particular excitement under which I laboured, this *internal* vision showed itself *exteriorly* with all the clearness of a diorama.

I felt, in short, what those who are afflicted with sensorial maladies feel, with this difference, that *my* hallucinations, instead of persisting like theirs, must naturally cease after the full digestion of the drug which had produced them. My brain bubbled like a locomotive in which there is too much fire, and carried me rapidly through infinite space, where I perceived at each moment a new perspective.

Besides all this, I lost completely the idea of *time*, and should have been incapable of deciding whether my hallucination was of a minute's, or of a century's, duration.

The same uncertainty held good with regard to size, so that I could hardly establish the difference betwixt an egg shell and the cupola of the Pantheon. However, as the action of hachisch is intermittent, I gradually came back to my own identity, and believing that the effect of the drug was exhausted, I thought it time to withdraw myself, and leave to their respective dreams my companions, who were too much absorbed to trouble themselves at my departure. But scarcely had I set foot on the pavement outside the house, than the effect of the drug, which had in a measure subsided, seized upon me again with redoubled force.

Here words utterly fail me to express the incomprehensible agony which ran through all my being! Sometimes I felt that my feet took root in the earth, and that I was sinking up to my neck in the soil, and that I could only draw my feet out with the greatest difficulty, each step seeming to have hundreds of pound weights attached to them.

Then I appeared to be gifted with the lightness of a sponge, and I remember that I held firmly on to a tree fearing that I should suddenly disappear in the air with the velocity of a balloon.

Vibrations, like shocks of electricity, ran through my body, and I was a victim to the most horrible sensations. An iron hand seemed to have got hold of my brain, and was crushing it; I was seized with dizziness, and I shudder even now when I think how intense was my suffering.

The horror of a man being flung from a precipice, of a martyr chained to the stake, and knowing that he would be consumed to cinders, may perhaps approach the terror which I experienced at this cruel period, and which seemed to be the length of eternity. I was in despair! I longed to fly from my proper self, and from this persecuting influence under which I was wholly powerless.

Shortly after this I began to feel myself growing tall, so immensely tall that I towered above the horizon, and my skull was even touching the blue roof of heaven!

It seemed as if the walls of the universe spread out around me, and that there issued therefrom strains of delicious music. This circumstance filled me with pleasure, and seemed to extinguish the anguish and terror with which I had been previously tortured.

I persuaded myself that I was divested of a material body, and became rapidly a divinity. He must have felt somewhat as I felt —this pagan, Cæsar—when he cried from his death-bed, 'My friends, I feel that I am becoming a God!'

I now began to experience a voluptuous happiness, to which no human enjoyment could be compared; I floated in a sea of pleasure, at once physical, moral, and intellectual. I had an immensity of love in my heart which enveloped all nature, and filled me with unlimited hope.

Under such impressions—which seemed to endure for ages—I began to feel a sense of corporeal lassitude creeping over me, and as I approached a cab-stand I threw myself into a carriage, and requested to be driven along the Champs-Elysées.

Then began for me other and new visions. A series less grandiose, but much more amusing. It seemed to me that I had entered now in full possession of an existence *anterior* to that of my actual life—existence which consequently had nothing fresh for me, notwithstanding its strangeness. I entered into the embodiment of my personality, as one does after the repose of sleep.

. . . .

Some hours later these visions began to dissolve, and I felt an urgent necessity for food; entering a restaurant, I attacked with a voracious appetite all which was set before me, but I must not forget to add that what I ate and drank was of exquisite and unknown flavour—in comparison with which ambrosia and nectar would be but ordinary bread and sour wine.

On reaching my chambers I fell into a profound and peaceful sleep, and on the morrow nothing remained of the effects of the hachisch, save a pallid countenance, an agreeable languor, and a bitter sentiment of *regret* at the aspect of the *reality* to which I had awakened.

COLOUR-SERGEANT RHODES.

If two lives join, there is oft a scar,
They are one and one, with a shadowy third;
One near one is too far.

I.

Miss Kitty Malone had tied up the last bunch of carnations which smelt like ripe apricots newly gathered. She had arranged as a row of footlights beneath her, many flower-pots holding calceolarias and tufts of the little creeping plant familiarly known as 'Creeping Jenny.' Above Kitty's fair head a gigantic bunch of sunflowers stood on a shelf, with attendant satellites in the shape of golden and bronze dahlias and orange lilies. Miss Malone shook some of the pollen that had fallen from the last-named plants off the creamy lace at her wrists; and then, after pinning one small nosegay of forget-me-nots among the pale blue folds of her dress, she sat down, like a Queen of the May among her garlands, and waited for customers.

The large hall was very empty, although the church clock had rung out four half an hour ago. A sense of disappointment weighed down the spirits of some two dozen ladies, who, with business-like muslin aprons and scissors fastened at their waists, cast impatient eyes at the great doorway, and over a few aimless strollers who had passed through it.

'It's ten thousand pities,' said Miss O'Shaughnessy, who presided over pincushions and photograph frames under a canopy next to Miss Malone, 'that the Lord Lieutenant found at the last moment he couldn't open the sale.' She spoke with a suspicion of a brogue, and pronounced her *ens* like *uns*. Then she looked sideways and not altogether agreeably at Kitty.

Miss O'Shaughnessy had been a reigning beauty in her beloved native city until the last season, when Miss Malone had come over to stay with a barrister uncle in Merrion Square, and had calmly taken away most of Miss O'Shaughnessy's favourite partners and also her reputation as the prettiest girl at the balls and race-meetings. It could not be said that Kitty seemed elated overmuch after her triumphs: on the contrary she received all admiration with a placid sense of its being no more than her due, and never exerted herself to win either attention or praise. Miss O'Shaughnessy's bitterness had reached its height a month or two ago at a small dance when she had seen her rival led through a quadrille by the Lord Lieutenant, and taken in to supper by the Commander-in-Chief.

And just towards the close of that same memorable evening, slangy Colonel Haldane, who had formerly been Miss O'Shaughnessy's most devoted admirer, had lounged across the room, and merely said, 'Heard the news?'

'No, what is it?'

'Well, the lovely Miss Malone has settled to make some fellow happy at last. She's accepted Vincent Pelham—thundering good marriage, ain't it? Capital soldier, old Vincent, though a bit dull. But his father ain't likely to hang on long, and then he'll come into no end of "oof." Are you surprised?'

Miss O'Shaughnessy was dressed in sea-green, and her draperies just then were too much like the colour of her skin to be becoming. She spoke after a second, in a very hoarse voice:

'I wonder how Lord Ryde will like his son's marriage. As he's so ill, I am afraid it may upset him a good deal. Because though dear Kitty is of course *charming*, some of her relations are not quite—*quite*, don't you know? And of course there was that rumour about her and an army doctor, you remember?'

Miss Malone passed the pair just then on her *fiancé's* arm. He was a tall man, undeniably handsome, in spite of a too-long neck and a head of a sugarloaf shape. He wore a heavy moustache, closely cropped, his eyes were grey, and a little unsympathetic. His smile, although at first sight pleasant, clearly expressed a consciousness of his own personal uprightness, and of his perfectly unblemished and prosperous career in the past, together with the least shade of contempt for other people who might happen to have stumbled or fallen on less easy roads. Miss Malone looked as usual perfectly calm and unelated. Her soft cheeks were hardly flushed, her dark lashes did not rest upon them with a newly acquired sense of shyness, on the contrary her blue eyes gazed frankly and unconcernedly at her many friends and acquaintances. Her full red underlip did not quiver with emotion, but was merely parted from the curling upper one in a quiet smile. Kitty Malone was clever enough to ignore the envious or admiring glances that ran like lightnings over her slight figure—and apparently all-untouched by them, she walked up the whole length of the ball-room, with the confident and erect Captain Pelham at her side.

'The sale will go on this evening, won't it?'

'Oh, yes; it will all look much prettier lighted up. And there will be coloured lamps in the little garden at the back, where the gipsy sits, telling fortunes.'

'A fortune teller?—a genuine gipsy?'

'Well, no; I'm afraid only a friend of mine dressed up. But she's very clever all the same. Why don't you have your fortune in this war foretold?'

'Ah!'—and he certainly did sigh this time, there was no mistake about it—'my fortune is told long ago.'

'But think of what may happen to you in Egypt. Oh, I beg your pardon, Lady Celbridge. Which would you like of these lilies—these orange ones or the lovely variegated ones above?'

'Look at Kitty!' murmured Miss Nora O'Shaughnessy to her sister. 'What a flirt she is! She even allowed that sergeant to stand and make eyes at her!'

'But we agreed just now that he was certainly a gentleman.'

'Yes, but it is so often scamps who enlist—men whose fathers will have nothing more to say to them.'

A band at the far end of the room began to play, and more people to troop in through the heavy doors. Mrs. Dowse was becoming crimson and hilarious over her urns and jugs of orangeade. The sergeant stopped at her stall and drank some champagne-cup. Then he glanced over his shoulder at the flower-stall and the little blue figure among the blossoms, and began to pace slowly round the great hall. A counter with some photographs attracted his attention. The owner, a lady who was a great admirer of Miss Malone, had fastened one of this young lady's portraits in a plush frame. The sergeant stopped.

'How much for this?' he asked carelessly.

'Oh, the photo of the lovely Miss Malone?'

'Exactly.'

'Well, ye can have ut for foive-and-six.'

The soldier paid the money, and the stall-keeper tied up the parcel.

'Put into a raffle, please, sergeant!' said a childish voice at his side.

He looked round and smiled pleasantly at a little girl carrying a large cushion representing in woolwork Joseph and all his Brethren.

The sergeant laughed. 'I'll take two tickets, if you like.'

'And where shall I send it if you win?' asked the child.

Colour-Sergeant Rhodes, . . . Barracks. But no, stay—it's no use to me; keep it for yourself if I win.'

When he had arrived at the end of the room the young soldier turned his head once more. He fancied that those large blue eyes behind the roses were actually watching him, and his thin brown cheeks grew a shade redder.

Towards seven o'clock the hall was lighted up, and, to the delight of the sellers, was at last thronged with townspeople. Miss Kitty had changed her blue dress for a cooler one of white muslin, with a fresh bunch of forget-me-nots pinned at her breast. By nine o'clock her stall bore the appearance of a forsaken garden. Only a few straggling plants which had been earlier in the day relegated to the back rows remained. Every bunch of carnations and each neatly made button-hole was sold. And Kitty thought that, considering the assiduous way in which she had worked, and the now stifling atmosphere of the room, she would allow herself a breath of fresh air in the garden. A few groups of dark figures stood on the gravel-path among the little twinkling red and green lights. The air was soft and cool, the sky of a dark velvety blue, with pale stars coming out. Round the little tent where the supposed gipsy sat some dozen people were standing, and among them Kitty saw a tall slight figure dressed in scarlet. One of the fairy lights illuminated the three gold stripes on his arm. As if owing to some magnetic influence the soldier turned his head sharply round as she advanced, and once more their eyes met, this time in a longer glance. The soft languorous air crept round Kitty, rustling her white skirts and lifting the curls on her forehead. She trembled a little. The sergeant came towards her, his scarlet figure standing out vividly against the dark background of wall.

'So you've come back!' said Kitty Malone.

'So it seems. Years ago I should not have thought that a sale and a sham gipsy would amuse me; but as I am so soon leaving England—perhaps for always—one takes a different view of things.'

He came and stood beside her in the curious uncertain light. The pale stars were not bright enough to lift the shadow off their faces; the fairy-lights threw odd little violet and green reflections upon her skirt and the red stripes on his trousers.

'Have you had your fortune told?'

'Not I. Nothing good is likely to happen to me ever again.'

'Why not? You might get a commission one of these days, and end as a general.'

They moved a little farther into the shadow.

'Only dreams!' he said. 'But I loathe talking of myself. Are you interested in this Egyptian business or in anyone going out?'

They were almost in darkness now, so that if Kitty Malone had blushed the young sergeant would have been none the wiser.

'No.'

Kitty's thoughts travelled remorsefully for one instant beyond her companion, and her mental vision was confronted by an eminently gentlemanly face poised on an ungainly neck. But although she was about to make the most prosaic of marriages—to join her lot to that of an entirely respectable and dull elder son of a rich peer—she had inherited with her Celtic blood a foolish craving for romance. Anyone as pretty as she was could have had no lack of lovers, but one and all had failed to bring her the excitement, the passionate desires, for which she sometimes longed. Here, in this dimly lighted garden—so dully commonplace at the noonday, but glorified for an hour or so by the mysterious stars and the distant sound of music—she felt for once strangely touched and moved.

'Miss Malone,' said the sergeant suddenly, 'you are extremely good to talk to me. For four—yes, five years no lady has said a word to me. I feel very much alone sometimes.'

'Indeed, I can understand that. But there are other men of your own class in your battalion with whom you can make friends?'

'Yes, now and then. But I know I have gone down hill. Not owing to the company of the men—no, I don't mean that, they are far better fellows, many of them, than I; but if one never sees a woman of one's own class one becomes coarser in tastes and pleasures, harder also and more cynical. You have done me good, and I thank you, even if we should never meet again.'

'But we *may* meet some day. Anyhow, I will come and see your ship start.'

'Will you?' And he drew a little nearer to her. 'You are very kind to me.'

'How did you know my name?'

'I found it out. And I have—no, never mind.'

'You must tell me yours in return.'

'Sergeant Rhodes.' He paused a minute. 'That is the name I shall always be known by.'

They walked slowly round the narrow garden, the distant music sounding in their ears—passionate, plaintive, tender. Then they came to a wooden bench, under a stunted tree. For an hour or more these two sat on, learning so much, and yet, alas! so little about one another. A church clock sounded. The music stopped suddenly. From a neighbouring garden a white cat leapt over the wall, the moon shining on its fur. The music had ceased, and the world seemed to have grown sadder and more silent. Kitty Malone sprang to her feet.

'Oh! how late it is! What will my uncle say, and my friends who were to have taken me home? Good-bye, Sergeant Rhodes.' She held out her little hand. The moonshine quivered on his pale handsome face—on the band of his cap and the scarlet and gold of his uniform. He looked at her long with the dark eyes which had grown graver now, and less reckless.

'Will you give me the bunch of forget-me-nots you wear in your dress?'

For a moment there flashed across Miss Kitty's romantic mind a memory of the beautiful American ballad telling of the lady who flung a rose down from her balcony as the column of war-worn men marched by. She trembled a little, but she took out the flowers, and he hid them away in his breast.

When Kitty came back alone, a few minutes later, the great hall was nearly deserted. Mrs. Dowse was yawning heavily over her emptied urns, and the O'Shaughnessys had gone home. Miss Malone felt very much ashamed of herself, but alas! more joyous than penitent. In her tremor of excitement she hardly realised yet that she had been behaving in a foolish, and, to say the least of it, a very unconventional way—in a manner which Lady Celbridge, her future husband's ideal of all that a lady should be, would have stigmatised as 'bad form;' she only knew that she had been strangely happy, for one evening, although to-morrow her folly might cause her twinges of regret and mortification.

And perhaps into the heart of a man, reckless and dissipated enough, but a gentleman still, now lying awake in his narrow bed within blank barrack walls, she had brought some short glimpses of hope and retrieval—possibilities of redemption which, even if they should not develop into maturity, might not have been born entirely in vain.

II.

'My dear Kitty, it is very foolish and emotional of you to wish to see the troop-ship start. You will probably be quite overcome, all the more so'—and here Captain Pelham patted his betrothed's curly head—'as we—we, my darling, shall so soon too have to say good-bye to one another.'

Vincent could never entirely divest himself of a certain stiffness of manner, even when he was most genuinely moved. His gestures, as, bending over her, he stroked Kitty's hair, were also a little stilted.

Miss Malone looked him straight in the face, and smiled, half sadly.

'You needn't be afraid I shall break down or disgrace you on this or any other occasion, Vincent. I really *do* wish to see the poor men sail. Lady Celbridge is going also.'

'That is quite a different thing. She has a young nephew bound for Egypt. Now there is no one in whom *you* are interested. Therefore I must continue to say I think it a little morbid of you, my dear Kitty.'

Captain Pelham straightened himself, stroked his moustache with both hands—his favourite habit, and allowed the subject to drop.

But it came about that two days afterwards Kitty Malone, seated on an outside car, with Lady Celbridge as her companion, drove to the station on a sunny, cloudless morning, sat silently for half an hour in the train, and then with rather flushed cheeks and shining eyes, walked with her friend to the wharf.

Her glance fell on scores of soldiers in helmets and serge tunics, many of them with laughing, boyish faces, almost all trying to look as if they had at last attained the one desire of their hearts, and here and there on a woman with swollen eyes and lips shut tight as if to prevent any expression of emotion. There were endless bales of luggage littered on the stones, horses about to be slung on board, careless and interested spectators getting in each other's way, talking, advising, gesticulating. Captain Vincent was already on the wharf, erect, self-satisfied, and well-dressed as usual. He advanced towards the two ladies.

'Well, Lady Celbridge, shall I go now and find your young man for you?'

'I wish you would! Dear boy, perhaps they would allow him to come to the hotel with me for a little while, and have a talk? He is my poor sister's only son, and I have been like a mother to him. Can I leave you here, dear Kitty? I thought I would go with kind Captain Pelham and find the boy, to save time. You have lots of friends, I know, here. Yes, there are the Staceys and the Egertons, stay with them if you like.'

Miss Malone's eyes were dazzled by the glare of the sun, and by her constant efforts to discern a figure that was familiar to her among the red tunics. She knew that when the men were embarked, all would be over, and her last chance gone. She strained her eyes till the tears almost started into them. It was so difficult to recognise people in those helmets that came so low over their foreheads. Suddenly, almost at her elbow, two sergeants passed by. The taller one, with the smart, upright figure, was he at last. He looked at her with the same lingering gaze that had attracted her before. But it left a different impression on her now. It seemed to imply reproach—was it even something stronger, disdain, contempt? Kitty Malone's cheeks were like white roses, as the young man, without making a sign of recognition, strode on towards the landing-place. Ah! he was a gentleman still, and he had never been introduced to her, she thought. He would not of course think it right to speak to her. But nevertheless her heart tightened strangely as she walked restlessly away to join her friends. Soon Vincent was back again, and at her side. She hardly heard his rather tedious explanations concerning the great ship lying now as if asleep in the sun.

'Would you like to come on board, Kitty?'

Yes, she would. And she followed her *fiancé* across the gangway. Under the blazing rays she stood impassive, while Vincent introduced her to officers and others of his acquaintance, a half-vacant smile on her lips, her eyes still wandering restless and aching over the herd of scarlet figures. Sergeant Rhodes was now standing some forty feet away, looking at her again. Kitty's cheeks burnt and her knees shook. She glanced at Captain Pelham—at this moment laying down the law to a young veterinary surgeon who had a vacuous face. In a second she had approached the sergeant, and was holding out her little hand. He hesitated, raised his own to his helmet, hesitated again, and took it in his.

'I have come to say good-bye,' said Kitty in the shaking voice of a child who has been punished.

'Ah!'

'It was *really* to see you I came. I wanted to—oh! it's so conventional to say, wish you luck, but you know what I mean!'

His eyes were only reckless to-day. They had lost the softer look that had come into them a few evenings ago for just an hour.

'Thank you, Miss Malone. And *I* wish you all joy in the future, too. For myself, if you ever think of me enough to form a desire for me, let it only be this, that I may never come home or see you more.'

'Oh! What have I done?'

The soldiers around her burst suddenly into a song. She started at the volume of sound.

Should auld acquaintance be forgot——

The familiar and pathetic words sung by these full, boyish voices cut her to the heart.

For auld lang syne, my dear,
For auld lang syne . . .

And when she turned her head, Sergeant Rhodes was gone.

Again, as the dusk was closing in, and Kitty and Lady Celbridge hurried down to the wharf once more, she saw him. But he was not looking at her this time. He was talking to a comrade, and laughing so loud, that she could see his white teeth through the dim light.

When the moon came out, and the clouds moved slowly, like great black birds, over the funnels and masts, she saw him once again. The silver light made his helmet seem almost dazzling, and his face look strange and blanched too. As the great ship got slowly under way, the soldiers took their caps and helmets off, and cheered as they waved them. And the pitiless moon smiled down upon the bare heads and boyish features, with the same callous stare with which she would perhaps watch them lying still more pale in the deserts far away across the sea; and instead of the black clouds drifting to-night every moment farther off, evil winged creatures would then draw closer and closer to faces upturned and rigid under the gaze of her cold eyes. A young man, with gold stripes upon his sleeve, suddenly pressed forward and leant over the side of the ship, and amid the noise of deafening cheers and stifled sobs upon the shore, his eyes flashed a last message to a woman who watched him go, a message that could never have been uttered in words even had the rushing seas not rolled between them.

III.

Miss Kitty's enemies—but, to do her justice, there were not many of these—acknowledged that she had wonderfully improved since the departure of Captain Pelham for Egypt. Lord and Lady Ryde, her future parents-in-law, wrote almost enthusiastically about her to other members of their family. Lord Ryde, whose hobbies were his own health and the results upon it of various patent medicines, thought her kindly and sympathetic; and Lady Ryde, whose mind was almost entirely absorbed in details concerning High Church ritual, found Kitty always ready to read aloud articles from her favourite controversial newspapers and to attend her to church at all hours.

Kitty's father, who had lived in London for years and lost almost every characteristic of the race from which he had sprung excepting a rather provoking tendency to the display of outward emotion, had always considered his daughter faultless. But even *he* was sensible of her increased gentleness of manner, her more fully developed powers of sympathy, her patient consideration towards the shortcomings of others. She was very sad and silent sometimes, but that was of course only to be expected during Vincent's absence. Mr. Malone was sincerely glad to see how romantically in love she was with her future husband.

Kitty and her father left London towards the end of July, and installed themselves for a few months in a little river-side house with a rose-garden and a tumble-down verandah. She never forgot the expression of her father's face one evening after the late newspapers had arrived. She came in and saw him standing by an open window, his hand shaking so that the sheets crackled, the tears running down his cheeks and the strangest triumphant smile lighting up his eyes at the same time.

He moved a few steps toward her, trembling still.

'Well, you're to marry a hero, Kitty, my darling! God bless him! See here!'—and he handed the crumpled newspaper to his child.

Her face grew stiff and white as she read an enthusiastic account of the heroic conduct of a Staff-officer, Captain the Hon. Vincent Pelham, who, although himself wounded, had carried away in his arms a sergeant who had been more severely hit. It was under a heavy fire, the paragraph went on to say, and there was but little doubt that Captain Pelham would be recommended for the Victoria Cross, which he had so thoroughly deserved.

The following morning 'The Times' brought more news to the river-side cottage—fuller details of the episode which was of so great interest to its occupants—and this time the name of the sergeant who had been so dangerously wounded and only saved from death by the valour of her lover met Miss Malone's eyes. She had known by some strange instinct what it would be, and that evening, when she sat by her open window inhaling the perfume of a thousand roses and listening to the gentle lapping of the water against the banks, she wrung her hands tightly together, and said, half aloud:

'Oh, why is one man to have all, and the other nothing—nothing till he dies?'

IV.

In the early spring Captain and Mrs. Vincent Pelham spent their honeymoon in a charming gabled house looking over wide downs and noble white cliffs in the Isle of Wight. The property belonged to an uncle of the bridegroom, and would in time, with many another good thing, become Vincent's own. The fresh breeze from the chalk slopes brought new roses to Kitty's cheeks, and they had been a little pale for some months past. People noted with admiration how much affected she had appeared at her husband's illness, how proud she was of his success. And, without doubt, she was striving earnestly to make him happy. She struggled to overcome the phases of melancholy to which she was sometimes subject, to take an interest in many matters, dull enough as they seemed to her, because they made up part of his life. And Vincent, if at times in his inmost heart he was a little mortified at her apparent indifference to the extreme good fortune that was hers, could not but acknowledge that she was sweeter and gentler than when he had first won her, and that she had lost the slight tinge of flippancy that had sometimes annoyed him against his will. The pair had come into the garden one sunny evening after a long walk by a white precipice which stands gigantic and perpendicular out of the slate-coloured sea. Mr. Malone had just arrived to pay a visit of a few days to his children, and was in a sentimental and extremely happy condition. He sat in a low chair and awaited them as they came sauntering over the downs, their figures silhouetted against the purple west. At Mr.

Malone's feet and all around him were large flower-beds of dazzling blue forget-me-nots, brighter than the distant sea, and the faint azure patches in the eastern heavens. Kitty came up to her father, and, throwing one slender arm about his neck, kissed him lovingly.

'It is so nice to have you with us, papa dear.'

'And nicer still for me to be with my children. My little girl and her hero.'

Captain Pelham began making holes in the gravel with his walking-stick. He was more of a gentleman than his father-in-law, and had an almost morbid dislike to hearing allusions to his past acts of daring, references which were always coupled with a smile of triumph from his father-in-law. Mr. Malone would have been unable to appreciate such fine gradations of feeling. He, for his part, delighted in recurring again and again to the war and its episodes, and in pestering Vincent with questions. After tea had been drunk out of doors, the good old man again referred to his favourite topic.

'And what has happened now, Vincent, my dear boy, to the sergeant, poor fellow, whose life you were so nobly the means of saving?'

Kitty looked away at the glimmering white cliffs and the expanse of placid sea.

'Oh, poor fellow, he's at Netley still; just across the water over there. I'm afraid he's done for. It's hard luck, because he's a gentleman, and might have got a commission one of these days.'

There was a short silence; then a blackbird chirped loudly and flew over the lawn into the bushes, while the crescent moon came slowly into view over the cliffs. Kitty spoke in a hard, dry voice.

'Couldn't we go, Vincent, one day over to Netley, and see that poor man?'

'My dear child, what earthly use would it be? I *did* see him once or twice, you know. And he's thoroughly well looked after. You certainly have a morbid taste for gloomy things.'

'But it might be kind; don't you think so, papa? I—I should so like to take him some flowers.'

'Well, my dear, surely Vincent knows best. It would upset you, no doubt, to see all those poor fellows, sick and wounded.'

And the shadows crept silently over the garden, while the stars stole out over the ghostly white cliffs, glimmering far across the downs. Mr. Malone lighted his pipe, and Vincent began cheerfully to hum a few bars of a popular song.

V.

THE soldier at the end of the ward had not spoken for twenty-four hours.

'Sinking fast,' said the doctor to a Sister, who wore a spotless white apron and scarlet cape over her shoulders, and who had just left the bedside.

'I fear so.' Sister MacDonald's sweet face grew sad, and she sighed. She had felt very sorry for Colour-Sergeant Rhodes, and had nursed him tenderly during many dreary months of pain and discomfort. But she grieved less now that the indescribable blue shade was spreading at last over his face—that his eyes were shut, and the perspiration lying cold on his forehead. He was so lonely, and it was better that he should go, thought Sister MacDonald. Other men had friends to come and sit beside them—old and young women with tender and tearful eyes, and faithful hands to grasp theirs; but no one ever came to see Colour-Sergeant Rhodes, excepting now and then an officer or old comrade of his battalion. And lately even these had seemed to forget him.

When the post came in that evening, the Sister found, rather to her surprise, that there was one letter at last for her favourite sergeant. She took it up to his bedside. He was breathing heavily, and his hand, when she touched it, was very clammy and cold.

'A letter for you,' she said in a low voice.

He lifted his eyelids a little, but made no other movement.

'Shall I open the cover and give you the letter?'

His lips moved, and she tore open the flap. It contained no writing after all—not a word of greeting or good-bye—only a bunch of forget-me-nots, so fresh and blue that they must have been very lately gathered. A pair of dark eyes opened wide, and were fixed upon the Sister. The soldier raised his cold fingers, and she put the little blue knot of flowers within them; and with quivering lips looked away from the dying man. He tried to hide the nosegay in the breast of his crumpled shirt. Then his arm dropped upon the coverlet.

And when the last low sunrays smote the blank wall in front of Sergeant Rhodes' bed, he had passed where time and space exist not, and memory is, perhaps, by God's mercy, no longer the twin-sister of pain.

TOFT AND CROFT.

LANGUAGE is a vast conglomerate of human fossils. It consists for the most part of fossil forms, fossil beliefs, fossil conceptions, fossil ideas. In a vague sort of way, indeed, we are all of us more or less conscious of its immense antiquity, its half-forgotten implications, its surviving barbarism. We can often see that it enshrines, like flies in amber, strange fragmentary relics of earlier creeds, and sometimes even of savage or cannibal thought. Whenever we 'thank our stars' for any piece of good luck, are we not vaguely aware that we are implicitly proclaiming ourselves devout believers in mediæval astrology? Whenever we talk of a man as 'jovial,' or 'saturnine,' or 'mercurial,' or 'martial,' do we not half know in some faint background of consciousness that we thereby acknowledge the guiding influence of the planets upon human life, and implicitly make ourselves out worshippers of Jupiter, and Saturn, and Mars, and Mercury? And even when we speak of 'last Wednesday,' or of 'Thursday week,' may we not at times realise the fact that we still use the very words of prehistoric ancestors who were devotees of Thor, of Woden, and of Frea? Heathenism and magic survive in every line of our newspapers and every household word of our daily life. Nay, more; we can only express the highest conceptions of modern science in terms invented for us by barbaric predecessors—believers in fetishes, in shamans, in spirits, and in puerile talismans of the most silly description.

It is this extreme antiquity of language—this curious history wrapt up in every word, that makes our modern tongue a sort of living etymological cabinet to those who know how to wrest from each syllable its secret meaning and to read in each letter its past evolution. Words, in short, are not mere arbitrary symbols; they are appropriate sounds, applied at first to objects for some obviously sufficient and quite transparent reason—as transparent in the first instance as cuckoo or katydid, whip-poor-will or bobolink, the boom of cannon or the whirr of wheels, the thud of a falling avalanche or the purling murmur of a mountain stream. Gradually, in the course of time, they get curtailed or altered; their appropriateness fades, their echo fails; but still they keep up for us innumerable strange memories of the men who gave them, and often enclose, in stratum over stratum, quaint reminiscences of age after age, each of which has twisted them to its own pattern. A word may thus be likened to some ancient cathedral, originally perhaps of pagan handicraft, and still preserving in its fabric a few worn fragments of Corinthian columns, then altered to Romanesque in its crypt and arches, afterwards Gothicised in its portals and windows, or renovated and defaced by Renaissance architects, and finally modernised in the churchwarden style by eighteenth-century muddlers. But traces of all this its chequered history generally survive on its very face till its latest moment.

Now, to quote the immortal language of Mrs. Cluppins to the Judge, 'I will not deceive you.' My object in writing this present contribution to the philosophy of language is not a wholly disinterested one. Let me take you into my confidence. I happen to abide in a cottage which bears the modest name of 'The Croft.' Ever since I called it so, however, life has been rendered a burden to me by people who ask me, the moment they come in, 'Oh, Mr. So-and-so, please what does a croft mean, and why is this house called one?' Well, I'm tired of unburdening my mind upon this philological question to the obvious boredom of the young ladies who ask it—for you may perhaps have observed that whenever a young lady broaches an abstract inquiry the last thing in the world she really expects is that you should try to answer it. So now I propose to put my views upon crofts in general on paper once for all, so that when young ladies in future propound their philological doubts to me I may be able to hand them a copy of this magazine, pop them comfortably down in the nearest window-seat, and say to them promptly, 'There you are! That article contains everything that is known to science about crofts and tofts and all their family. Sit down and read; and as soon as you have finished it, it will give me the greatest pleasure in life to examine you on the subject.' I flatter myself that vigorous course of action ought to stifle inquiry about crofts in future.

The longest way round is well known to students of the wisdom of our ancestors to be the shortest way home; therefore I propose to attack the subject of crofts and tofts by a short preliminary investigation of the nature of thorpes, which at first sight apparently irrelevant inquiry will finally cast light, I hope, upon our more immediate subject.

Forty years ago, I fancy, even well-educated people might easily have been ignorant of the very meaning of the word 'thorpe.'

As a personal name, indeed, it survived in common use, and as an element in such place-names as Fenthorpe or Mablethorpe it was abundant in many parts of Eastern England, but as a significant factor in the spoken or written language it had become practically obsolete. And so it might have remained, I believe, to the present day but for a Lincolnshire Dane, one Alfred Tennyson by name, who, born in a district where almost every village name ended in thorpe, must have been familiar with the word and its local signification from childhood upward. He reintroduced the half-forgotten term into literary English in his idyll of 'The Brook,' where everybody now remembers it in the almost classical quotation:—

By thirty hills I hurry down,
Or slip between the ridges:
By twenty thorps, a little town,
And half a hundred bridges.

Not long after, the word made its second appearance in modern literature among the ringing lines of Browning's 'Grammarian's Funeral,' where, oddly enough, it is immediately associated with its congener, 'croft,' in the well-known exordium:—

Let us begin and carry up this corpse,
Singing together.
Leave we the common crofts, the vulgar thorpes,
Each in its tether.

Thus sponsored by the two greatest poets of the age, the word 'thorpe' may fairly claim to have entered into its own again after a long eclipse of half a dozen centuries.

But whence did it come originally? Well, its remoter origin, like that of most other words, is lost in the mist of ages. All we can say with certainty is that it is a good old Teutonic term, common to all the branches of the Teutonic tongue, and surviving to this day in its true form in English, while in modern High German, that thick guttural corruption of the undivided mother-tongue, it is perverted into *dorf*, just as 'three' is perverted into *drei*, and 'that' into *das*. Indeed, in High German every original *th* has become a thickened *d*, while every original *p* has become a harsh *f*. This is one of the changes which constitute that mysterious entity known as Grimm's Law; it merely represents in scientific form the same tendency to thickening in the German vocal organs, so familiar to us all in Mr. Du Maurier's amusing parodies, which makes Germans nowadays say *touchours* for *toujours* and *brovessor* for *professor*. It is just the German way of mumbling your consonants.

When the English pirates first swarmed over from the Continent to the land we now call England, in the mythical 'three keels' with Hengest and Horsa, they brought this common Teutonic word 'thorpe' along with them. It was 'thorpe,' not 'dorf,' in the old English fatherland. But they didn't use it much; for though they knew it, it wasn't the usual English word for a house or village; *ham* and *tun*, the origins of our modern 'home' and 'town,' were much more common in primæval England. Hence, in the purely English part of Britain, place-names like Buckingham, Birmingham, Nottingham, or like Kensington, Islington, Wellington, are much more frequent than place-names in thorpe, which last only occur at considerable distances. But when the Northern pirates from Denmark began to settle in our Eastern counties, under good King Alfred, they brought the word 'thorpe' with them as a common element of their spoken language; and in consequence, thorpes abound all over the district largely occupied by Guthrum and his Danes, more especially in Norfolk, Suffolk, and Lincolnshire. Sometimes the word occurs alone as a place-name, as at Thorpe, near Aldeburgh; sometimes it turns up in conjunction with another name, as at Thorpe-on-the-Wold, and Thorpe-in-the-Fallows; but most often it exists as a suffix alone, as in Theddlethorpe, Skellingthorpe, Kettlethorpe, and Laythorpe. Sir Isaac Newton was born at Woolsthorpe, that is to say, Ulf's thorpe. Fridaythorpe was sacred to the goddess Frea. If some of these names have an awkward sound to modern ears, we must charitably remember that this was not the case in ancient times, when the Danish hero Ketel, or Ketyl, bearing a most aristocratic Scandinavian name, fixed his seat at Kettlethorpe, or when the great clan of the Scyllings, a most famous family, beloved of Mr. William Morris, placed the Raven banner of their kin at Skellingthorpe. But sometimes, I must admit, as at Hogthorpe, Baconsthorpe, and Lobthorpe, even the most devoted apologist can but allow with a blush that the name from its very inception could never have been euphonious.

Mr. Streatfeild, the learned historian of the Danes in Lincolnshire, has further pointed out that the word 'thorpe' is rarely used of an isolated farm, but almost invariably denotes a collection of houses, especially those of the poorer classes—in one word, a village. Its companion word, *by*, on the other hand, as in Derby and Scrivelsby, is often applied to the residence of a single great family. There are, therefore, more *thorpes* than *bys* in the rich pastures of the sea-marsh and the Trent Valley where the Danes settled thickly, but more *bys* than *thorpes* among the bleak upland hills, where the means of supporting life were at first less abundant. Mr. Cole similarly notices in Yorkshire that thorpes cluster thickest in the Vale of York and Holderness, but thin out on the wolds, and disappear altogether on the wilder and half-Celtic moorlands.

Territorial families who lived at a thorpe often bore its name, as is always the case in early times with landed houses. Thus Adam de Thorpe, Simon de Throp, or Ralph de Trop may all be mentioned, Mr. Bardsley tells us, in the self-same register; while familiar modern names derived from similar sources are Althorpe, Calthrop, Westropp, Conythrop, Hartrop, and Gawthorpe. Thorpe itself figures often in the uncompounded form as a surname, while Thrupp is only a slight dialectal corruption of the same original syllable.

Names of this type are particularly common in parts of New England, where, through a curious incident, they pass as almost a patent of nobility. To have 'come over in the Mayflower' is, of course, the Massachusetts equivalent for coming over, like the Slys, 'with Richard Conqueror.' Now the Mayflower refugees, as all the world knows, were for the most part Lincolnshire men or East Anglians; they called their capital Boston after the Lincolnshire port which was once Botulfston; and they mostly bore such surnames themselves as Winthrop, Haythrop, Lothrop, and Lathrop. Hence these Danish patronymics are very aristocratic to-day in Salem or Concord; they mark their possessor as a person of antique distinction in the Puritan commonwealth. 'My people came over in the Mayflower,' said an unknown New Yorker to a Plymouth Winthrop. 'Indeed!' was the crushing answer, 'I didn't know the Mayflower took steerage passengers.'

Nor do the derivatives of 'thorpe' stop even here. They have pervaded science; for Linnæus gave the pretty little Cornish moneywort the name of *Sibthorpia*, in compliment to a certain Dr. Sibthorp, who was professor of botany at Oxford; and as *Sibthorpia Europæa* it is now accordingly known from the Azores to Turkey, which are its extreme limits. I don't know whether this Dr. Sibthorp belonged to the same family as the famous Colonel Sibthorp, that stout old Conservative who so long opposed the introduction of railways, and who even after the iron horse became a *fait accompli* preserved his dignity by descending from the train a few miles out of town and driving into London decorously in his own carriage, 'after the manner of his forefathers.'

Thus, at the present time, though we note it not, we are positively surrounded by thorpes of various kinds, from Copmansthorpe, near York, 'the chapman's village,' to Yawthorpe and Grainthorpe in the Lincolnshire district. People named Thorpe abound in the London Directory; and compounds of Thorpe overrun all America from the Hub to Frisco. We are doubly thorped in place and person. Yet from the day when Chaucer wrote in the Clerkes Tale—

> There stod a thorpe of sight delitable,

to the day when Tennyson and Browning restored the neglected word to the literary language, I doubt if it had ever once been written as a substantive by itself in any English poem or treatise.

The fortunes of 'toft' have been very similar. The word means originally a homestead or enclosure; it is a Teutonic root, but it was almost unknown in England before the Danish conquest, and, as Canon Isaac Taylor has acutely pointed out, it forms one of the best test-words of Danish occupation. It is exclusively Danish, indeed, as opposed to Norwegian: tofts being common in Danicised East Anglia, but almost unknown in Norwegian Cumberland. Lowestoft is perhaps the best-known instance of the names compounded with this half-forgotten word; but in Lincolnshire they abound, as at Huttoft, Fishtoft, Brothertoft, and Wigtoft. Some dozens of them are scattered over the interior of the county. The Danes who settled in Normandy spoke the self-same dialect as their brother-pirates in East Anglia, and took the word 'toft' with them to their French home. There, however, it was soon Gallicised into the softer form of *tôt*. Thus Ivo's toft became Yvetot, the famous little town whose mock-king is familiar to us all through Béranger's satirical *chanson* of 'Le Roi d'Yvetot.' In like manner, Blumtoft or Bloomtoft got corrupted into Plumetot; while its companion Littletoft now appears in Gaulish garb as Lilletot. Routot means red toft; Criquetot, crooked toft; Berquetot, birk toft or birch toft; Hautot, high toft; and Langetot, lang toft or long toft. For all these instances I am indebted to Canon Taylor's critical eye. Over a hundred others may still be collected in Normandy.

Only in one phrase, however, did the word 'toft' survive as such in spoken or written English; and that was in the rhyming legal locution, toft and croft, defined by Dr. Murray, in the great English dictionary, as 'a messuage with land attached.' This particular phrase 'toft and croft' belongs to the common legal class of rhyming or alliterative phrases, well-known instances of which are scot and lot, sac and soc, wear and tear, earl and churl, kith and kin, and so forth. A toft, then, in this case, is the house or tenement; a croft is the surrounding plot of land or homestead in which it is situated.

The origin of 'croft' itself, even more than of its sister words, is 'wrop in mystery.' It is a very old English term, appearing in the charters or title-deeds of estates as long ago as the reign of Edgar, where the phrase 'at the croft's head' is quoted by Dr. Murray; but it remained long unrecognised in the literary language. The old English form, like the modern one, is 'croft,' meaning an enclosed field; in Lowland Scotch it appears generally in the form 'craft,' which is still employed in many derivatives; but the only other Teutonic equivalent in the sister languages is the Dutch word 'kroft,' which means 'a piece of high and dry land,' 'a field on the downs,' 'a rocky headland.' In the North of England, according to Ray, the word 'croft' implies neighbourhood to a house; but in the south it is applied to any small enclosure, near a building or otherwise.

Dr. Murray's English Dictionary gives several uses of croft in early times, though not for the most part in what can fairly be called literature. 'As he stood in his croft,' says a legal writer of the thirteenth century, whose spelling and grammar I mercifully modernise; while Piers Plowman writes, 'Birds come into my croft and crop my wheat.' Early in the sixteenth century, Fitzherbert defines a curtylage (whatever that may be) as 'a lytell croft or court to put in catell for a tyme.' In the seventeenth century the phrase occurs, 'All ould tenants shall have a croft and a medow,' which sounds as if it came out of a Crofter Commission Report. But it was Milton who first ennobled the plebeian word by admitting it frankly into immortal poetry. The spirit in 'Comus' says to the Elder Brother:—

> This have I learned
> Tending my flocks hard by i' th' hilly crofts
> That brow this bottom glade.

And his use of the word distinctly suggests the idea that to Milton at least a croft still carried with it something of its Dutch suggestion of height or rockiness. This shade of meaning is probably present to-day in the minds of all those who speak of 'Highland crofts,' in which phrase, I fancy, there lurks even now some suspicion of an idea that the soil of a croft is naturally unfruitful, rocky, or heather-clad.

That is not the sense, however, which the word often bears in later English literature. Wordsworth writes:—

> A little croft we owned—a plot of corn;

where cultivation is clearly implied in the expression; and Scott, in the 'Heart of Midlothian,' makes a wife 'occupy her husband's cottage and cultivate a croft of land adjacent.' As for Tennyson, his voice is obscure when he says:—

> Thro' crofts and pastures wet with dew,
> A living flash of light he flew;

but that more prosaic authority, the 'Glasgow Herald,' remarks outright, with no uncertain accent, 'The croft is now generally the best land in the farm, and every farm almost has its croft.' On the other hand, Dr. Murray, from whom I borrow much of this secondhand erudition, quotes 'The West Cornwall Glossary' for the opposite definition: 'Croft, an enclosed common not yet cultivated.' On the whole, seeing how much the doctors disagree, it would seem that the primitive sense of enclosure is still the only fixed and constant one, and that the other elements of meaning fluctuate as yet in use from person to person and from county to county, for in Dumfriesshire we read about 'a few acres of what is called croft-land, which is never out of crop;' while in another place we hear of 'waste land, consisting of marsh, croft, and sandy soils.' The contradictions are obvious. Here is a very pretty case for a lawyer to fight over.

For myself, I take my stand upon the Miltonic ground that my own particular croft is distinctly hilly, and that it 'brows a bottom glade' among the wildest in England.

In modern times, and for parliamentary purposes, a croft means especially a small holding worked by a peasant tenant, and most often a tenant who fishes for his livelihood. Indeed it has been wittily said that the Orkney man is a farmer who owns a boat, while the Shetlander is a fisherman who owns a farm. The man who cultivates a croft, again, is a crofter; and hence have arisen endless words and ideas in our latter-day language—the crofter question, crofting, crofterdom, and so forth. 'To croft linen' is to expose it on the ground in the sun for bleaching, and a crofter is still the technical designation of the person who bleaches it. Of late years the crofter, like the poor, we have always with us.

As a proper name the best-known croft to most modern Englishmen is probably the pretty little suburb called the Croft at Hastings. There is, or was once, a Mavis Croft at Gainsborough. Ashcroft and Moorcroft occur to this day as village names. A suburb of Salisbury is known as the Green Croft. Tranby Croft has made its mark on our social history. But the suffix is far less frequent in place-names than either thorpe or toft. From its very nature, indeed, it belongs for the most part only to the isolated upland farms of cotter tenants; and such lonely shielings are very little likely to form the nucleus for a town or village. There is an isolated field near Lyme Regis, however, known as Lanchycraft, which has always moved my most mysterious feelings. The form of the name is northern, and tradition reports that a skeleton in armour—perhaps a Danish pirate—lies buried in the meadow. Snowdrops grow wild there, and nowhere else in the neighbourhood. Finally, the field, though remote from the town, conferred on its possessor a vote for the borough.

Among our modern surnames, Toft and Croft are but fairly well represented. Burghman or Burman is a good old English name, recorded in the 'Hundred Rolls;' and one such Burman, no doubt, gave his patronymic to some upland toft, which was thenceforth known among his neighbours as Burmantoft. From that village, in turn, sprang a family of Burmantofts, and from them, once more, comes the name of the fantastic Burmantoft pottery (which reminds me incidentally that when dealing with thorpes I forgot Linthorpe). I have met once with a person named Eastoft, and have seen Bratoft over a shop door in America, but, on the whole, tofts cannot compare with thorpes as producers of patronymics. Crofts are far commoner in surnames, however. Meadowcroft is perhaps the most poetical form; but Ryecroft and Ashcroft also occur, the last being borne at present as a christian-name by a distinguished critic. The Allcrofts are a mighty firm of glovers. The name of Bancroft is not unknown to theatregoers; and Canon Bardsley explains it as meaning really beancroft. Berecroft in like manner is equivalent to barleycroft. An Englishman named Moorcroft was the first European to explore

Tibet. North Country forms tend rather towards the North Country variant craft. A gentleman of the name of Calcraft, it may be remembered, long held a lucrative position of trust and responsibility under her Majesty's Government; in point of fact, he was the common hangman. Hay in old English signifies a hedge, and Haycraft is therefore just the hedged croft or fenced enclosure. What Cracroft means I cannot conjecture. Croft and Craft are themselves surnames, like Thorpe, though of somewhat less frequent occurrence; the plural form Crofts is not wholly unknown; and I have met with Croftman. Crofter, as a surname, on the other hand, has never happened to pass my way; but as the word itself is of tolerably old standing, even in print, some of my readers may have been more fortunate in scraping acquaintance with it.

One curious little point in the history of language which croft and toft and thorpe alike illustrate is the influence of fashion in deciding the fate of various elements in a literature. Words rise once into use, decay, become obsolete, and are revived again by caprice—just like hooped petticoats or leg-of-mutton sleeves—at the will of the classes who make the language. Sometimes they surge up from below at the bidding of the mob, as is the case just now with all the odious music-hall words at present being forced upon us; sometimes they die out for a time, and are called back to life, on account of their inherent beauty or their literary associations, by poet or essayist. Thorpe was almost dead between the day when Chaucer wrote

> The cock, that horloge is of thorpës litë,

and the day when Tennyson and Browning revived it at one blast in two immortal lyrics. Croft was almost dead from the time when some anonymous dramatist in the 'Towneley Mysteries' made Satan call to mankind,

> Come to my crofte alle ye,

to the time when Milton introduced it once more into the full blaze of literary light in 'Comus.' Even then it remained a mere poetical and literary word till the crofter agitation in the Western Islands and Highlands of Scotland made it suddenly blossom out into the official dignity of Blue-books and Parliamentary Enquiries. Nowadays, there is a Crofter Society and a Crofter League, a vast Crofter literature, and a burning Crofter question. As for 'toft,' poor neglected word, it still waits its turn. I can't recollect that any great poet has extended to it the hospitality of his sonorous lines; and, indeed, its unlucky likeness to the commonest childish mispronunciation of *soft* weights it somewhat heavily at the very outset as a possible subject for the fastidious muse. But the whirligig of time brings its revenges unexpectedly, and perhaps in some twenty years more we shall all be prepared to find

> By lonely moorland toft or heathery wold

quite as poetical and pretty as we find to-day the clustering thorpes and upland crofts of contemporary versification.

The eighteenth century was nothing if not classical. It went off at a tangent after a Latinised vocabulary and a pedantic style. It cared for no charmers save Euphemia and Chloe; it loved to gaze entranced on Cynthia's pallid ray; it tuned its Aeolian lyre or its oaten reed to false Virgilian echoes and secondhand Theocritean lays. From Helicon's harmonious springs it rolled its monotonous music through verdant vales and Ceres' golden reign. It lapped its soul in Lydian measures, till all the world was fairly sick of them. Our own age, grown tired of nymphs and fauns and all the other eighteenth-century borrowed stock-in-trade, has returned with delight from Parnassus and Mæander to the forgotten wealth of our own language. It has revived many words of our Teutonic mother-tongue, half obsolete till now since the Middle Ages. It has thus brought back literature many steps nearer to the speech of our ancestors, and has enormously enriched our own spoken vocabulary from the storehouse of Chaucer and his predecessors. Among the beautiful words which this happy revolution has well reinstated in our modern tongue are 'thorpe' and 'croft;' another generation will very probably add 'toft' and 'thwaite' as well to the ever-growing number.

BARNABAS RABBITS' RAIN-CLOUD.

I.

'WELL,' said Colonel O'Rorke as he strolled forth upon his parched lawn, with his hands in his pockets and his Panama hat cunningly bent 'twixt his face and the unclouded sun, 'though this is the seventy-fifth day since we've had a drop of rain down here, reckon we can't grumble, Martha, if it keeps fine this afternoon.'

'My goodness, John!' exclaimed Mrs. O'Rorke, 'it gives me the creeps to think of rain to-day.'

'You can reserve your creeps, my dear, for a time more suitable. I'm going to have my moths out. If that ain't a sign of fine weather where 'll you find it?'

'Your moths, John? Oh, don't now. If you remember, at our last party you lost three of them—the most valuable ones too, weren't they?'

'They were,' said the Colonel grimly. 'But I know now who pinched them. That party's gone to another township. He had no choice, after what I hinted to him. We are as honest a lot in Scorcher nowadays as you'll find anywhere in Texas.'

'It is such a queer idea too, John. Moths at a garden party!'

'Queer, begad! There's nothing queer in it that I can see. I know a lady of my own witty nation who on the like occasion paid fellows to set a hare across the lawn. It's divarsion, my dear. Folks' spirits ain't always at top pitch at these sort of merry-makings. They want a spark in their energies. Well, my moths 'll do for the hare. Most people in the States know about Colonel O'Rorke's unrivalled collection of the world's moths. They'll be set round on trays, and the three darkies 'll keep their eyes on 'em.'

Mrs. O'Rorke sighed resignedly. Her husband's whim seemed to her a mild reflection upon her entertaining abilities.

The moths were accordingly brought forth—tray after tray. There were five cabinets of them. The wood alone of the cabinets and trays would have sufficed for a small ring fence. Colonel O'Rorke superintended their arrangement. At first sight you would have said that the lawn was designed for an open-air bazaar.

Yet plenty of moving room remained, and when the *élite* of Scorcher came up, mostly in volatile buggies drawn by long-tailed horses, loud and sincere were the cries of gladness evoked by their host's hospitable consideration of them.

II.

Barnabas Rabbits resided about half a mile from Colonel O'Rorke. He was an industrious man, with a scientific itch and a sister. His sister Betsy was by way of being a *belle,* though she was getting on for thirty. Of course she was among the invited to Colonel O'Rorke's festivity. For the matter of that, so was Barnabas. But no one supposed that Barnabas would attend. He was hardly ever seen in anything but his shirt-sleeves, and Colonel O'Rorke was a person who exacted tall hats from those who honoured him with their society when he and Mrs. O'Rorke issued cards.

Sister Betsy began her toilet at an early hour. Brother Barnabas was otherwise engaged.

In fact, Barnabas Rabbits was more than engaged: he was engrossed. He had been in correspondence with a dealer in showers who lived at Cincinnati, and the correspondence had at last eventuated in business. Mr. Rabbits had, with divers misgivings and also keen hopes, transmitted twenty dollars to the shower merchant, and had that morning received in return a snug little packet warranted to give him twenty tons of good wholesome rain whenever he chose.

Having read and re-read the instructions that accompanied the packet, Mr. Rabbits had inspected his garden and calculated the profit that would accrue to it when he let loose the shower. Everything looked disgustingly brown and yellow and powdery, and even the hardiest and least bibulous of his flowers hung their heads. Then, from his own garden, he had slouched on to his neighbours' gardens, some with fields of ill-conditioned wheat adjacent. He had chuckled repeatedly also as he thought of the contrast about four-and-twenty hours would produce between his property and, for example, Mike Annesley's, which was conterminous with his. He hated Mike Annesley with a great hatred.

Barnabas's appetite had given way before the spiritual excitement of his packet of rain. Sister Betsy had remarked it. She would have taken more sympathetic notice of it had she not herself been preoccupied about gowns. The Scorcher ladies were wont to be monumental in colours. Sister Betsy did not mean to be obscure if she (that is, her wardrobe) could help it.

Sister Betsy appeared at length in a gown of cabbage green. She wore also a very flushed face. The strain of choosing the cabbage-green frock had been immense. She reckoned, however, that she would have her reward in unlimited admiration. The ostrich-feather in her hat, though snow-white, went well with her frock: Barnabas, on being asked, said so.

'And how, Barny, shall you fill up your gaps?' sister Betsy asked, warmed to the core by her brother's praise.

'Me! Oh, I'm thinking of a thing. Country looks kind o' yaller, don't it?'

'*That* ain't new news,' said sister Betsy, derisively, as she tried to cool her red face, for the sake of the cabbage-coloured gown.

'Guess not. You'll see, though.'

'What, in goodness, Barny, am I to see? A body knows as the wells have nigh run dry and we're in for a famine this fall. You ain't going to waste the pumps on the flowers?'

'Not much, Betsy,' replied Barnabas, with an irritating grin of angelic wisdom on his countenance. 'You'll see, though. And now you'd better be off and enj'y yerself!'

Sister Betsy went off in a huff. Her brother did not often indulge in enigmas, and she resented the inexplicable smile on his face.

III.

The company at the O'Rorkes' garden party numbered nearly fifty, and there were many worse frocks and discordances than sister Betsy's cabbage-green gown and white ostrich-feather.

Jake Thompson's wife and three girls from the sawmill turned out in grass-green trimmed with blue, the old lady sporting a scarlet fichu into the bargain, spite of her children's wails that fichus were long out of fashion. Miss Cornelia Jewitt, the school-marm, came in pale blue. She wore her hair in extensive curls, and a white straw hat with strings sat perkily on her head. Mrs. Rand, the leading land-agent's wife, astonished even herself in her yellow silk—improved by a heliotrope parasol. There was also a very stout lady from Kentucky (a guest of the doctor's), who was conspicuous in a heliotrope bodice and a white corset skirt.

These details, however, give but an imperfect idea of the magnificence of the scene. The materials of the various costumes were mostly silk or satin. The leading *modiste* of Galveston had been hard at work for three weeks upon them and the bills that were to be their corollary.

The parallel of a tulip-bed has often been applied to a garden party. The same comparison may be used here if hollyhocks and sunflowers may be interspersed among the tulips, and the flowers be set in uneasy movement to and fro about a dried-up lawn with not an atom of shade from a sun that seemed to burn to the bone.

The phrase 'How nice you look, dear!' went backwards and forwards among the ladies. Those who could not, either from physical or conscientious scruples, keep it up to the surfeit point found solace in ices, half-frozen drinks, and moths. The enthusiasm excited by the moths was great, as it was bound to be. And the three darkies on guard, in mauve livery trimmed with green, paid particular heed to the elbow action of the guests who excelled at eulogistic interjections.

So an hour passed. Then, suddenly, Colonel O'Rorke, who was being very civil to Miss Amelia Thompson, stared at the horizon, frowned, and cried aloud—

'What in thunder's that?'

IV.

'It's noiseless,' said Barnabas Rabbits, reading the instructions for the fifth time ere casting the little cube of composition upon the ground, 'and I wouldn't wish it not to be.'

He hesitated, looked at the blinding purple sky, at his little grey bungalow with the green shutters, and the three pairs of sister Betsy's stockings which hung so touchingly on a wire between two of the verandah posts, and then at his thirsty garden and dejected flowers.

'Mighty queer!' he murmured as he rubbed his rough chin with one hand while again contemplating his twenty tons of condensed rain. 'How the Moses can all that liquid come without never a sound? This yere bit o' mess cost ten cents by the mail; cheap carriage I call that for twenty tons o' stuff!'

Then he read the instructions for the sixth time. According to the maker, he was to stand about a hundred feet from the area he wished to water, and was to hurl the cube of composition in that direction. There was then to be a smoke which should slowly pack, rise, and rush strongly towards its destined goal. The deluge would not fail to ensue.

'Wal!' said Barnabas at length, 'here goes!'

He tossed the concentrated rain-cloud upon the hard soil and folded his arms.

'Bless my cats!' he exclaimed slowly as before his astonished eyes a dense mass of vapour arose. Then he ran boldly through the middle of it, towards the house, to watch how it did its watering.

Now, according to the inventor of this particular kind of rain-cloud, that is where Barnabas erred. He ought not to have interfered with its works by scampering across its half-formed organisation. But he did not know what he had done until afterwards.

In a very short time the cloud hustled itself into something like shape, and then sped off laterally, like a balloon before a strong current. It took no more notice of Barnabas Rabbits' thirsty flowers than if they were not. In a moment or two it had passed them by.

'Now, darn it!' cried Barnabas, in a rage, 'if the cussed thing harn't scooted off my estate!'

He watched it open-mouthed—a dark oblong mass with ragged edges—as it hurried westwards.

'I'll just swear, I will, if it busts itself over Mike Annesley's garden—twenty ton o' nice rain like that!'

The next instant he saw that it had broken. Standing where he did, he could hear its music—like that of a million large-sized garden water-cans set in motion at the same time. He felt the air freshen while he watched it wonderingly. In one minute, however, all was over. Nothing remained of it. The brazen sky seemed more brazen than ever.

V.

Much perturbed, Barnabas ran off in his shirt-sleeves to see who had profited by his purchase. He heard loud cries from O'Rorke's house long before he got near it. Divers citizens, like himself, were speeding in the same direction, spawning ejaculations while they ran.

Then he saw a dull mass of colour worry out of the Colonel's porch. From the midst of it his fraternal eyes distinguished his sister Betsy, with her cabbage-green frock clinging to her body as if she had a bath in it. The stout lady in the heliotrope uppers and the white corset skirt fought through the crowd and bombarded *her* way down the street—a sight to divert Momus himself! As she ran she made a brook. There were a variety of other affecting scenes of a similar kind. And the language of these outraged ladies as they puddled their dismal homeward track was something unique in Scorcher's experience.

When they had all gone, Colonel O'Rorke stood, dripping, at his garden gate, and swore loud and long.

In the meantime, however, Barnabas Rabbits had made up his mind.

'What in goodness has happened?' he screamed as he contemplated his damp sister. 'Has it been raining all that?'

'It was just a shower,' hiccoughed the poor lady, in utter grief for her cabbage-green frock, which now proved that its colour was not fast; 'it didn't rain anywhere else. It just covered us up and wetted us, as you see.'

'Wal, I never did!' exclaimed brother Barnabas. 'Twenty ton o' rain among fifty folks *is* pretty smart shares.'

'What?' asked sister Betsy impatiently.

'Oh, nothing, my dear. You just hurry on and get quit of that gown. I'm glad, any way, it didn't do Mike Annesley a turn,' said Barnabas to himself when his sister had renewed her heavy exertions homewards.

. . . . . .

It did not take long for Colonel O'Rorke to surmise that some one had been larking around with rain-manufactures. But he could not, try how he might, discover whom it behoved him to sue for the 20,000 dollars at which he rated his collection of moths, now utterly spoilt, and afterwards fight in order to vindicate himself with his guests.

Manifestly, Barnabas Rabbits was not in a position to make a fuss with the dealer in showers; and he had to be satisfied with the merchant's explanation about the miscarriage of the particular shower 'with which,' as he phrased it, 'discontent had been expressed.'

THE LAST GOVERNOR OF THE BASTILLE.

THERE has recently come into the hands of the present writer a little volume, the contents of which throw a curious light upon the internal economy of the Bastille during the time that Count de Launay filled the post of Governor. The title of the book, which was published in Dublin in 1783, runs as follows:

'Memoirs of the Bastille, containing a full Explanation of the Mysterious Policy and Despotic Oppression of the French Government in the Interior Administration of that State Prison.

'Translated from the French of the celebrated M. Linguet, who was imprisoned there from September, 1780, to May, 1782.'

It is stated in the translator's preface that M. Linguet was, for ten years, one of the most distinguished of the Councillors of the Parliament of Paris, and enjoyed a high reputation as an orator. But, unluckily for him, he undertook the publication of a periodical entitled 'Annales Politiques, Civiles et Littéraires du 18$^{\text{ème}}$ Siècle,' in which he ventured to expose the abuses that then prevailed in the administration of nearly every department of the Government.

The Count de Vergennes, one of the French ministers, was so exasperated by an attack made upon him in one of the numbers of the 'Annales' that he obtained from the king a *lettre de cachet*, by virtue of which M. Linguet was arrested and sent to the Bastille.

In the course of the 'Mémoires' this gentleman describes how prisoners who were not of high rank were, in his time, treated. He says:—'Most of the cells are in the towers, the walls of which are at least twelve, and at the base thirty to forty, feet thick. Each cell has a small vent-hole in the wall, crossed by three bars of iron, so that a passage is left to the sight of scarcely two inches square. Several of the cells—and mine was one of these—are situated upon the moat into which the common sewer of the Rue St. Antoine empties itself, so that in summer, after a few days of hot weather, there exhales from the stagnant water a most infectious, pestilential vapour, and when it has once penetrated through the vent-holes into the cells, it is a considerable time before it is got rid of.'

De Launay, it is stated, contracted with the Government to supply the furniture of the prisoners' rooms at a fixed price, this being one of the many perquisites attached to his office. The furniture of M. Linguet's cell consisted of two mattresses, half eaten by moths, a matted arm-chair, the seat of which was only kept together by pack-thread, a rickety old table, a water-pitcher, two pots of Dutch-ware, one of which served to drink out of, and a flagstone to hold the wood fire. No dog-irons, tongs, shovel, nor poker was provided, these utensils being regarded by the Governor as superfluous luxuries. The prisoners, too, were prohibited to buy these conveniences for themselves, since, had this been the case, it would have afforded palpable evidence to the Government that De Launay had neglected to furnish the rooms in a proper manner.

In the winter, too, the prisoners frequently suffered from the cold, owing to the insufficient supply of firing. 'Formerly,' says M. Linguet, 'a proper quantity was allowed, and, without doubt, the instructions given on this point still remain the same. But the present Governor has limited the allowance to each prisoner to six billets of wood a day, *large or small.* This economical purveyor of firing is careful to pick out in the timber merchants' yard the smallest logs he can find. Not only does he do this, but he selects those which are worm-eaten and rotten, they being, of course, the cheapest. By this course being pursued, although the purchaser is allowed a handsome commission on the transaction, the total cost of the firing to the Government is less than it was formerly.'

De Launay was allowed a fixed sum for the subsistence of each of the prisoners, according to his social position, the amount ranging from five livres *per diem* for a tradesman or other member of the *bourgeoisie,* to twenty-five livres for a marshal of France. This allowance was by no means an inadequate one, and had the money been expended in conformity with the intentions of the Government, the inmates of the Bastille would have had, in this respect, no reasonable cause for complaint. But the privilege accorded to De Launay of purchasing provisions for the prisoners was, M. Linguet declares, abused to such an extent 'that not only was the food provided inferior in quality, but it was, in most instances, so insufficient in quantity that there were prisoners who, at dinner, were not allowed above four ounces of meat.' Consequently the savings thus effected alone amounted to no inconsiderable sum.

Again, De Launay was authorised, as had been the case with his predecessors in office, to buy for the use of the inmates of the Bastille one hundred tuns of wine annually, without having to pay the *octroi* on them. The object of this exemption from the city dues was, of course, to furnish the prisoners with good wine at cost price. 'But the present Governor,' says M. Linguet, 'sells this concession to a tavern-keeper in Paris of the name of Joli, for six thousand two hundred and fifty livres, and takes in exchange the worst kind of wines for the consumption of the prisoners.'

De Launay, not content with the augmentation to his income derived from the above sources, went to the extent of letting out the grounds attached to the prison to a gardener; and in order to make the better bargain, those of the prisoners who had formerly enjoyed the privilege of taking exercise in the garden were rigorously excluded from it. In fact, it would appear from M. Linguet's statements that De Launay proved himself more ingenious in devising expedients for increasing the emoluments to be derived from his post than had been any of his predecessors.

The way, too, in which he obtained the post was characteristic of the social and political abuses which prevailed in France at that period, many of the most important appointments under Government being sold to the highest bidder, quite irrespective of the qualifications of the candidates for filling them properly. Indeed, so general was the usage that no more odium attached to these transactions than it does, at the present day in this country, to the purchase of the next presentation to a church living.

Under these circumstances De Launay—he being desirous of obtaining the governorship of the Bastille—entered into negotiations with the Count de Jumilhac, who then held the appointment, with a view of securing the reversion of the post when the Count, who was in bad health, should resign it. The conditions of the compact were that De Launay should pay the sum of three hundred thousand livres, and that his daughter, who would have a handsome dowry, should become the wife of the Count's eldest son.

This arrangement was carried out through the interest with the Ministry of the Prince di Conti, in whose service was a younger brother of De Launay's, notwithstanding the fact that there were other candidates for the appointment who, besides being prepared to pay the price demanded, could plead in their favour previous services to the State. 'This was not the circumstance,' says M. Linguet, 'with De Launay. He had never filled any civil post, and his military career had been brief and undistinguished.' The influence of the Prince, however, was all-powerful, and De Launay was secured the reversion of the post he sought.

The almost invariable result of an official being obliged to pay a large sum for any important Government appointment was that, as soon as he was installed in the post, he sought to recoup himself for the outlay by practising the most outrageous form of extortion. This evil pervaded every department of the State, even the French judiciary, prior to the Revolution, being notoriously corrupt. More especially was this the case with the farmers of the revenue, who, at the same time, oppressed the people and defrauded the Government. In this connection an anecdote is related of Voltaire. He was spending a few days at the house of a friend. It was proposed one evening, by his host, that, to while away the time, each of the gentlemen present should tell a story of some celebrated robber. This was agreed to, and the exploits of Cartouche, Madrin and others were dwelt upon. Finally, it became Voltaire's turn. He rose, lighted a bedroom candle which stood on a side table, and then said, 'Gentlemen, there was once a *Fermier Général.*' With not a further word, he bowed gravely to the company and walked out of the room. He evidently thought to add anything to the fact that the individual referred to was a farmer of the revenue would be superfluous, as, necessarily, his exploits as a robber must have far surpassed those of any of the persons whose deeds had formed the topic of conversation.

The intense hatred with which the great mass of the nation regarded those individuals who had filled posts of any kind under Government found expression, during the Revolution, by the members of that class being hunted down and put to death, under circumstances, in many instances, of the most revolting brutality.

In conclusion it may be said that, while perusing M. Linguet's narrative, the reflection naturally suggests itself how little could he have imagined, when he penned it in 1783, that, in the course of a few years, a terrible convulsion of society would take place in France, and one that should sweep away for ever the abuses of which he had been the victim—that the Bastille, that odious monument of the oppression under which the people had suffered for countless generations, would be razed to the ground, and that the last Governor of it was destined to meet a cruel death at the hands of an infuriated populace.

WITH EDGED TOOLS.

CHAPTER XL.

SIR JOHN'S LAST CARD.

'Tis better playing with a lion's whelp
Than with an old one dying.

As through an opera runs the rhythm of one dominant air, so through men's lives there rings a dominant note, soft in youth, strong in manhood, and soft again in old age. But it is always there, and whether soft in the gentler periods, or strong amidst the noise and clang of the perihelion, it dominates always and gives its tone to the whole life.

The dominant tone of Sir John Meredith's existence had been the high, clear note of battle. He had always found something or some one to fight from the very beginning, and now, in his old age, he was fighting still. His had never been the din and crash of warfare by sword and cannon, but the subtler, deeper combat of the pen. In his active days he had got through a vast amount of work—that unchronicled work of the Foreign Office which never comes, through the cheap newspapers, to the voracious maw of a chattering public. His name was better known on the banks of the Neva, the Seine, the Bosphorus, or the swift-rolling Iser than by the Thames; and grim Sir John was content to have it so.

His face had never been public property, the comic papers had never used his personality as a peg upon which to hang their ever-changing political principles. But he had always been 'there,' as he himself vaguely put it. That is to say, he had always been at the back—one of those invisible powers of the stage by whose command the scene is shifted, the lights are lowered for the tragedy, or the gay music plays on the buffoon. Sir John had no sympathy with a generation of men and women who would rather be laughed at and despised than unnoticed. He belonged to an age wherein it was held better to be a gentleman than the object of a cheap and evanescent notoriety—and he was at once the despair and the dread of newspaper interviewers, enterprising publishers, and tuft-hunters.

He was so little known out of his own select circle that the porters in Euston Station asked each other in vain who the old swell waiting for the four o'clock 'up' from Liverpool could be. The four o'clock was, moreover, not the first express which Sir John had met that day. His stately carriage-and-pair had pushed its way into the crowd of smaller and humbler vehicular fry earlier in the afternoon, and on that occasion also the old gentleman had indulged in a grave promenade upon the platform.

He was walking up and down there now, with his hand in the small of his back, where of late he had been aware of a constant aching pain. He was very upright, however, and supremely unconscious of the curiosity aroused by his presence in the mind of the station 'canaille.' His lips were rather more troublesome than usual, and his keen eyes twinkled with a suppressed excitement.

In former days there had been no one equal to him in certain diplomatic crises where it was a question of browbeating suavely the uppish representative of some foreign State. No man could then rival him in the insolently aristocratic school of diplomacy which England has made her own. But in his most dangerous crisis he had never been restless, apprehensive, pessimistic, as he was at this moment. And after all it was a very simple matter that had brought him here. It was merely the question of meeting a man as if by accident, and then afterwards making that man do certain things required of him. Moreover, the man was only Guy Oscard—learned if you will in forest craft, but a mere child in the hands of so old a diplomatist as Sir John Meredith.

That which made Sir John so uneasy was the abiding knowledge that Jack's wedding-day would dawn in twelve hours. The margin was much too small, through, however, no fault of Sir John's. The West African steamer had been delayed—unaccountably—two days. A third day lost in the Atlantic would have overthrown Sir John Meredith's plan. He had often cut things fine before, but somehow now—not that he was getting old, oh no!—but somehow the suspense was too much for his nerves. He soon became irritated and distrustful. Besides the pain in his back wearied him and interfered with the clear sequence of his thoughts.

The owners of the West African steamer had telegraphed that the passengers had left for London in two separate trains. Guy Oscard was not in the first—there was no positive reason why he should be in the second. More depended upon his being in this second express than Sir John cared to contemplate.

The course of his peregrinations brought him into the vicinity of an inspector whose attitude betokened respect while his presence raised hope.

'Is there any reason to suppose that your train is coming?' he inquired of the official.

'Signalled now, my lord,' replied the inspector, touching his cap.

'And what does that mean?' uncompromisingly ignorant of technical parlance.

'It will be in in one minute, my lord.'

Sir John's hand was over his lips as he walked back to the carriage, casting as it were the commander's eye over the field.

'When the crowd is round the train you come and look for me,' he said to the footman, who touched his cockaded hat in silence.

At that moment the train lumbered in, the engine wearing that inanely self-important air affected by locomotives of the larger build. From all quarters an army of porters besieged the platform, and in a few seconds Sir John was in the centre of an agitated crowd. There was one other calm man on that platform—another man with no parcels, whom no one sought to embrace. His brown face and close-cropped head towered above a sea of agitated bonnets. Sir John, whose walk in life had been through crowds, elbowed his way forward and deliberately walked against Guy Oscard.

'D—n it!' he exclaimed, turning round. 'Ah!—Mr. Oscard—how d'ye do?'

'How are you?' replied Guy Oscard, really glad to see him.

'You are a good man for a crowd; I think I will follow in your wake,' said Sir John. 'A number of people—of the baser sort. Got my carriage here somewhere. Fool of a man looking for me in the wrong place, no doubt. Where are you going? May I offer you a lift? This way. Here, John, take Mr. Oscard's parcels.'

He could not have done it better in his keenest day. Guy Oscard was seated in the huge roomy carriage before he had realised what had happened to him.

'Your man will look after your traps, I suppose?' said Sir John, hospitably drawing the fur rug from the opposite seat.

'Yes,' replied Guy, 'although he is not my man. He is Jack's man Joseph.'

'Ah, of course; excellent servant, too. Jack told me he had left him with you.'

Sir John leant out of the window and asked the footman whether he knew his colleague Joseph, and upon receiving an answer in the affirmative he gave orders—acting as Guy's mouthpiece—that the luggage was to be conveyed to Russell Square. While these orders were being executed the two men sat waiting in the carriage, and Sir John lost no time.

'I am glad,' he said, 'to have this opportunity of thanking you for all your kindness to my son in this wild expedition of yours.'

'Yes,' replied Oscard, with a transparent reserve which rather puzzled Sir John.

'You must excuse me,' said the old gentleman, sitting rather stiffly, 'if I appear to take a somewhat limited interest in this great Simiacine discovery, of which there has been considerable talk in some circles. The limit to my interest is drawn by a lamentable ignorance. I am afraid the business details are rather unintelligible to me. My son has endeavoured, somewhat cursorily perhaps, to explain the matter to me, but I have never mastered the—er—commercial technicalities. However, I understand that you have made quite a mint of money, which is the chief consideration—nowadays.'

He drew the rug more closely round his knees and looked out of the window, deeply interested in a dispute between two cabmen.

'Yes—we have been very successful,' said Oscard. 'How is your son now? When I last saw him he was in a very bad way. Indeed I hardly expected to see him again.'

Sir John was still interested in the dispute, which was not yet settled.

'He is well, thank you. You know that he is going to be married.'

'He told me that he was engaged,' replied Oscard; 'but I did not know that anything definite was fixed.'

'The most definite thing of all is fixed—the date. It is to-morrow.'

'To-morrow?'

'Yes. You have not much time to prepare your wedding garments.'

'Oh,' replied Oscard with a laugh, 'I have not been bidden.'

'I expect the invitation is awaiting you at your house. No doubt my son will want you to be present—they would both like you to be there no doubt. But come with me now: we will call and see Jack. I know where to find him. In fact, I have an appointment with him at a quarter to five.'

It may seem strange that Guy Oscard should not have asked the name of his friend's prospective bride, but Sir John was ready for that. He gave his companion no time. Whenever he opened his lips Sir John turned Oscard's thoughts aside.

What he had told him was strictly true. He had an appointment with Jack—an appointment of his own making.

'Yes,' he said in pursuance of his policy of choking questions, 'he is wonderfully well, as you will see for yourself.'

Oscard submitted silently to this high-handed arrangement. He had not known Sir John well. Indeed all his intercourse with him has been noted in these pages. He was rather surprised to find him so talkative and so very friendly. But Guy Oscard was not a very deep person. He was sublimely indifferent to the Longdrawn Motive. He presumed that Sir John made friends of his son's friends; and in his straightforward acceptance of facts he was perfectly well aware that by his timely rescue he had saved Jack Meredith from the hands of the tribes. The presumption was that Sir John knew of this, and it was only natural that he should be somewhat exceptionally gracious to the man who had saved his son's life.

It would seem that Sir John divined these thoughts, for he presently spoke of them.

'Owing to an unfortunate difference of opinion with my son we have not been very communicative lately,' he said with that deliberation which he knew how to assume when he desired to be heard without interruption. 'I am therefore almost entirely ignorant of your African affairs, but I imagine Jack owes more to your pluck and promptness than has yet transpired. I gathered as much from one or two conversations I had with Miss Gordon when she was in England. I am one of Miss Gordon's many admirers.'

'And I am another,' said Oscard frankly.

'Ah! Then you are happy enough to be the object of a reciprocal feeling which for myself I could scarcely expect. She spoke of you in no measured language. I gathered from her that if you had not acted with great promptitude the—er—happy event of to-morrow could not have taken place.'

The old man paused, and Guy Oscard, who looked somewhat distressed and distinctly uncomfortable, could find no graceful way of changing the conversation.

‘In a word,’ went on Sir John in a very severe tone, ‘I owe you a great debt. You saved my boy’s life.’

‘Yes, but you see,’ argued Oscard, finding his tongue at last, ‘out there things like that don’t count for so much.’

‘Oh—don’t they?’ There was the suggestion of a smile beneath Sir John’s grim eyebrows.

‘No,’ returned Oscard rather lamely, ‘it is a sort of thing that happens every day out there.’

Sir John turned suddenly, and with the courtliness that was ever his he indulged in a rare exhibition of feeling. He laid his hand on Guy Oscard’s stalwart knee.

‘My dear Oscard,’ he said, and when he chose he could render his voice very soft and affectionate, ‘none of those arguments apply to me because I am not out there. I like you for trying to make little of your exploit. Such conduct is worthy of you—worthy of a gentleman, but you cannot disguise the fact that Jack owes his life to you and I owe you the same, which, between you and me, I may mention, is more valuable to me than my own. I want you to remember always that I am your debtor, and if—if circumstances should ever seem to indicate that the feeling I have for you is anything but friendly and kind, do me the honour of disbelieving those indications—you understand?’

‘Yes,’ replied Oscard untruthfully.

‘Here we are at Lady Cantourne’s,’ continued Sir John, ‘where, as it happens, I expect to meet Jack. Her ladyship is naturally interested in the affair of to-morrow, and has kindly undertaken to keep us up to date in our behaviour. You will come in with me?’

Oscard remembered afterwards that he was rather puzzled—that there was perhaps in his simple mind the faintest tinge of a suspicion. At the moment, however, there was no time to do anything but follow. The man had already rung the bell, and Lady Cantourne’s butler was holding the door open. There was something in his attitude vaguely suggestive of expectation. He never took his eyes from Sir John Meredith’s face as if on the alert for an unspoken order.

Guy Oscard followed his companion into the hall, and the very scent of the house—for each house speaks to more senses than one—made his heart leap in his broad breast. It seemed as if Millicent’s presence was in the very air. This was more than he could have hoped. He had not intended to call this afternoon, although the visit was only to have been postponed for twenty-four hours.

Sir John Meredith's face was a marvel to see. It was quite steady. He was upright and alert, with all the intrepidity of his mind up in arms. There was a light in his eyes—a gleam of light from other days, not yet burnt out.

He laid aside his gold-headed cane and threw back his shoulders.

'Is Mr. Meredith upstairs?' he said to the butler.

'Yes, sir.'

The man moved towards the stairs.

'You need not come!' said Sir John, holding up his hand.

The butler stood aside and Sir John led the way up to the drawing-room.

At the door he paused for a moment. Guy Oscard was at his heels. Then he opened the door rather slowly, and motioned gracefully with his left hand to Oscard to pass in before him.

Oscard stepped forward. When he had crossed the threshold Sir John closed the door sharply behind him and turned to go downstairs.

CHAPTER XLI.

À TROIS.

Men serve women kneeling; when they get on their feet they go away.

GUY OSCARD stood for a moment on the threshold. He heard the door closed behind him, and he took two steps farther forward.

Jack Meredith and Millicent were at the fireplace. There was a heap of disordered paper and string upon the table, and a few wedding presents standing in the midst of their packing.

Millicent's pretty face was quite white. She looked from Meredith to Oscard with a sudden horror in her eyes. For the first time in her life she was at a loss—quite taken aback.

'Oh—h!' she whispered, and that was all.

The silence that followed was tense as if something in the atmosphere was about to snap; and in the midst of it the wheels of Sir John's retreating carriage came to the ears of the three persons in the drawing-room.

It was only for a moment, but in that moment the two men saw clearly. It was as if the veil from the girl's mind had fallen—leaving her thoughts confessed, bare before them. In the same instant they both saw—they both sped back in thought to their first meeting, to the hundred links of the chain that brought them to the present moment—they *knew*; and Millicent felt that they knew.

'Are *you* going to be married to-morrow?' asked Guy Oscard deliberately. He never was a man to whom a successful appeal for the slightest mitigation of justice could have been made. His dealings had ever been with men, from whom he had exacted as scrupulous an honour as he had given. He did not know that women are different—that honour is not their strong point.

Millicent did not answer. She looked to Meredith to answer for her; but Meredith was looking at Oscard, and in his lazy eyes there glowed the singular affection and admiration which he had bestowed long time before on this simple gentleman—his mental inferior.

'Are *you* going to be married to-morrow?' repeated Oscard, standing quite still, with a calmness that frightened her.

'Yes,' she answered rather feebly.

She knew that she could explain it all. She could have explained it to either of them separately, but to both together somehow it was difficult. Her mind was filled with clamouring arguments and explanations and plausible excuses; but she did not know which to select first. None of them seemed quite equal to this occasion. These men required something deeper, and stronger, and simpler than she had to offer them.

Moreover, she was paralysed by a feeling that was quite new to her—a horrid feeling that something had gone from her. She had lost her strongest, her single arm: her beauty. This seemed to have fallen from her. It seemed to count for nothing at this time. There is a time that comes as surely as death will come in the life of every beautiful woman—a time wherein she suddenly realises how trivial a thing her beauty is—how limited, how useless, how ineffectual!

Millicent Chyne made a little appealing movement towards Meredith, who relentlessly stepped back. It was the magic of the love that filled his heart for Oscard. Had she wronged any man in the world but Guy Oscard, that little movement—full of love and tenderness and sweet contrition—might have saved her. But it was Oscard's heart that she had broken; for broken they both knew it to be, and Jack Meredith stepped back from her touch as from pollution. His superficial, imagined love for her had been killed at a single blow. Her beauty was no more to him at that moment than the beauty of a picture.

'Oh, Jack!' she gasped; and had there been another woman in the room that woman would have known that Millicent loved him with the love that comes once only. But men are not very acute in such matters—they either read wrong or not at all.

'It is all a mistake,' she said breathlessly, looking from one to the other.

'A most awkward mistake,' suggested Meredith with a cruel smile that made her wince.

'Mr. Oscard must have mistaken me altogether,' the girl went on, volubly addressing herself to Meredith—she wanted nothing from Oscard. 'I may have been silly, perhaps, or merely ignorant and blind. How was I to know that he meant what he said?'

'How, indeed?' agreed Meredith with a grave bow.

'Besides, he has no business to come here bringing false accusations against me. He has no right—it is cruel and ungentlemanly. He cannot prove anything; he cannot say that I ever distinctly gave him to understand—er, anything—that I ever promised to be engaged or anything like that.'

She turned upon Oscard, whose demeanour was stolid, almost dense. He looked very large and somewhat difficult to move.

'He has not attempted to do so yet,' suggested Jack suavely, looking at his friend.

'I do not see that it is quite a question of proofs,' said Oscard quietly, in a voice that did not sound like his at all. 'We are not in a court of justice, where ladies like to settle these questions now. If we were I could challenge you to produce my letters. There is no doubt of my meaning in them.'

'There are also my poor contributions to—your collection,' chimed in Jack Meredith. 'A comparison must have been interesting to you, by the same mail presumably, under the same postmark.'

'I made no comparison,' the girl cried defiantly. 'There was no question of comparison.'

She said it shamelessly, and it hurt Meredith more than it hurt Guy Oscard, for whom the sting was intended.

'Comparison or no comparison,' said Jack Meredith quickly, with the keenness of a good fencer who has been touched, 'there can be no doubt of the fact that you were engaged to us both at the same time. You told us both to go out and make a fortune wherewith to buy—your affections. One can only presume that the highest bidder—the owner of the largest fortune—was to be the happy man. Unfortunately we became partners, and—such was the power of your fascination—we made the fortune; but we share and share alike in that. We are equal, so far as the —price is concerned. The situation is interesting and rather—amusing. It is your turn to move. We await your further instructions in considerable suspense.'

She stared at him with bloodless lips. She did not seem to understand what he was saying. At last she spoke, ignoring Guy Oscard's presence altogether.

'Considering that we are to be married to-morrow, I do not think that you should speak to me like that,' she said with a strange, concentrated eagerness.

'Pardon me, we are not going to be married to-morrow.'

Her brilliant teeth closed on her lower lip with a snap, and she stood looking at him, breathing so hard that the sound was almost a sob.

'What do you mean?' she whispered hoarsely.

He raised his shoulders in polite surprise at her dullness of comprehension.

'In the unfortunate circumstances in which you are placed,' he explained, 'it seems to me that the least one can do is to offer every assistance in one's power. Please consider me *hors de concours*. In a word—I scratch.'

She gasped like a swimmer swimming for life. She was fighting for that which some deem dearer than life—namely, her love. For it is not only the good women who love, though these understand it best and see farther into it.

'Then you can never have cared for me,' she cried. 'All that you have told me,' and her eyes flashed triumphantly across Oscard, 'all that you promised and vowed was utterly false—if you turn against me at the first word of a man who was carried away by his own vanity into thinking things that he had no business to think.'

If Guy Oscard was no great adept at wordy warfare, he was at all events strong in his reception of punishment. He stood upright and quiescent, betraying by neither sign nor movement that her words could hurt him.

'I beg to suggest again,' said Jack composedly, 'that Oscard has not yet brought any accusations against you. You have brought them all yourself.'

'You are both cruel and cowardly,' she exclaimed, suddenly descending to vituperation. 'Two to one. Two men—*gentlemen*—against one defenceless girl. Of course I am not able to argue with you. Of course you can get the best of me. It is so easy to be sarcastic.'

'I do not imagine,' retorted Jack, 'that anything that we can say or do will have much permanent power of hurting you. For the last two years you have been engaged in an—intrigue such as a thin-skinned or sensitive person would hardly of her own free will undertake. You may be able to explain it to yourself—no doubt you are—but to our more limited comprehensions it must remain inexplicable. We can only judge from appearances.'

'And, of course, appearances go against me—they always do against a woman,' she cried rather brokenly.

'You would have been wise to have taken that peculiarity into consideration sooner,' replied Jack Meredith coldly. 'I admit that I am puzzled; I cannot quite get at your motive. Presumably it is one of those—*sweet* feminine inconsistencies which are so charming in books.'

There was a little pause. Jack Meredith waited politely to hear if she had anything further to say. His clean-cut face was quite pallid; the suppressed anger in his eyes was perhaps more difficult to meet than open fury. The man who never forgets himself before a woman is likely to be an absolute master of women.

'I think,' he added, 'that there is nothing more to be said.'

There was a dead silence. Millicent Chyne glanced towards Guy Oscard. He could have saved her yet—by a simple lie. Had he been an impossibly magnanimous man, such as one meets in books only, he could have explained that the mistake was all his, that she was quite right, that his own vanity had blinded him into a great and unwarranted presumption. But, unfortunately, he was only a human being—a man who was ready to give as full a measure as he exacted. The unfortunate mistake to which he clung was that the same sense of justice, the same code of honour, must serve for men and women alike. So Millicent Chyne looked in vain for that indulgence which is so inconsistently offered to women, merely because they are women—the indulgence which is sometimes given and sometimes withheld, according to the softness of the masculine heart and the beauty of the suppliant feminine form. Guy Oscard was quite sure of his own impressions. This girl had allowed him to begin loving her, had encouraged him to go on, had led him to believe that his love was returned. And in his simple ignorance of the world he did not see why these matters should be locked up in his own breast from a mistaken sense of chivalry to be accorded where no chivalry was due.

'No,' he answered. 'There is nothing more to be said.'

Without looking towards her, Jack Meredith made a few steps towards the door—quietly, self-composedly, with that perfect *savoir-faire* of the social expert that made him different from other men. Millicent Chyne felt a sudden plebeian desire to scream. It was all so heartlessly well-bred. He turned on his heel with a little half-cynical bow.

'I leave my name with you,' he said. 'It is probable that you will be put to some inconvenience. I can only regret that this —*dénouement* did not come some months ago. You are likely to suffer more than I, because I do not care what the world thinks of me. Therefore you may tell the world what you choose about me —that I drink, that I gamble, that I am lacking in—honour! Anything that suggests itself to you, in fact. You need not go away; *I* will do that.'

She listened with compressed lips and heaving shoulders; and the bitterest drop in her cup was the knowledge that he despised her. During the last few minutes he had said and done nothing that lowered him in her estimation—that touched in any way her love for him. He had not lowered himself in any way, but he had suavely trodden her under foot. His last words—the inexorable intention of going away—sapped her last lingering hope. She could never regain even a tithe of his affection.

'I think,' he went on, 'that you will agree with me in thinking that Guy Oscard's name must be kept out of this entirely. I give you *carte blanche* except that.'

With a slight inclination of the head he walked to the door. It was characteristic of him that although he walked slowly he never turned his head nor paused.

Oscard followed him with the patient apathy of the large and mystified.

And so they left her—amidst the disorder of the half-unpacked wedding presents—amidst the ruin of her own life. Perhaps, after all, she was not wholly bad. Few people are; they are only bad enough to be wholly unsatisfactory and quite incomprehensible.

She must have known the risk she was running, and yet she could not stay her hand. She must have known long before that she really loved Jack Meredith, and that she was playing fast and loose with the happiness of her whole life. She knew that hundreds of girls around her were doing the same, and, with all shame be it mentioned, not a few married women. But they seemed to be able to carry it through without accident or hindrance. And illogically, thoughtlessly, she blamed her own ill-fortune.

She stood looking blankly at the door which had closed behind three men—one old and two young—and perhaps she realised the fact that such creatures may be led blindly, helplessly, with a single hair, but that that hair may snap at any moment.

She was not thinking of Guy Oscard. Him she had never loved. He had only been one of her experiments, and by his very simplicity—above all, by his uncompromising honesty—he had outwitted her.

It was characteristic of her that at that moment she scarcely knew the weight of her own remorse. It sat lightly on her shoulders then, and it was only later on, when her beauty began to fade, when years came and brought no joy for the middle-aged unmarried woman, that she began to realise what it was that she had to carry through life with her. At that moment a thousand other thoughts filled her mind—such thoughts as one would expect to find there. How was the world to be deceived? The guests would have to be put off—the wedding countermanded—the presents returned. And the world—her world—would laugh in its sleeve. There lay the sting.

CHAPTER XLII.

A STRONG FRIENDSHIP.

> Still must the man move sadlier for the dreams
> That mocked the boy.

'Where are you going?' asked Meredith, when they were in the street.

'Home.'

They walked on a few paces together.

'May I come with you?' asked Meredith again.

'Certainly; I have a good deal to tell you.'

They called a cab, and singularly enough they drove all the way to Russell Square without speaking. These two men had worked together for many months, and men who have a daily task in common usually learn to perform it without much interchange of observation. When one man gets to know the mind of another, conversation assumes a place of secondary importance. These two had been through more incidents together than usually fall to the lot of man—each knew how the other would act and think under given circumstances; each knew what the other was thinking now.

The house in Russell Square, the quiet house in the corner where the cabs do not pass, was lighted up and astir when they reached it. The old butler held open the door with a smile of welcome and a faint aroma of whisky. The luggage had been discreetly removed. Joseph had gone to Mr. Meredith's chambers. Guy Oscard led the way to the smoking-room at the back of the house—the room wherein the eccentric Oscard had written his great history—the room in which Victor Durnovo had first suggested the Simiacine scheme to the historian's son.

The two survivors of the originating trio passed into this room together, and closed the door behind them.

'The worst of one's own private tragedies is that they are usually only comedies in disguise,' said Jack Meredith oracularly.

Guy Oscard grunted. He was looking for his pipe.

'If we heard this of any two fellows except ourselves we should think it an excellent joke,' went on Meredith.

Oscard nodded. He lighted his pipe, and still he said nothing.

'Hang it!' exclaimed Jack Meredith, suddenly throwing himself back in his chair, 'it *is* a good joke.'

He laughed softly, and all the while his eyes, watchful, wise, anxious, were studying Guy Oscard's face.

'He is harder hit than I am,' he was reflecting. 'Poor old Oscard!'

The habit of self-suppression was so strong upon him—acquired as a mere social duty—that it was only natural for him to think less of himself than of the expediency of the moment. The social discipline is as powerful an agent as that military discipline that makes a man throw away his own life for the good of the many.

Oscard laughed, too, in a strangely staccato manner.

'It is rather a sudden change,' observed Meredith; 'and all brought about by your coming into that room at that particular moment—by accident.'

'Not by accident,' corrected Oscard, speaking at last. 'I was brought there and pushed into the room.'

'By whom?'

'By your father.'

Jack Meredith sat upright. He drew his curved hand slowly down over his face—keen and delicate as was his mind—his eyes deep with thought.

'The Guv'nor,' he said slowly. 'The Guv'nor—by God!'

He reflected for some seconds.

'Tell me how he did it,' he said curtly.

Oscard told him, rather incoherently, between the puffs. He did not attempt to make a story of it, but merely related the facts as they had happened to him. It is probable that to him the act was veiled which Jack saw quite distinctly.

'That is the sort of thing,' was Meredith's comment when the story was finished, 'that takes the conceit out of a fellow. I suppose I have more than my share. I suppose it is good for me to find that I am not so clever as I thought I was—that there are plenty of cleverer fellows about, and that one of them is an old man of seventy-nine. The worst of it is that he was right all along. He saw clearly where you and I were—damnably blind.'

He rubbed his slim brown hands together, and looked across at his companion with a smile wherein the youthful self-confidence was less discernible than of yore. The smile faded as he looked at Oscard. He was thinking that he looked older and graver—more of a middle-aged man who has left something behind him in life—and the sight reminded him of the few grey hairs that were above his own temples.

'Come,' he said more cheerfully, 'tell me your news. Let us change the subject. Let us throw aside light dalliance and return to questions of money. More important—much more satisfactory. I suppose you have left Durnovo in charge? Has Joseph come home with you?'

'Yes, Joseph has come home with me. Durnovo is dead.'

'Dead!'

Guy Oscard took his pipe from his lips.

'He died at Msala of the sleeping sickness. He was a bigger blackguard than we thought. He was a slave-dealer and a slave-owner. Those forty men we picked up at Msala were slaves belonging to him.'

'Ach!' It was a strange exclamation, as if he had burnt his fingers. 'Who knows of this?' he asked immediately. The expediency of the moment had presented itself to his mind again.

'Only ourselves,' returned Oscard. 'You, Joseph, and I.'

'That is all right, and the sooner we forget that the better. It would be a dangerous story to tell.'

'So I concluded,' said Oscard, in his slow, thoughtful way. 'Joseph swears he won't breathe a word of it.'

Jack Meredith nodded. He looked rather pale beneath the light of the gas.

'Joseph is all right,' he said. 'Go on.'

'It was Joseph who found it out,' continued Oscard, 'up at the Plateau. I paraded the whole crowd, told them what I had found out, and chucked up the whole concern in your name and mine. Next morning I abandoned the Plateau with such men as cared to come. Nearly half of them stayed with Durnovo. I thought it was in order that they might share in the Simiacine—I told them they could have the whole confounded lot of the stuff. But it was not that; they tricked Durnovo there. They wanted to get him to themselves. In going down the river we had an accident with two of the boats, which necessitated staying at Msala. While we were waiting there, one night after ten o'clock the poor devil came, alone, in a canoe. They had simply cut him in slices—a most beastly sight. I wake up sometimes even now dreaming of it, and I am not a fanciful sort of fellow. Joseph went into his room and was simply sick; I didn't know that you could be made sick by anything you saw. The sleeping sickness was on Durnovo then; he had brought it with him from the Plateau. He died before morning.'

Oscard ceased speaking and returned to his pipe. Jack Meredith, looking haggard and worn, was leaning back in his chair.

'Poor devil!' he exclaimed. 'There was always something tragic about Durnovo. I did hate that man, Oscard! I hated him and all his works.'

'Well, he's gone to his account now.'

'Yes, but that does not make him any better a man while he was alive. Don't let us cant about him now. The man was an unmitigated scoundrel—perhaps he deserved all he got.'

'Perhaps he did. He was Marie's husband.'

'The devil he was.'

Meredith fell into a long reverie. He was thinking of Jocelyn and her dislike for Durnovo, of the scene in the drawing-room of the bungalow at Loango; of a thousand incidents all connected with Jocelyn.

'How I hate that man!' he exclaimed at length. 'Thank God—he is dead—because I should have killed him.'

Guy Oscard looked at him with a slow pensive wonder. Perhaps he knew more than Jack Meredith knew himself of the thoughts that conceived those words—so out of place in that quiet room, from those suave and courtly lips.

All the emotions of his life seemed to be concentrated into this one day of Jack Meredith's existence. Oscard's presence was a comfort to him—the presence of a calm, strong man is better than many words.

'So this,' he said, 'is the end of the Simiacine. It did not look like a tragedy when we went into it.'

'So far as I am concerned,' replied Oscard with quiet determination, 'it certainly is the end of the Simiacine! I have had enough of it. I, for one, am not going to look for that Plateau again.'

'Nor I. I suppose it will be started as a limited liability company by a German in six months. Some of the natives will leave landmarks as they come down so as to find their way back.'

'I don't think so!'

'Why?'

Oscard took his pipe from his lips.

'When Durnovo came down to Msala,' he explained, 'he had the sleeping sickness on him. Where did he get it from?'

'By God!' ejaculated Jack Meredith, 'I never thought of that. He got it up at the Plateau. He left it behind him. They have got it up there now.'

'Not now——'

'What do you mean, Oscard?'

'Merely that all those fellows up there are dead. There is ninety thousand pounds' worth of Simiacine packed ready for carrying to the coast, standing in a pile on the Plateau, and there are thirty-four dead men keeping watch over it.'

'Is it as infectious as that?'

'When it first shows itself, infectious is not the word. It is nothing but a plague. Not one of those fellows can have escaped.'

Jack Meredith sat forward and rubbed his two hands pensively over his knees.

'So,' he said, 'only you and I and Joseph know where the Simiacine Plateau is.'

'That is so,' answered Oscard.

'And Joseph won't go back?'

'Not if you were to give him that ninety thousand pounds' worth of stuff.'

'And you will not go back?'

'Not for nine hundred thousand pounds. There is a curse on that place.'

'I believe there is,' said Meredith.

And such was the end of the great Simiacine Scheme—the wonder of a few seasons. Some day, when the Great Sahara is turned into an inland sea, when steamers shall ply where sand now flies before the desert wind, the Plateau may be found again. Some day, when Africa is cut from east to west by a railway line, some adventurous soul will scale the height of one of many mountains, one that seems no different from the rest and yet is held in awe by the phantom-haunted denizens of the gloomy forest, and there he will find a pyramid of wooden cases surrounded by bleached and scattered bones where vultures have fed.

In the meantime the precious drug will grow scarcer day by day, and the human race will be poorer by the loss of one of those half-matured discoveries which have more than once in the world's history been on the point of raising the animal called man to a higher, stronger, finer development of brain and muscle than we can conceive of under existing circumstances. Who can tell? Perhaps the strange solitary bush may be found growing elsewhere—in some other continent across the ocean. The ways of Nature are past comprehension, and no man can say who sows the seed that crops up in strange places. The wind bloweth where it listeth, and none can tell what germs it bears. It seems hardly credible that the Plateau, no bigger than a cricket field, far away in the waste land of Central Africa, can be the only spot on this planet where the magic leaf grows in sufficient profusion to supply suffering humanity with an alleviating drug, unrivalled—a strength-giving herb, unapproached in power. But as yet no other Simiacine has been found and the Plateau is lost.

And the end of it was two men who had gone to look for it two years before—young and hearty—returning from the search successful beyond their highest hopes, with a shadow in their eyes and grey upon their heads.

They sat for nearly two hours in that room in the quiet house in Russell Square, where the cabs do not pass; and their conversation was of money. They sat until they had closed the Simiacine account, never to be reopened. They discussed the question of renouncement, and after due consideration concluded that the gain was rightly theirs seeing that the risk had all been theirs. Slaves and slave-owner had both taken their cause to a Higher Court, where the defendant has no worry and the plaintiff is at rest. They were beyond the reach of money—beyond the glitter of gold—far from the cry of anguish. A fortune was set aside for Marie Durnovo, to be held in trust for the children of the man who had found the Simiacine Plateau; another was apportioned to Joseph.

'Seventy-seven thousand one hundred and four pounds for you,' said Jack Meredith at length, laying aside his pen, 'seventy-seven thousand one hundred and four pounds for me.'

'And,' he added after a little pause, 'it was not worth it.'

Guy Oscard smoked his pipe and shook his head.

'Now,' said Jack Meredith, 'I must go. I must be out of London by to-morrow morning. I shall go abroad—America or somewhere.'

He rose as he spoke, and Oscard made no attempt to restrain him.

They went out into the passage together. Oscard opened the door and followed his companion to the step.

'I suppose,' said Meredith, 'we shall meet some time—somewhere?'

'Yes.'

They shook hands.

Jack Meredith went down the steps almost reluctantly. At the foot of the short flight he turned and looked up at the strong, peaceful form of his friend.

'What will you do?' he said.

'I shall go back to my big game,' replied Guy Oscard. 'I am best at that. But I shall not go to Africa.'

(*To be continued.*)

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MATTHEW AUSTIN.[1]

BY W. E. NORRIS.

CHAPTER XXI.

BANNOCK LODGE.

TOWARDS the middle of July—which chanced, that year, to be a dull, rainy and oppressive month—Matthew began to be vaguely disquieted about Lilian. She no longer wrote to him with her former regularity; her letters, when they came, were shorter, far less circumstantial, and invariably opened with a sort of irritated apology for her remissness, which she did not ascribe, as she might have done, to stress of engagements, but to lack of any topics worth writing about. 'It is always the same old story over and over again,' she declared; 'you must be as sick of hearing about these things as I am of doing them.'

To her meeting with Leonard Jerome she had made no allusion; and at this omission Matthew was a little surprised, because Leonard himself had made a point of writing to report the circumstance; but possibly that might be one of the incidents which Lilian deemed unworthy of special mention. It was, however, noticeable that from the date of its occurrence she became more and more imperative in her entreaties to her betrothed to come up to London, if only for a day or two. 'I think you *ought* to come, and I think it is hardly fair upon me that you don't,' she had written once, using, as it happened, almost the identical language employed by Leonard Jerome upon the same subject. But the coincidence—which indeed he regarded as a

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coincidence, pure and simple—neither suggested misgivings to Matthew's mind nor shook his resolution. He felt in honour bound to let Lady Sara have a free hand, and this was, in substance, the reply that he made to both his correspondents.

Nevertheless, on this moist, muggy, airless morning, as he stood by his dining-room window, with an open letter in his hand, and stared at the drenched geraniums and begonias and calceolarias, he was asking himself whether, after all, his duty was quite as clear as he had hitherto imagined it to be. Had he not, perhaps, been thinking rather too much about what he owed to the mother and hardly enough about what he owed to the daughter and to himself? He turned once more to the sheet of notepaper which he had already perused more often than was necessary in order to master its contents.

'For the last time,' Lilian wrote, 'will you come and see me? I suppose you must wish to see me, as you always say that you do, and unless you come soon, I can't tell when we shall meet again, or even '—here a few words were very carefully erased. 'At the end of this month,' she went on, 'we are going to stay with some people in Hampshire, and after that there will be visits upon visits until the winter, as far as I can see. If I could have had my way, we should have returned to Wilverton at the end of the season, but what can I do, now that all these invitations have been accepted? You think, no doubt, that you are behaving chivalrously, and, in a way, I dare say you are, but you might remember sometimes that it is a little hard to have to do *all* the fighting.'

Possibly it was a little hard; possibly also—as indeed she seemed almost to hint—the fighting operations which she had to undertake were not directed solely against such feeble opponents as her mother and a family council. Only, in that case, she ought surely to be left to undertake them alone. If she was beginning to repent ever so slightly of her impetuous promises, if there was a shadow of doubt in her mind as to whether she had not made her choice too hastily, it would be ill done on his part to intervene or to bring any sort of pressure to bear upon her. This was Matthew's final conclusion, and he was all the more sure of its being a right conclusion because he would so gladly have decided otherwise.

'She will think,' said he to himself, 'that I don't care enough about her to come to her aid when I am called. So be it! I would a thousand times rather have her think that than lead her into doing what can never be undone, and what she may regret when it is too late.'

It was a relief to put these views, or something equivalent to them, into writing, to close the envelope, stamp it, and despatch it to the post, beyond reach of recall. There are cases in which the real truth—*la vérité vraie*—must not be told: all one can hope for is that a truly sympathetic soul may contrive to read between the lines. There was at least this to be said, Matthew reflected, casting about him somewhat forlornly for stray scraps of consolation, that he had done Lilian no injury. If he had a rival, and was destined to have a supplanter, that happy man would, no doubt, be a rival and supplanter of the right sort. The danger which he had formerly dreaded on her behalf, the danger that she might, through indifference or ignorance, be induced to espouse some aged aristocrat or millionaire, had, he felt sure, been conjured away. And it is one of those melancholy duties which fall to the share of a faithful historian to add that Mr. Bush received an unusually sharp lecture that day. Bush considered such rebukes unmerited and uncalled for, and did not hesitate to say so. He could not, he remarked, control the 'helements.' He likewise expressed a decided opinion to the effect that his master's health and temper, 'sim'lar to plants,' were suffering from abnormal atmospheric conditions, and he made so bold as to strongly advise a change of air.

It might be that Bush was in the right; there was no need to be a physician in order to know that occasional holidays are requisite to keep mind and body in good condition, and Matthew began to think of a few weeks in Switzerland or the Tyrol. Change of air, change of scene, something that would induce a sort of false oblivion, something that would, at all events, help to make the time pass away—that was the prescription which he would have given to anybody else, and why should he not apply it to himself?

The continent of Europe, however, was not fated to be trodden by his wandering feet that year; for while he was still dallying with the idea of a foreign trip—and this half-hearted dalliance occupied his leisure for some little time—there came to him a letter from Leonard Jerome which diverted the current of his plans and wishes into quite another channel.

'My sister, Lady Bannock,' Leonard wrote, 'is awfully anxious to know you, and I am commissioned by her to say that, if you will excuse an unceremonious invitation and come to us in the Highlands about the last week in August, she will feel immensely honoured and flattered and all the rest of it. Do come, like a good chap, and give an old friend the satisfaction of seeing your face once more. You needn't shoot unless you like, but I may tell you that it won't matter a bit if you shoot badly. Bannock can't hit a haystack at fifty yards, and I'm no great shakes, and we should as soon think of asking a crack shot to stay at Bannock Lodge as of publishing our record. So, if you have got a gun and a rifle, bring them with you, and if you haven't, you can be supplied on arrival. All this won't tempt you, I dare say; but I know what will. Lady Sara Murray and her daughter are going to join our small house-party some time between the 20th of August and the 1st of September, and unless I am much mistaken, one of them will be as pleased to see you as I shall be—which is saying a lot.'

Well, this heartily proffered hospitality was very tempting, and acceptance of it seemed to be legitimate; because it had been pretty well understood from the first that Matthew's period of banishment was to be conterminous with the close of the London season. After considering awhile, he replied by a letter of warm thanks and conditional acquiescence, writing at the same time to Lilian, who was now in Hampshire, to tell her of the project and state that he would be guided entirely by her wishes in the matter.

What Lilian would say he was by no means sure. Their correspondence, since his reluctant refusal to respond to her last appeal, had languished perceptibly; she had made no disguise of the fact that she was hurt and disappointed; she had gone so far as to declare that pretty language did not, in her opinion, atone for supineness, and it now seemed quite upon the cards that she might see fit to punish him by declining tardy reparation. But no such unhandsome revenge was, it appeared, contemplated by her. The return post brought Matthew a missive, couched in much more affectionate terms than those which he had received of late, and in it Lilian proclaimed the delight with which she would now look forward to her visit to Bannock Lodge. 'I was rather dreading it,' she avowed, 'because, as you are aware, I am not particularly devoted to your friend Mr. Jerome, and I hardly know Lady Bannock; but this makes all the difference! I shall begin to count the days at once, and when you write to Mr. Jerome, you may tell him from me that I am pleased with him. He evidently understands that his society is hardly an attractive bait enough in itself.'

Thus it came about that, on a windy, showery evening of late summer, the hero of this narrative reached the unpretending shooting-lodge in Ross-shire which was more often tenanted by Lord Bannock's friends than by its owner. Matthew, who had had a long drive from the nearest railway-station and who had been enjoying the keen, invigorating air, the flying shadows of the clouds upon the hillsides, and even the occasional downpours of pelting rain, was glad, when his destination came in sight, to perceive that the building was not of a size to accommodate many guests. He had, in obedience to instructions, brought his gun with him (a rifle he did not possess), but he had by no means decided to use it, nor was he ambitious of making an exhibition of himself in the presence of a large number of spectators.

His hostess proved to be as simple and unpretentious as the establishment over which she was at that time presiding. She came out to the doorstep to welcome him, and, after ascertaining that he was not in the least fatigued by his journey, said:

'You had better come and have some tea with me now; Leonard and the others will be back before long. We are quite a small party, and for the present I have only one lady, Madame d'Aultran, who is out shooting with the men. I doubt whether they are blessing her, but she would go. Leonard tells me that you are not a very enthusiastic sportsman.'

'I can't call myself a sportsman at all,' Matthew answered. 'I don't think I have had a gun in my hand more than twenty times since I was a boy, and as I never so much as saw a grouse upon its native heather, I must not venture to compete with your lady friend.'

'Oh, you will have to shoot,' Lady Bannock returned, laughing good-humouredly; 'there is absolutely no alternative. Even my husband shoots when he is here, much as he hates it. My husband is a hunting-man, and just now he is a yachting-man, *faute de mieux*. He has gone off for a few weeks' cruise, leaving Leonard to do the honours, which is much the best arrangement. Leonard, as I dare say you have discovered, does everything well.'

'Except, perhaps, cycling?'

'Oh, poor fellow, yes. I never heard of anything more pathetic than his being driven to such extremities by his desire to behave dutifully to Uncle Richard, who, between ourselves, is a horrid old man. Still, the accident was not altogether to be deplored, since it was the means of bringing you and Leonard together.'

Lady Bannock was very friendly and chatty across her well-furnished tea-table. Presently, as was inevitable, she alluded to the approaching visit of Lady Sara Murray and her daughter; but she asked no questions, and Matthew's gratitude for her forbearance was enhanced by a suspicion that she felt some curiosity as to the precise state of his relations with her future guests.

'Leonard was very anxious that they should be asked,' she explained, 'and I shall be only too delighted to have them; because I presume they won't bring gun-cases, like Madame d'Aultran. Probably they will be contented to go up on the hill with me and the luncheon sometimes.'

'And I hope I may be allowed to form one of the party on those occasions,' Matthew said.

'Well, I don't know about that; you will have to do what Leonard tells you. I believe he has set his heart upon your bringing down at least one stag, to exhibit as a trophy to Miss Murray.'

'As if there were the remotest chance of my ever being able to hit a stag!'

'You will if you get the chance. Stags are very big animals, and there is always plenty of time to aim. Lord Bannock declares that it is only the good shots that miss, and that they only miss through over-anxiety. He accounts for his own success by saying that the whole thing is such unqualified misery to him that he doesn't care a straw what happens when the critical moment comes. Leonard is much more keen; but then Leonard never does anything by halves.'

Assuredly there was nothing half-hearted about Leonard's welcome of his friend. He appeared, after a time, in his shooting boots and knickerbockers, and greeted the new arrival with almost boisterous effusiveness.

'We should have been home an hour ago,' he said, 'only that awful woman kept us back. She got dead-beat, as I knew she would, and wanted to sit down and take a nip out of somebody's flask at every hundred yards.'

'Can she shoot?' Lady Bannock inquired.

'Oh, yes, she can fire off any number of cartridges. She can't *hit* anything, except by accident. Mercifully, she didn't hit any of us. Well, it's all in the day's work, and there's no harm done. We're only a shooting-party *pour rire*, you know, Austin.'

'Leonard is so good-tempered!' Lady Bannock murmured explanatorily.

Indeed, it was evident that, in the opinion of this fond sister, Leonard possessed every virtue which can adorn a human character. He seemed, at least, to possess in a remarkable degree the virtue of hospitality; for nothing had been neglected to make Matthew comfortable, and when the latter went upstairs to dress for dinner, he found that various trifling predilections of his had been remembered and provided for. It is in this way, much more frequently than by substantial benefits conferred or sacrifices submitted to, that affection is won.

However, it was a genuine and substantial kindness to have asked a duffer to a Highland shooting-lodge at all, and so our hero felt, after he had descended to the low-pitched drawing-room and had been introduced to the four men who were his fellow-guests. These stalwart, sunburnt gentlemen did not convey to him the impression of being sportsmen *pour rire*, and would probably have been as much surprised as displeased to hear themselves described in such terms. They were polite, but he fancied that they scrutinised him with a certain apprehension, and he gathered from a few muttered remarks which he overheard that their patience had been sorely tried that day.

'Well, they needn't be alarmed,' he thought. 'Nothing shall persuade me to spoil their sport; and if the lady wants to go out to-morrow, I will go with her. Then, perhaps, they will recognise that I am a blessing in disguise.'

But the Vicomtesse d'Aultran, who presently entered, and whose brocade and diamonds looked a little out of keeping with her close-cropped, artificially curled blonde hair, her pince-nez, and her would-be mannish carriage, lost no time in proclaiming to all and sundry whom it might concern that she had had enough of such sport as was obtainable in her present quarters.

'This shooting over dogs is no fun at all,' she asserted. 'Why do you not have your birds driven, as they do in Yorkshire, where I was staying with Lord Towers last year? That was worth the trouble of going out for; but here—I am sure you will pardon me for saying so, dear Lady Bannock—I have been thinking all day what a wise man Lord Bannock is to *ficher le camp!* Tomorrow I stay in bed until midday and read Pierre Loti's last novel—*c'est positif!*'

She spoke English with ease and fluency. She was a plain-featured little woman, but her self-satisfaction was evidently undisturbed by any inkling of her physical disadvantages or any suspicion of the relief with which her statement was listened to by her audience. Her husband—so Leonard whispered to Matthew—was attached to the Belgian Legation, and she was considered to be capital company. It cannot, however, be said that Matthew, who found himself placed beside her at the dinner-table, felt disposed to subscribe to the general verdict in that respect.

'I am enchanted to have met you,' she was kind enough to tell him, after champagne had started a sufficient flow of general conversation to admit of asides; 'I was dying to see the *fiancé* for whose sake the beautiful Miss Murray is said to have spurned more than one coronet.'

'I trust,' said Matthew, 'that I come up to your expectations.'

'Oh, my expectations are of little consequence; the important affair is that you should satisfy Miss Murray's expectations after a period of separation so full of events and experiences for her. Do you not feel nervous?'

'I doubt whether I should confess it if I did,' Matthew replied. 'Are you thinking of making a long stay in Scotland?'

But Madame d'Aultran was not to be diverted from her subject. 'That depends,' said she. 'Lady Bannock is charming; but she comes here to rest after the fatigues of the season, and she is quite happy to do nothing all day long. That is very well for persons of a certain age, but it is not my idea. I am one of those who demand perpetual amusement. Possibly you may provide me with some—you and your lovely *fiancée*—for I adore a romance.'

She proceeded, with a frankness which he could not sufficiently admire, to state her reasons for hoping that this particular romance might not be unaccompanied by dramatic episodes. She had watched Miss Murray in London, she said, and was of opinion that volcanic fires lurked beneath that calm surface.

'You may be her master,' the outspoken lady concluded, 'but it is certain that, if you are, you are not *le premier venu.* And have you no fear at all of any of these gentlemen? It seems to me that, under the circumstances, a little fear would not be out of place. However, we shall see.'

Before leaving the room, she gave Matthew a cigarette out of her silver case, and, placing another between her own lips, bent over one of the candles to light it.

'I shall never become accustomed to your barbarous practice of dismissing us as soon as dinner is over,' she remarked.

But since nobody manifested the slightest desire to depart from established rules for her benefit, she had to follow her hostess; after which the talk was of grouse and nothing else until bedtime.

It was at a comparatively early hour that the weary sportsmen, who naturally wished to keep their eyes clear, retired; and Matthew, not feeling sleepy, had ensconced himself in an armchair, with a book, before his bedroom fire when a rap at the door was followed by the entrance of Leonard Jerome. Leonard had ostensibly come to insist upon it that his friend should not shirk the duties of the morrow, and he explained that the party would be divided, 'so that you and I can go with old Standish, who is the best-natured fellow in the world and won't criticise either of us.' But the true purport of this nocturnal visit became apparent to a close observer when he inquired carelessly:

'By the way, what was that horrid little Belgian woman saying to you about Miss Murray at dinner? I could see by her face that she was talking about Miss Murray.'

'Nothing libellous,' answered Matthew, laughing; 'she only thought it kind to warn me that there might be rocks and shoals ahead. I suppose I did not strike her as presenting the appearance of a lover who could afford to risk rivalry with younger and more fascinating men.'

'Impudent little wretch!' exclaimed Leonard; 'I hope you snubbed her as she deserved. She wouldn't be here, I can assure you, if she hadn't invited herself. She didn't—er—caution you against anybody in particular, then?'

'She mentioned nobody in particular. Is there anybody in particular whom she might have mentioned?'

'To the best of my belief, not a soul,' answered Leonard, with a certain eagerness. 'It's an open secret that Miss Murray has refused some good offers; but of course you know that. And I do hope, old man, that you'll lose no time now in getting everything settled. As far as I can understand, Lady Sara won't be obdurate, and—and surely this ordeal has lasted long enough!'

'Perhaps it has,' Matthew replied slowly. 'Anyhow, you have given me an opportunity which might have been deferred indefinitely, but for you, and no friend could have done more.'

'I have tried to behave like your friend and—and hers,' the other declared; 'I suppose, as you say, nobody could do more for you than to bring you together.'

He fidgeted about the room for a few minutes, and then remarked: 'Well, I'm off to bed, and you had better follow my example. You'll be ready enough to turn in by this time to-morrow night, I expect.'

CHAPTER XXII.

MATTHEW'S TRIUMPH.

'So, after all, you are not going to stay at home and pretend you don't know how to shoot, Mr. Austin,' Lady Bannock remarked, glancing at Matthew's knickerbocker breeches, when he came down to breakfast the next morning.

'There's no pretence about the matter, I assure you,' he answered; 'but I have been ordered to go out, and all I hope for is that I may be ordered home again early in the day. If your brother would only believe me, it is no sort of pleasure to me to spoil other people's sport.'

'And if you would only believe me, you *can't* spoil anybody's sport at this game,' Leonard declared. 'You aren't being asked to take part in a swagger battue, and you may miss every single bird that rises to you with a perfectly clear conscience. Not that you are a bit more likely to miss than I am.'

But not long after the tyro, accompanied by his friend and Colonel Standish, a wiry little man with a brown face and grizzled moustache, had set forth and had breasted one of the hills by which the house was surrounded, he began to suspect, for his comfort, that not too many chances of exhibiting his incapacity would be accorded to him. To right and left of him his companions got a shot apiece and killed their respective birds neatly; soon afterwards the same thing occurred again, with a similar result, and Matthew was inwardly blessing them for their foresight and consideration in having placed him in the middle when a covey of six rose suddenly directly in front of him. This time he was bound to fire; so he selected his bird and was even more astonished than relieved to see it stop and fall. Nobody said a word, which caused him some momentary disappointment; but the fact was that the other two men were far too intent upon their work to waste time in paying him compliments. One of them might be what he had proclaimed himself, a bad shot (the other had not indulged in unnecessary self-depreciation), but certainly there was very little bad shooting that morning. Regard for truth compels Mr. Austin's biographer to state that what little there was was provided by the hero of this narrative; still he might have done a great deal worse, and perhaps it was rather wonderful that, with his total lack of practice, he did so well.

'I knew you were an old humbug,' Leonard said, when at length a halt was called; 'at this rate, you'll be taking the shine out of us all next week.'

'Two brace and a half, I believe,' answered Matthew modestly; 'but I am afraid it ought to have been four brace.'

'Oh, I don't know; you seemed to me to take every chance you got, except perhaps one. Upon my word, we're in luck to-day, though! I never expected to see so many birds, did you, Standish?'

Colonel Standish smiled and said: 'No, by Jove, I didn't! If those other fellows want to beat us, they'll have to look sharp.'

But he was evidently anxious to get on; and so, for the matter of that, was Matthew, who was already bitten with the sport-fever and was no longer in terror of committing some dire solecism. The task set before him was, after all, straightforward enough, and reminiscences of his boyhood enabled him to avoid glaring misbehaviour. Then, too, the air was exhilarating, the exercise was invigorating, it was a joy to watch the dogs working, and, happily, when he missed, he missed. If it be cruel—and there is not much use in denying that it is cruel—to slay wild birds and beasts, the guilt involved in so doing is at least no greater than that of consenting to the daily slaughter of sheep and oxen. But it is not pleasant to cause torture through clumsiness; and that is why many a man ought never to raise a gun to his shoulder. Matthew, who, it must be owned, had had some reason to suspect himself of being such a man, was proportionately thankful when he was able to sit down upon the heather and partake of a well-earned luncheon without cause for self-reproach, save that his contribution to the bag might have been larger.

'Oh, you'll do,' Colonel Standish interrupted his apologies by saying good-naturedly; 'all you want is to get accustomed to the thing. I'd a good deal rather go out with our friend here than with Bannock, eh, Jerome?'

'Rather!' answered Leonard heartily. 'As far as that goes, I haven't a doubt that Austin would make me look small most days of the week. I happen to be rather on the spot to-day, for some reason or other.'

The fact is that both of these gentlemen were pretty well pleased with themselves, and were consequently disposed to be pleased with everybody and everything else. That they were somewhat less successful after luncheon than they had been earlier in the day was due in part to the fact that they did not meet with quite an equal measure of luck and partly to the heat of the sun, which made one of them lazy. Leonard Jerome, indeed, as Matthew had often had occasion to notice, was not a man who cared to stick to anything very long, and before four o'clock he was quite willing to leave Colonel Standish with the keeper.

'I'm sure you must have had more than enough of this, old chap,' he said to his other guest, 'and I dare say you'd like to stroll back and see what letters have come for you.'

No letters, it subsequently appeared, had arrived for Mr. Austin; but Lady Bannock, who was discovered drinking tea placidly on the lawn, beneath the shade of a gigantic Japanese umbrella, informed him, after hearing of his prowess and offering her congratulations, that she had received one in the contents of which she presumed that he would be interested.

'The Murrays will be here to-morrow afternoon,' she said. 'I shall be almost as delighted as you will be to see them, for I really don't feel equal to undertaking Madame d'Aultran single-handed. What do you think she has just been doing, Leonard?'

'Who?—Madame d'Aultran?' asked Leonard, whose colour had faded on a sudden, and who did not seem to be quite himself. 'Oh, I don't know; something funny, no doubt.'

'Well, it was funny to look at, but I am not sure that she found it as good fun as she had expected. She said she must positively be amused, and, as my company doesn't amuse her, nothing would do but that she must ride the Shetland pony. I warned her that he bucked and kicked; but she declared she could sit anything; so we had him out and managed to get a side-saddle on his back, and Madame d'Aultran jumped into the saddle. Up went his heels, of course, and in about two seconds she was sent flying. I believe she is upstairs now, repairing damages; but the sound of your voices is sure to draw her out again.'

'Then let us on no account speak above a whisper!' exclaimed Matthew.

But that precautionary measure was taken too late, and it fell to his lot to entertain the vivacious little Belgian lady until the shooting-party reappeared, Leonard having basely fled and Lady Bannock presently begging to be excused, on the plea that she had letters to write. Madame d'Aultran had bruised her knees and scratched her hands; but she confided to Matthew that such trifling inconveniences were a small price to pay for a few moments of excitement. She catechised him as to his first impressions of grouse-shooting, and was good enough to say that she would perhaps go out with him on the ensuing day.

'Before evening, *grâce à Dieu!*' she added, 'we shall have your *fiancée* here, and then, I hope, there will be fun.'

Neither then nor later was she invited to explain herself; though she evidently wished to be questioned, and seized every opportunity that offered to revert to the subject. Matthew was not the man to discuss his *fiancée* with anybody, and if this vulgar and irrepressible woman succeeded in lowering his spirits, he was properly ashamed of having allowed her to do so.

But he did not sleep, that night, as well as he ought to have done after such a fine dose of fresh air and exercise; nor, alas! could he contrive to bring down a single grouse on the morrow. Madame d'Aultran, mercifully, had thought better of her fell intention and was not yet out of bed when he set forth with his companions of the previous day; yet, after a time, he almost wished that the Vicomtesse had joined the party. Her presence, he thought, would at least have been some excuse for the amazing lack of dexterity with which the keeper's lengthening face mutely reproached him. However, Leonard and Colonel Standish were as good-natured as possible, and would not hear of letting him beat a retreat.

'You shall be released in plenty of time,' the former assured him, laughing; 'I give you my word that it isn't possible for any visitors, travelling by road or rail, to reach the house before four o'clock.'

Colonel Standish was even more explicit. 'Don't worry yourself,' the weather-beaten little soldier took occasion to say encouragingly to Matthew, while offering him a drain out of his flask; 'no man can shoot when he's worried. *I* know well enough what's the matter; bless you! I've been through it all myself ages ago. Yet here I am still a bachelor at eight-and-forty, you see, and I might be a precious sight worse off! This locket,' continued the Colonel, tapping his watch-chain, 'contains a scrap of her hair; she is now a Mrs. Something Thomson and has I forget how many children. It wasn't for Thomson that she threw me over, though; there was another fellow before him, and my belief is that all women are tarred with pretty much the same brush. I don't say this to put you off, you know; only I mean—it doesn't signify quite as much as you think it does.'

He concluded with a friendly tap upon the younger man's shoulder and a laugh which sounded oddly pathetic and compassionate.

Did the kindly little man intend to convey a note of warning? It might be so; for he mixed a good deal in fashionable society, and doubtless he had heard things. Well, the warning was not required. Matthew was prepared, and had been prepared all along, for any contingency that might arise: moreover, he had the consolation of knowing that in a very few hours he would be out of suspense. Nevertheless, he could by no means induce his hand and eye to work together, and eventually—to the keeper's undisguised relief—he gave up trying.

The afternoon was not very far advanced when he quitted the sportsmen and wandered slowly along the hillside towards Bannock Lodge. He was troubled, on his way, by sundry absurd doubts and misgivings. Would Lilian wish him to return in advance of the other men? Might she not prefer that their meeting should take place just before dinner? How would he meet her?—and in what manner would she expect him to greet her, if—as would probably be the case—her mother and Lady Bannock and Madame d'Aultran were present, as spectators of the scene?

But all these questions were delightfully answered and all these foolish doubts set at rest by the sudden apparition of a slight figure in a tweed dress and jacket and a waistcoat of the most approved pattern. Down dropped Matthew's gun upon the heather; he stretched out his arms involuntarily, and the next moment Lilian's head was upon his shoulder.

'They didn't want me to come out and meet you,' she said, after the interchange of certain more or less inarticulate speeches which there is no need to place on record, 'but I hoped that perhaps you would be walking back alone, and I was determined not to be confronted with you before them all. Well, are you glad to see me again, Mat? And, now that you do see me, what do you think of me? Have I improved or deteriorated?'

He was able to answer the first question in the affirmative without hesitation; as for the others, it was necessary to wait a little longer before making any replies which could be pronounced at once truthful and satisfactory. But so far as mere outward appearance went, she had certainly improved, and for the rest, she did not allow him much time to speak. She was voluble, she was excited, she had a hundred things to tell him and a hundred more to ask him about; there was no trace in her manner of that constraint which had at one time been painfully apparent in her correspondence. Every now and again she interrupted herself to say how thankful she was to be near him once more.

'It is a clear case of Providential interference!' she declared, 'and if we only had a patron-saint apiece—as of course we ought to have—it would be our duty to supply them with any number of the best wax candles.'

'I don't know whether Jerome would care about wax candles,' remarked Matthew, 'but he has undoubtedly shown himself our patron on the present occasion. Perhaps he could hardly be described as a saint, though.'

'He?—oh, no, he's a distinct sinner. There was a St. Jerome once upon a time, wasn't there? He must have been very unlike his modern namesake. Of course you have a lot of other stupid sort of men staying in the house.'

'Surely you don't class Leonard Jerome among the stupid sort of men!'

'Oh, well; it doesn't matter whether he is stupid or clever, for he will be out shooting all day long, I hope and trust. *You* won't want to shoot every day, will you? I suppose it will be acknowledged that we are privileged persons and that we may go off by ourselves—you and I.'

'Is that at all likely to be acknowledged?' Matthew asked.

'It *must* be,' answered the girl decisively; 'Mamma admits now that the engagement must be formally announced. Don't you understand that she couldn't have come here unless she had made up her mind to the inevitable?'

'She is still opposed to it, then.'

'I don't know. I think she is still rather surprised at my obstinacy; but she is as fond of you as ever, and at the bottom of her heart she is longing to see you again and tell you all about her rheumatism. Oh, Mat, if you could but realise what a relief it is to have you on the spot! Do you know that, all this time, you have been behaving very much as if you didn't really want to marry me at all?'

The least he could do was to demonstrate that there was no shadow of foundation for that impression; and in truth the task was not a difficult one, although it proved somewhat protracted. And on his side, how could he doubt any longer that Lilian's love for him was genuine and permanent? It had stood the test of absence, it had withstood every temptation by which its stability could have been assailed, and although, like Lady Sara, he might—and indeed did—marvel at his own triumph, he was bound to accept, with due humility and gratitude, the fact that he had triumphed.

It was with humility, if not precisely with gratitude, that Lady Sara herself accepted that indisputable fact. She told him so before he had been five minutes in her bedroom, whither he was summoned immediately upon his return to the house, and long before he had concluded the medical examination which he was requested to institute. 'I believe I have done all that any mother could do,' she said—as though she owed Matthew some apology for her failure—'but Lilian is too self-willed for me. I can only let her have her own way now, and trust that she may not live to repent.'

'You do not flatter me,' Matthew remarked, smiling.

'Oh, it isn't you; you are as good as gold, and I don't know why a reasonable woman shouldn't be perfectly happy with you. But Lilian isn't reasonable. I can't understand her, and I suppose I shall never feel quite easy about her to my dying day. In many ways she reminds me of my poor sister, about whom you have heard, of course. However, we will hope for the best.'

'It seems to me that we are entitled to do that,' said Matthew. 'At any rate, if she is not happy with me, the fault shall not be mine. You have been very good to me, both of you.'

'You have been very good to us,' Lady Sara returned. 'It stands to reason that I should have preferred a different sort of alliance; but in all truth and sincerity there is no man in England whom I should have preferred to you, personally.'

It was, therefore, as a formally engaged man that Matthew went downstairs shortly before the dinner-hour. He found his betrothed in the drawing-room with Leonard Jerome, who at once stepped forward to shake him by the hand and wish him joy. Lady Bannock was told; everybody in the house was told; and it must be confessed that everybody looked a little surprised.

'Small blame to them!' the bridegroom-elect reflected. 'It *is* a surprising thing, and I myself am quite as much surprised at it as they can be.'

He could have wished, however, that Leonard had been less noisily congratulatory, and that, having proclaimed his friend's good fortune, he would have consented to let the subject drop. Something of this sort Matthew whispered to Lilian, who shrugged her bare shoulders and returned:

'Do you object? *I* don't. I suppose Mr. Jerome wants to make us feel uncomfortable; but he hasn't succeeded with me, and I hope you won't let him imagine that he has succeeded with you. As far as I am concerned, the whole world is welcome to know that I am going to marry the best man in the world.'

Upon the whole, that was a very happy evening for Matthew. It certainly was not spoilt for him by sundry ironical utterances of Madame d'Aultran's, nor did he so very much mind Leonard's pleasantries, although some of them struck him as being in rather bad taste. Yet, for some reason which eluded his mental grasp, there was a perplexing sense of unreality about it all. The oddest thing was that, when he bade Lady Sara good-night, she gripped his hand nervously, and he saw, to his astonishment, that there were tears in her eyes.

'I wish we had not come here!' she exclaimed, on a sudden. 'But I think Lilian is in earnest—oh, I am sure she *must* be in earnest! And you quite understand—don't you?—that the whole thing has been her doing. I have no hold over her nowadays—none whatsoever!'

Now, it was simply impossible to doubt that Lilian was in earnest. Matthew assured himself of that before he went to sleep, remembering also that women in Lady Sara's state of health are likely enough to become hysterical and fanciful under the influence of emotion. 'Perhaps I may not have been told quite everything that happened when they were in London,' was his final conclusion. 'Well, I don't want to be told everything; nobody but an arrant fool does. It is sufficient for me to know that she loves me still.'

CHAPTER XXIII.

FRESH LAURELS.

THE modern Anglican clerics who (without previous training or experience or any superabundance of mother-wit to guide them in their wielding of a dangerous weapon) have sought to revive auricular confession must, one would think, be led to form some queer conceptions respecting the depravity of human nature. Indeed, it is noticeable that this is what generally happens to them—with resultant blunders of a serio-comic kind. Upon the whole it seems most prudent to rest satisfied with the exhaustive knowledge which we all possess of the thoughts and deeds of one human being (a most sympathetic and pardonable creature he or she always is), and to avoid prying too closely into those of our neighbours.

'I tell my husband everything,' a lady once declared to the insignificant individual who had the honour to take her in to dinner. Whereupon he ejaculated, before he could stop himself, 'Then thank God I am not your husband!'

It was partly because Matthew Austin was a gentleman and partly because he was no fool that he studiously abstained from questioning his betrothed as to every episode which had occurred during the period of their separation. There had been something—that much he could see in the course of twenty-four hours—but he could not quite make out whether she wished to tell him about it or not, and, in any case, he was resolved to manifest no curiosity. What if she had hesitated for a moment?—what if she had met with somebody whom she might, under different circumstances, have cared for sufficiently to marry? Was it not precisely for that purpose that he had wished her to pass through a London season? And was not her fidelity to him infinitely more convincing and satisfactory now that it had been fairly tried?

He would indeed have been sceptical and exacting if he had not been convinced of her fidelity. During their long, solitary rambles, while the men were on the hill and the ladies more or less occupied indoors, she gave him clearly to understand that neither in London nor elsewhere had she met with his equal. She was affectionate; she was touchingly submissive; she asseverated, until he was ashamed of saying any more about it, that the monotonous existence of a country doctor's wife had no terrors for her; her one anxiety seemed to be to please him, and she implored him again and again to point out her faults to her, so that she might try to correct them. Yet, for all that, there had been something: perhaps there still was something. Every now and again she let fall an obscure hint, but, meeting with no encouragement, reverted to other topics.

'Since you are so very eager to be convicted of sin,' Matthew said to her laughingly, one afternoon, 'I will mention a small matter in which I should like to see you change, and that is in your behaviour to poor Jerome. I know you have never liked him; but is it necessary to treat him with such persistent incivility?'

'Am I uncivil to him?' asked the girl indifferently.

'Well, I think you are, and I think he feels it. After all, we are considerably indebted to him—you and I—and it seems rather ungrateful and ungracious to take every opportunity of impressing upon him that you prefer his room to his company.'

'I will endeavour to be grateful and gracious, then. How am I to begin? Shall I offer to join the guns, like that horrible little Belgian woman who is always making eyes at you?'

'No, you might stop short of that; but perhaps it would have been kinder to go out with Lady Bannock and the luncheon to-day when he asked you. He was evidently disappointed.'

'Poor fellow! And poor you, too!—for I suppose I disappointed you into the bargain with my selfishness. Of course you must want to shoot; what else are you here for?'

Matthew assured her, with absolute sincerity, that that temptation would never have drawn him to the Highlands; but she shook her head.

'I don't believe a word of it!' she returned; 'you can't possibly prefer wandering about all day long with me to shooting grouse. It would be against nature—against masculine nature, anyhow. No; we shall have the evenings together, and sometimes, perhaps, a bit of the afternoons, and always the middle of the day; for no luncheon-basket shall be complete without me henceforth. That ought to be enough; and so it is. I shall have to put up with a smaller share of your company than that after we are married, I dare say.'

She did not seem to be at all offended; but he was not altogether successful in persuading her that by consenting to take his gun out of its case once more he was showing himself as unselfish as she was. For the rest, he really thought that they ought to display a little more consideration for their host and hostess. He had an uncomfortable feeling that he was making rather too much of a convenience of them both.

Lady Bannock, it may be presumed, cared very little how her guests might see fit to divert themselves, so long as they left her in peace; but Leonard looked decidedly gratified when he was informed, the next morning, that Matthew would like to be allowed one more chance of missing easy shots, and that Miss Murray proposed to accompany the servants and the provisions to the appointed halting-place at midday. In order that the two parties might forgather at a given place and hour, he at once cancelled certain arrangements which he had made, and probably Colonel Standish was alone in deploring the substitution of a sort of picnic for a hard day's sport. As for Matthew, he enjoyed the picnic all the more because, during the two hours or so which preceded it, he had been shooting very fairly well and had been deservedly complimented. Modest though he was, he was not sorry to be able to give a good account of himself to the ladies.

'It seems,' observed Madame d'Aultran, who had decided to grace the occasion with her presence, 'that one can bring a few grouse down when one likes. You have eclipsed Mr. Jerome to-day—eh?'

It had been no very hard matter to eclipse Mr. Jerome, who complained of a headache, and who begged to be excused shortly after parting company with his sister and her friends. Matthew would willingly have walked home with the deserter, but was restrained both by the protests of Colonel Standish and by an intimation that Leonard did not want him. He, therefore, remained out until the dinner-hour was not far distant, acquitting himself so creditably that even the keeper bestowed a grim smile upon him, while his companion said:

'You would make a fine shot, Mr. Austin, if you cared to practise, and, by my way of thinking, it's worth everybody's while to cultivate his natural abilities. There are times, you know, when a man gets down on his luck; but if there is any form of outdoor exercise at which he is tolerably good, he knows where to look for consolation.'

'I hope I shall always have my work,' Matthew answered, 'and when I find that discouraging—as of course doctors often do—I shall have the joys of the domestic hearth to turn to.'

'H'm!' grunted the Colonel; 'the joys of shooting are a certainty; the joys of the domestic hearth ain't. Take my word for it, there's no certainty about anything where women are concerned.'

As if to back up this *ex parte* assertion, Madame d'Aultran, who was seated beside Matthew at dinner that evening, must needs remark maliciously:

'You Englishmen have droll ways of treating your wives and daughters, not to speak of your *fiancées*. One would suppose that you thought women were to be trusted.'

'Perhaps we do think that Englishwomen are to be trusted, and perhaps we are right,' said Matthew.

Madame d'Aultran laughed stridently. 'And your Divorce Court, which is always busy?' she returned. '*Enfin!*—it is better to use one's eyes too soon than too late. If I were in your place, for example, I should take the liberty to ask Miss Murray what was the interesting subject which she and our handsome friend Mr. Jerome were discussing this afternoon. It must have been very interesting, since they had to walk about together for more than two hours before they reached the end of it—if indeed they reached the end of it then.'

Matthew was not much more likely to put the suggested question than he was to be alarmed by Madame d'Aultran's impertinent warning; but later in the evening Lilian volunteered the information for which she had not been asked.

'I have made friends with Mr. Jerome,' she said. 'We had a long walk this afternoon, and we talked about you the whole time.'

'That must have become a little monotonous, didn't it?' said Matthew, laughing.

'No,' answered Lilian, with a slight smile; 'there were a good many things to be said. Plans to be formed for your amusement, too, lest you should find life in the Highlands a little monotonous. By the way, do you know that you are to go out for your first stalk to-morrow?'

'I was not aware of it, and I can assure you that I don't intend to do anything of the sort.'

'Oh, you will have to obey orders; all the arrangements have been made. Besides which, I want the antlers to decorate our entrance-hall at Wilverton. Can't you see Mrs. Jennings examining the head through her glasses and inquiring where we bought it? "Oh, that is one of the stags that my husband shot in Scotland last summer," I shall say, in an off-hand way. "He is rather fond of shooting when he has nothing better to do."'

'But, my dear child, it is in the last degree improbable that I shall kill a stag, even if I am given the chance; and I have heard that stalkers are not particularly fond of giving beginners a chance.'

'Well, you will have to try, at all events, and Donald or Angus, or whatever his name may be, will certainly be forbidden to play tricks with you. Here comes Mr. Jerome to tell you all about it.'

Leonard seemed to be really anxious that his friend should not quit Bannock Lodge without having had at least one day's experience of deer-stalking, and as everything appeared to have been settled, Matthew could hardly refuse his assent to a scheme which, to tell the truth, was not wholly distasteful to him. 'Madame d'Aultran will have no words to express her sense of my imprudence to-morrow evening,' he thought, with some inward amusement.

Assuredly, no misgivings of the nature alluded to by Madame d'Aultran disturbed his mind when he seated himself, early the next morning, in the dog-cart which was waiting for him at the door and was driven off towards the glen where he was to put himself in the hands of his guide. He had passed the age of irrational jealousy; besides which, he happened to know for a fact that Lilian was somewhat irrationally prejudiced against Leonard Jerome. If they had now composed their differences, so much the better: disloyalty was the last thing of which he could suspect either of them. On the other hand, he was beset by very serious misgivings as to his own ability to accomplish the task that lay before him that day, and the first thing that he said to Alick, the stalwart, brown-bearded individual who wished him good morning on his arrival at the trysting-place, was: 'Now, I want you to understand that I know nothing about this business—absolutely nothing at all! I will try to do what you tell me; more than that you mustn't expect.'

'Indeed, sir, it is not every gentleman that will do so much,' answered the other, with a quiet smile.

In spite, however, of this promising beginning, Matthew's first act was one of insubordination; for he resolutely declined to mount the rough little pony which one of the attendant gillies was leading. He thought it would be a good deal less tiring to scale the hillside on foot than to perch himself on that very uncomfortable-looking deer-saddle, and Alick did not insist. Only, to tell the truth, he had not bargained for quite so long or quite so precipitous a walk. The time for adopting precautions evidently had not yet come; the deer, he gathered—for he did not like to ask too many questions, and not much information was vouchsafed to him—were still miles away; progress, measured by the distance covered, seemed to be slow; yet it was all he could do to keep pace with the easy strides of the stalker and the gillie, who never turned a hair, and who, in truth, were taking things very easy, out of mercy to the uninitiated stranger. A sudden heavy shower which drenched Matthew to the skin scarcely added to his discomfort; a man in a Turkish bath has no objection to cold water. But all this (as, indeed, he had been previously warned) was nothing. There are acute miseries connected with deer-stalking; but a preliminary stroll uphill must not be accounted one of them. Even if he had thought of uttering a complaint, or of asking, as forlorn passengers are wont to ask the stewards of cross-Channel boats, whether this sort of thing was likely to last much longer, he could not have found the breath to do it. Onward and upward he plodded, in patient silence, wondering sadly whether, when the decisive moment came, he would be able so much as to attempt aiming with such a shaking hand and clouded eye.

He had no need to feel anxious on that score; for many weary hours had to elapse before the approach of the decisive moment, and ample time to grow cool in person and in nerves was reserved for him. The reconnoitring process, when at length a post of vantage had been reached; the blurred vision of a remote herd at which he was bidden to gaze through the telescope; the consultation between Alick and the gillie; the interminable, circuitous tramp up hill and down dale; and then—ah! then—the excruciating crawl, first on his hands and knees, and afterwards on the flat of his stomach, through a great dismal swamp—these were experiences which, when Matthew subsequently looked back upon them, appeared to him to have spread themselves over a respectable slice of his lifetime.

However, by sedulously watching and imitating his pioneer, he at least avoided doing anything wrong, and his relief was greater than his excitement when at last Alick stealthily beckoned to him to draw near. Yet it must be confessed that it brought his heart into his mouth to discern six fine stags lying down on a grassy space beneath him and not a hundred yards off. He drew in his breath and held out his hand for the rifle. But Alick, to his surprise and disappointment, made a negative sign and began a noiseless retrograde movement. There would be no chance of a shot—so he was presently given to understand—until the deer got up and began to feed again; it was not yet one o'clock—Good heavens! not yet one o'clock!—and a further delay of an hour and a half, or perhaps two hours, must be submitted to.

That long wait was certainly the worst part of the entire ordeal. Little comfort was to be got out of a few saturated sandwiches and a short pull of raw whisky; smoking was impossible, and although Alick and the gillie exchanged some whispered remarks, Matthew did not dare to join in their conversation. Had he been a keen sportsman, he would doubtless have been miserable enough; but he was not particularly keen, and his misery was intensified by the conviction that all this tremendous outlay of skill, labour and perseverance would prove to have been utterly wasted. He was sorry for himself and sorry for Lilian, but chiefly he was sorry for poor Alick, whom he could never venture to look in the face again after the failure which he felt to be a foregone conclusion. All the greater, therefore, was the joy of ultimate success. 'I can't in the least tell you how it happened,' he said, giving as circumstantial an account of himself as he could to Lilian that evening; 'all I know is that it was an easy broadside shot and that I was so paralysed by terror of missing that I obeyed instructions quite mechanically. He went like the wind for about eighty yards and then dropped, stone-dead. Alick thinks I might have got another, but he comforts me by saying that I was right not to fire unless I was pretty sure. Pretty sure indeed! Well, at any rate, I am pretty sure of one thing now, and that is that deer-stalking is worth the trouble. Only it is too exciting for a sober old country doctor like me, and I am not going out again. At least, not until next time.'

As matters fell out, no 'next time' ever came, and that fine head remains Matthew Austin's unique trophy of the kind. But as long as he lives he is likely to preserve in all its freshness the recollection of his one day's stalking—of the moment when Alick handed him the rifle, silently indicating the stag at which he was to aim, of the unspeakable satisfaction with which he heard the thud of the bullet as it struck, of the well-earned pipe afterwards, and of the long triumphant march home through sweeping showers and flying gleams of sunshine. Upon certain other incidents of his visit to Bannock Lodge he has not cared to dwell with equal frequency, and these have consequently lost clearness of outline in his memory. Happily for us all, we are so constituted that we remember the good days of the past, while we begin to forget pain from the moment when it ceases to hurt us.

CHAPTER XXIV.

USQUE RECURRET.

LILIAN spoke the truth (and it must be said for her that she almost invariably did speak the truth) in telling Matthew that he had been the chief subject of conversation between her and Leonard Jerome during that protracted colloquy which had excited the curiosity of Madame d'Aultran. But the subject had not been of her choosing, nor had she greatly enjoyed hearing her future husband's praises sung at such inordinate length and in a tone which seemed to imply that she might not be fully alive to the extent of her good fortune. She would have talked about something else, only that that had appeared quite the safest thing to talk about, and that, for various reasons, some of which were not very clearly defined, the question of safety had to be taken into consideration. At all events, she had no desire to revert to it on the ensuing day, and she learnt with some annoyance that Mr. Jerome was still feeling too unwell to go out shooting with the other men. At luncheon Lady Bannock made a prodigious fuss over him, pressing him to eat certain delicacies which had been specially prepared with a view to tempt his palate, and appealing to Miss Murray to say whether he was not looking wretchedly ill. As a matter of fact, he was looking rather pale, and Lilian, after a hasty glance at him, unfeelingly suggested a couple of pills; but, as he pointed out to her, it was impossible for him to carry out her prescription then and there, and, since he saw fit to hang about the house the whole afternoon, it proved equally impossible for her to avoid his society. They had a game of billiards together, during which she was absent-minded and taciturn, and then, towards evening, he proposed that they should walk up the glen and meet Matthew, who ought, he said, to be nearing home by that time.

Lilian replied, with a yawn, that she had no objection; so they set forth, and before they had proceeded very far on their way he began, somewhat abruptly:

'I have always wanted to explain to you about that photograph, Miss Murray. I can't tell you how sorry I was to have given offence by what I really thought at the time was a harmless little indiscretion.'

Now, Lilian had repeatedly seen him and conversed with him since the occurrence of the episode alluded to, and she saw no reason why he should choose this particular moment to remind her of an indiscretion which she had neither forgotten nor entirely forgiven.

'I don't know what possible explanation you can give,' she answered curtly, 'and I haven't the slightest curiosity to listen to one. It is generally considered bad form to buy a photograph of a girl with whom you are acquainted and exhibit it on your table, as if she had presented it to you, isn't it?'

'But I didn't exhibit it,' pleaded Leonard eagerly; 'I kept it in my own private den, where nobody could see it, except myself.'

It was upon the tip of Lilian's tongue to rejoin that he was not improving his case; but she thought better of it, and only said impatiently: 'Oh, well! it doesn't in the least signify now, one way or the other. If you want my photograph, I am sure you are very welcome to it, and I will look one out for you as soon as I go in. Which will be immediately,' she added, as a warning drop of rain fell on her cheek. 'I don't want to be soaked.'

Soaked, however, she was; for she persisted in walking straight back to the house, notwithstanding his entreaties that she would take shelter under the lee of an overhanging rock until the shower should have passed.

'Is this necessary?' he exclaimed at length. 'You might keep comparatively dry and get rid of me, you know. I am perfectly willing to walk on by myself and meet Austin.'

'In your present precarious state of health!' she returned, with a short laugh. 'Oh, no; you must come home and be taken care of. What would Lady Bannock say if you were to catch a cold in your head?'

He splashed along silently by her side for some little distance before he remarked, in a low, reproachful voice, 'I thought we had made friends.'

'Did you?' said Lilian; 'I didn't.'

'But *why* not? What have I done? How can I help—well, I shall only make matters worse by saying more, I suppose; but I do think you are rather unmerciful and rather——'

'Rather what?' asked Lilian, standing still and facing him fiercely.

'I was going to say unwise; but never mind! I won't say that. Only may I remind you that it was I who brought Austin here, and that I have done everything in my power to serve him and you?'

This, at least, was undeniable, and she reflected with compunction that his charge of unwisdom was likewise scarcely open to refutation. It had been her fault, not his, that he had now practically avowed what both of them had known for a long time past. So she said:

'Oh, very well; we will call ourselves friends, then, if you like; though I doubt whether we shall ever hit it off together very well. Of course it goes without saying that Matthew and I are much indebted to you.'

It was not in the best of tempers that she parted from him on the doorstep; but she recovered herself before dinner-time, and she could not but acknowledge that his behaviour throughout the evening was exemplary. His contribution to the chorus of congratulation which greeted Matthew on the latter's return had the appearance of being as sincere as it was hearty; he had the good taste, too, to make no allusion, covert or otherwise, to the colloquy of which a part has been recorded above.

Nevertheless, there was now a secret—and a secret which must be kept—between her and Leonard Jerome. That was why she felt that it would be impossible for her to remain much longer at Bannock Lodge, and that was also one reason why the steady, persistent rain of the morrow filled her with despondency. Some of the men were leaving that morning; the others proposed to shoot, notwithstanding the weather; only Leonard, who was still unwell, was peremptorily forbidden by his sister to accompany them.

'Whatever you do, don't leave me!' Lilian whispered to Matthew, while plans were being discussed after breakfast. 'Selfish I may be, but I decline to face a second whole day of Mr. Jerome. You must sacrifice yourself for once, and as soon as I can I shall get mamma out of this. It must be bad for her to be in such a cold, damp atmosphere. Indeed, she has begun to cough already.'

'Oh, we shall have the sun out again before nightfall, I dare say,' responded Matthew cheerfully. 'Meanwhile, I ask for nothing better than to be allowed to stay in the house and try to amuse you. What would you like to do? Shall we have a game of billiards?'

Lilian assented; and although it subsequently proved necessary to include Madame d'Aultran and Leonard in the game, she was not dissatisfied. After all, what was there to be so much afraid of? Matthew, for his part, was evidently afraid of nothing, and she endeavoured to admire, instead of being irritated with, his calm belief in everybody.

Madame d'Aultran, puffing out cigarette smoke and giving utterance to occasional witticisms of a *risqué* character, did most of the talking. She played a neat game, and, with Leonard for her partner, easily defeated the other couple. Every now and then excursions were made into the hall to tap the falling barometer and gaze out at the unbroken leaden sky; once or twice Lady Bannock looked in to see how her guests were getting on and to assure them audaciously that it never rained for twelve consecutive hours in the Highlands. But the time dragged on very slowly, and Lilian was beginning to wonder how on earth the afternoon was to be disposed of, when a servant came in with some message for Matthew, who at once laid down his cue and left the room. As he had not returned at the end of five minutes, Madame d'Aultran shrugged her shoulders and remarked:

'It is not ceremonious; but the charm of your English country life is its absence of ceremony. What is certain is that three people cannot play billiards together—perhaps even cannot talk together with the freedom that two of them would prefer. *Allons! je me sauve. Amusez-vous bien, mes enfants, et tâchez d'être sages!*'

The horrid little woman disappeared through the doorway, with a parting grin, and for a moment Lilian thought of following her. But it seemed a little ridiculous to do that. From whom or from what was there any need for her to run away? So she stood her ground and said coolly:

'Shall we begin another game? We can stop when Matthew comes back.'

Instead of making the reply that might have been expected of him, Leonard walked the whole length of the room and back again in silence. Then, halting in front of her, and looking straight into her eyes, he exclaimed abruptly, 'Are you *sure*?'

'I don't know what you mean,' faltered Lilian.

'Yes; you know what I mean. Perhaps I ought not to say it; perhaps it is treacherous to say it—although Heaven knows I have been loyal enough up to now! Anyhow, I can't help myself—I must ask you the question! Are you sure that you really love Austin? Are you sure that you have ever really loved him at all?'

When, as sometimes happens, ordinary intercourse is stripped on a sudden of ordinary conventional restrictions, we are all apt to become amazingly honest. This, of course, is not because we have any wish to be so, but simply by reason of our inability to adapt ourselves at a moment's notice to novel and unforeseen conditions. Lilian completely lost her presence of mind and answered:

'If I were not sure, you are the very last person in the world to whom I should confess it.'

'Ah, then it is as I thought!' he cried. 'You don't love him; you only like and admire him—as indeed I do too, for the matter of that. But it isn't enough to like and admire your husband. At least, it can never be enough for *you*, and I am sure in your heart you feel that.'

Lilian, who had sunk down upon one of the long leather benches which surrounded the room, stared at him affrightedly. She seemed to have no answer to make; so he went on, with the more confidence:

'I am not ashamed of speaking like this——'

'You ought to be!' she interjected quickly.

'No; I should be ashamed of keeping silence. Ought I to let you wreck your whole life for an idea? I was going to say that I shouldn't have ventured to speak as I am doing if you hadn't betrayed yourself a dozen times in the course of the last two days. You may have deceived others, you may even, for aught I know, have deceived yourself; but it isn't in your power to deceive a man who—well, it can do no harm to tell you what you know already—who loves you as passionately as I do.'

Lilian rose to her feet, not without an effort, and faced him unflinchingly. 'So this is what your friendship is worth,' said she; 'this is what you boasted of and expected to be thanked for! I suppose it never occurred to you that I would rather have died than come here if I had imagined for one moment that your only object was to put such an insult upon me.'

'Ah, but I think you must be very well aware that that was not my object,' he returned quietly. 'What had I to gain by insulting you, whom I love with all my heart and soul? When I asked my sister to invite you here and to invite Austin at the same time, I had no other wish than the very natural one to be put out of my pain as soon as possible. Shall I tell you the whole truth? I was convinced that you loved him, but I was not at all convinced that he loved you. I thought—and indeed I think still—that he was fond of you in a sort of elder-brotherly way; I knew he would make the best of husbands; but I was sure that, partly out of chivalry and partly out of indifference, he would never attempt to force himself upon you, against your mother's wish. And I wanted you to have what would make you happy. It seems to me that that is a sufficient excuse for what I did.'

Lilian's face had flushed and paled alternately during this speech. She now said: 'You are not excusing yourself for what you have done, but for what you say that you meant to do. Oh, why could you not leave us alone?'

'I have told you,' he answered. 'I soon saw what the truth was, and that changed everything. I give you my word of honour that I would have held my tongue up to the end if I could have gone on believing that the love was on your side; but——'

'Oh, your honour!'

'Yes, my honour. I don't admit that I have acted dishonourably, though I know it will be said that I have. Austin is my friend; but when it comes to be a question between Austin and you, he must go to the wall. I go further than that; I believe I am doing him an actual service by preventing you from marrying him on false pretences.'

Lilian broke out into an hysterical laugh. 'You are very fortunate to be able to think so well of yourself,' said she; 'I wish you could give me your recipe! But you certainly go very far indeed when you take it for granted that you have prevented me from marrying the man to whom I am engaged. It is ingenious of you to suggest that he never cared for me; only I am not bound to believe that you are speaking the truth.'

'I didn't say that he had never cared for you; I said he had never really been in love with you. But that is nothing. What goes to the root of the whole matter is that you are not in love with him. Can you tell me that you are?'

Well, she tried to tell that falsehood—a falsehood which had been dear to her, which she had cherished, in spite of all, and which she had never until now admitted to be a falsehood—but her eyes dropped and the words refused to pass her lips. All she could say was, 'What right have you to cross-examine me?'

He caught her by both hands, and, bending forward, murmured a few passionate words which explained what, in his opinion, constituted his right. Perhaps it was a right; perhaps it must be acknowledged to be a right; perhaps two unmarried people who love one another ought not to allow anything or anyone to come between them. Yet it may be hoped that the majority of men would not have accepted Leonard Jerome's position as lightheartedly as he did.

'Don't be so troubled about it,' he said, five minutes later; 'it isn't nearly such a tragic business as you suppose. There will be a bad quarter of an hour for both of us; but that is a small price to pay for thirty or forty years of happiness, instead of misery.'

'Oh, you won't love me for thirty or forty years,' Lilian returned, shaking her head sorrowfully; 'if it is thirty or forty months of happiness that I am buying, that is the very outside. Besides, it isn't of myself, or of you either that I am thinking.'

'Well, you will see that Austin will take it coolly enough. It may be a shock to him, and I dare say it will; but I doubt whether he understands what love means. One feels like a brute; one can't help it—and yet all the time one knows that one isn't hurting him much.'

'He does care for me,' said Lilian.

'Yes; but not as *I* care for you—not as you wish to be cared for.'

That might be true, and, if so, it was her one excuse. She said as much, adding: 'I think he is too good for me; I think I could have gone on loving him—because I did love him at first—if he hadn't always made me feel that he was such a long way above me. That objection doesn't apply to you,' she concluded, with a faint smile.

'Oh, I'm not Matthew Austin,' Leonard confessed readily; 'still I don't know that I am much worse than my neighbours. It is true that you have always treated me with apparent hatred and contempt; but wasn't that only because——'

'Don't!' she exclaimed, laying her finger on his lips; 'you make me feel as if I had been acting a part which anybody could have seen through. But it was not pretence; I really thought that I disliked and despised you. Even now I can't quite understand why you suspected what I never admitted to myself.'

Leonard laughed. 'When one honestly despises a man, one doesn't take the trouble to keep on telling him so,' he answered. 'All the same, I felt nothing approaching to certainty until yesterday, nor any sort of hope that I should ever be as happy as I am now until a few minutes ago.'

'You have no business to be happy,' Lilian began. 'I almost wish——'

But she started away from his side, without ending her sentence; for at this juncture the door was opened, and Matthew Austin walked in.

(*To be continued.*)

‘*VIA DOLOROSA ATLANTICA.*’

R.M.S. ‘*Gigantic.*’ *Wednesday.*—We are lying snug and steady in the Alexandra Dock; the time is half-past nine in the evening. We should have left Liverpool at four. Outside the library in which I write you hear steps walking up and down the deck with the reverberations of a seaside pier in August. Inside, under the golden electric light, business men (good business men, I've no doubt, but ridiculous to a degree in Margate yachting caps) are frowning and writing, rustling flimsy paper, to catch the ten o'clock mail-bag. They are travellers for the great Anglo-American firms; they cross the Atlantic three or four times a year and call the stewards by their Christian names.

No one seems to know why we don't start; some say it's the tide's wrong, and some that it's too rough for us to cross the bar. The real reason I understand to be an accident to an American vessel, blown by the gale across the dock gates and at present barring our exit. Anyway, we are still as a rock against the quay side, while the booming wind that has swept the face of heaven clean and freshened to a joyous twinkling every February star, wreathes its thin shrill lips through our rigging with a high hooting cry, ‘Come outside, you great coward, and I'll show you!’

We are all aboard, down to the last steerage passenger, with his high cheek-bones and worn fur cap, his flat, light-haired, freckled wife, tied up in a scarlet shawl; his rough, red, mottled-faced child, stamping about in a yellow fur coat, like a young Eskimo. When I strolled on shore before dinner, down the long dock-shed, flickering with gas and pungent with cases of onions, I met a youthful son of Erin staggering towards the New World with his bundle and flushed skin-full of whisky. He challenged us to fight, of course, ‘Who's the next? Come on, both av ye!’ and was assisted up the gangway by the dock policeman and a ragged compatriot selling the *Evening Mail.*

Downstairs—I beg pardon—below, my stout little steward wipes his polished dome of a forehead and advises me to go to bed now, before we get outside. In his trim white jacket he regards me benevolently, and his eyes twinkle at my assurance that I am a fearsome sailor, as though he had heard it often before. I suppose he must; he has been voyaging between Liverpool and New York for seventeen years. Seventeen years! Why, he should know every wave and every seagull by sight.

As I sink between the rough and pleasant country-inn sheets of my berth I hear the lap of the water, the throbbing of a pump, and a drowsy voice from the next cabin that murmurs, 'What a lot of bolts . . . and rivets . . . spring mattress . . . George?'

Thursday.—Still in the Alexandra Dock. A sailor, who tells me no one is allowed ashore, looks up at the shrill rigging and doesn't think the ranting, snoring gale is anyway abated. I go down to breakfast to the splendid gilded saloon (with an entirely unnecessary lurching, sailor-like walk), and find a type-written *menu*, a hand's length, crammed with every English and American delicacy. 'Clam chowder, corn cakes, buckwheat, hominy and cranberry jelly' make me feel as though Bartholdi's statue were already in sight.

On deck the day is windy-brilliant. The sky is Eton blue, and through the haze the white gulls circle tempestuously. The surface of the dock is occasionally lashed into wreaths of skurrying mist. Near me two business men in yachting caps, to whom nothing in the voyage or in nature are noticeable, talk earnestly and gustily I hear, 'stall-fed cattle . . . went right down to the bank, sir, and got it . . . if that had been all the money he had in the world, he couldn't 'a been tighter.'

Now it's 11.30 by the dock clock, and we're gradually lurching away from the Alexandra quay side. We pass the dock gates and out into the leaping river. Against the bright sunlight the houses and shore of New Brighton look black as a silhouette. The last I see of the Lancashire coast is the long dun sand-hills, patched with ragged grass blown into shapeless hummocks by the wind. Then, like sticks, the masts of a wreck. All round the hurricane deck tarpaulins are stretched; they *flap-flap, flap!* monotonously; they rumble with the dull thump of loosely stretched drums. As the *Gigantic* is still steady, passengers promenade briskly, and as they pass me in my deck-chair, I hear scraps of their conversation. A stout woman with a pinched waist, a brown ulster and a cap pinned over her streaming hair, asks, 'Has she any money *at all*?' Her companion, a wizened little man, dried up and brittle, in a shrunk covert-coat, answers disagreeably, 'Seventy pounds a year.' Droll, these fleeting scraps of conversation. I remember at South Kensington Station, only the other day, two men passing me with heavy important tread while waiting for the train. '*If* I survive my wife,' says one to the other solemnly, 'as I hope I *shall.*' *Cætera desunt*, for the train came in. But what a glimpse into a household!

All the early afternoon we get fairy views of the beautiful Welsh coast. Holyhead and its lighthouse look clear and sharp as in a water-colour drawing. From my deck-chair I begin to notice the beginning of acquaintanceships and flirtations. One of the most obvious is that of an elderly golden-haired lady, with deep-set twinkling eyes and the highly artificial figure of a dressmaker's mantle-hand, who walks the planks sharply with one of the travellers in yachting caps. He is the type of 'handsome swell' of a third-rate comic paper in its seaside summer number; he wears a serge suit, and, with his hands plunged in his jacket pockets and his sturdy *bourgeois* legs planted briskly down one after the other, he regards his companion with that fatuous air of the irresistible who has had much success among barmaids. The husband of the golden-haired lady sits playing poker in the smoking-room, where the company looks like that of the commercial parlour of a Manchester hotel, and the atmosphere resembles a blue fog.

As the *Gigantic* turns towards Queenstown the trembling and throbbing approach something more definite in the way of movement. I make up my mind to get shaved while I can. The barber, who is curled up asleep in his little shop, operates upon me deftly and informs me this is the one hundred and eighty-fifth time he has crossed the Atlantic. He charges a shilling for the shave and says I sha'n't get done in New York for that money. Then he turns with a low bow to the most important man on board, our Member of Parliament, who sits on the Captain's right in the saloon. If the poor gentleman's well enough he will be called on to preside at the concert that always takes place the last night. Indeed, he has the air, as he strolls about in his fur coat, of already considering his neat and appropriate remarks as chairman, or at least one of the many important social and political problems of the day. Possibly, however, I do him an injustice, and he is only wondering whether he is going to be sick.

Dinner is announced by a couple of sailor-boys marching about playing bugles. I find those bugles very trying in mid-Atlantic; they are tootled just outside my cabin door, and they seem to say: 'Get up and come into the saloon, my boy. There you'll find meat and rich sauces and puddings and wine.' Even Sam, the steward, admits they sometimes have boots thrown at them. At dinner I observe the morose feeling growing stronger; my hair has a tendency to rise off my forehead, the *menu* seems absurdly, outrageously, disgustingly long. I am next rather a handsome girl who can't understand why I don't talk to her. She asks me to pass the salt, and when I do it in dreary silence she says, 'Thank you *very* much,' and looks me straight in the eyes. The table steward bends over me with the *menu* and presses more food on me. His voice sounds muffled as though it came from a telephone. I rise with a frown, I sway gently from side to side, the joints in my legs don't feel sufficient to meet the upward and downward movements of the deck. The talk and the laughter, the rattle of knives and forks grow fainter. I find myself in a narrow passage with a brass rail on one side and a limp fire-hose on the other. I say aloud fretfully, 'I want cabin 125.' In despair I open a door, any door: it's a bathroom. Fortunately I meet a boy carrying linen, from whom I demand Sam, my steward Sam. He says, 'Sam is at plates, mister.' That means Sam is assisting to wash-up. At last, cabin 125. The curtains, the coats, my dressing-gown are swinging from side to side. I throw my clothes off me as though they were all shirts of Nessus. I fall asleep, dully, heavily, like a drunken tramp under a haystack.

At one in the morning I wake to absolute silence and stillness. We are at Queenstown. I discover Sam has been in and fastened a tin arrangement, very like the *tronc pour les pauvres* outside a Catholic church, on to the edge of the berth. *Très commode, ça.* At three I wake again and find we are leaving Queenstown. Sam, who looks in upon me, replies to my inquiries as to whether it isn't very rough, 'Well, the wind's been here before us.'

Friday.—Sam opens the portholes, and, leaning one fat hand on the edge of my berth, asks how I am. In a strangled voice I reply that I am wretched. His consolation is that he will see me again presently. The bugles blow for breakfast; I hear the water going into the bath, loud voices, somebody who whistles the 'Pinafore.' The sea gushes into the glass cap of the portholes and gushes out again; gushes in and gushes out. A basket-work chair advances from the other side of the cabin, meets a portmanteau, and retires. My tooth-brush rattles in the glass, bottles fall. I doze.

Sam comes in carrying a little basin of chicken-broth and some crackers. He says it's half-past eleven. I stare at him stupidly when he mentions crackers. I think of a Christmas party and my dear small nephews and nieces. But crackers are only pallid-looking biscuits, to escape from which I put my head under the clothes. Sam sighs and says he will see me again presently. Surely I told him to take away the chicken-broth? I know I tried to. Doze.

The bugles blow for lunch—for dinner. The 'Pinafore' whistler sings the curate's song in the next cabin as he blithely dresses. The sea gushes and hisses in and out of the portholes; the curtains of my berth sway over my face and brush it. I ring the electric bell for Sam to come and close the portholes and shut out that horrible gushing sea. The boy comes in and says Sam is at plates. I try to throw into my glance an order to close the portholes. Far down under the bed-clothes a strange voice says 'portholes.' The boy looks at me alarmed and says: 'Sam will see me presently.'

In the middle of the night I wake with a baked, parched thirst. I ring the bell and a strange man enters in a dark flannel shirt. By my directions he gives me an effervescing drink. He makes it too strong and it fizzes over my face and hair deliciously. He says it is two o'clock, and blowing pretty hard. I look at my watch and find it's twenty past three. That's the worst of going west; the nights are all the longer. I hear the sea boiling up into the port-holes like a witch's cauldron. I slide from side to side in my berth and have to grip the edge to prevent myself from falling out. 'Yes,' says the strange man, 'she's rolling.'

Saturday.—As I follow the motion of the ship, I cannot help thinking of a country road that climbs and dips and falls, turns corners, rumbles and bumps over ruts and unmended spaces; stops for a minute or two to let the horse-power breathe and then dashes on again wildly, whip-bethwacked. I fancy myself in a shaky, weak old chaise; I am driving from Devizes to Marlborough over the downs; the road is very bad, there are huge stones and long raw places. As we sway and slide along, I build up beside our path Wiltshire farmhouses and villages. We stop for one trembling, suspended moment opposite a Cold Harbour I know. There is a damp-stained blue paper in the parlour, blue horsemen are leaping blue fences, some of them are cut in half by the corner china-closets. Outside a horn blows; it is that rackety young Pike with his tandem. Chalker, the farmer, enters to look at me, with his little eyes and long teeth. No, it's Sam, steadying himself with the door-handle, and young Pike's horn is the bugle for breakfast. Sam has an orange stuck on a fork, the skin and the white all cut away, the juice dripping. 'Dare I?' Sam opens the portholes and says, 'It's a nasty morning again.' The sea boils up into the portholes like milk into a saucepan.

I notice that the voices in the corridor and from the neighbouring cabins are stronger, more cheerful. Sam says all his gentlemen are up with the exception of one next door, who spends the day making noises, each more complicated than the last. Sam says he wouldn't be so bad if he didn't think himself so well and eat so much. Why doesn't he imitate me? Yesterday I broke a biscuit in half. To-day I suck an orange.

All day long I doze, doze confusedly. There are times in ocean voyages, I am sure, when these great ships strike and roll over marine monsters taking their ease near the surface. Often and often I felt the *Gigantic* strike something, struggle for a few moments with a body, vast and pulpy; either cut its way through it, or rise above and along it, and then go free again through the unresisting waves. Frequently I was sure I heard screams and dolorous cries of anguish. It was just as though we had run over some one in the street. Perhaps these vessels that are lost and never heard of again (the *City of Boston*, for instance, which they suppose destroyed by an iceberg) are in reality smashed and devoured by the revolt and combination of outraged furious monsters who have borne the mutilation and death of their nearest and dearest long enough.

Sam visits me later in the interminable day with milk and lime water; to strengthen the stomach, he says. No use, my good Sam; *je ne puis pas le retenir*. Steps, bugles, voices, the man who sings 'Ta-ra-ra-boom de ay' while he gets ready for dinner, the man who comes down late from the smoking-room and undresses noisily.

Sunday.—Sam suggests I should see the doctor. The doctor comes rolling and lurching into my cabin after the half-past ten Church of England service in the saloon. He, too, has had seventeen years of voyaging to and fro; it took him two months, he says, to get over his sea-sickness, so I can scarcely complain of my three days. He is an Irishman of the jovial type of Charles Lever's doctors, with a brogue one might cut with a silver knife. He demands my tongue, and when, with an immense effort, I show it to him, 'Oi wish oi'd got wan so clane,' says he, regretfully. He orders me milk and lime water and a visit on deck, neither of which prescriptions I have the faintest idea of obeying. He tumbles out of my cabin like an amateur actor pretending to be extremely drunk, and I fall again to intermittent dozing.

In the afternoon I am seized with a passionate desire to see the face of this restless, storm-lashed Atlantic. I begin by sitting up in my berth for the first time for three days. My head feels full of molten, swimming, clanging lead; my legs, on the other hand, as I dangle them impotently over the side of my berth, are as pieces of string. I fall on my knees, grown leaden now instead of my head (which feels light and bobbing as a cork), and with the help of the basket-work chair which slides to my aid, drag myself like a shot rabbit to the opposite berth below the portholes. How high above me it seems, and now how low! Up I clamber and look out through the gushing, boiling porthole. Waves, green and curling; hollows, slabs, terraces, troughs of water, broken and tumbling. White ridges and manes, and vast deep pits where the sea appears clean sliced into polished sides of the richest verd-antique. Not a ship, nor a bird; only the low grey sky, with its masses of slowly shifting cloud; only the grandiose, breaking seas. Tempestuous as the seascape is, its very silence strikes me as ominous. It is like watching a man in a fit of dumb, inarticulate rage. It reminds me of seeing people dance, through a window, when you don't hear the music.

In the evening Sam persuades me to sit in the basket-work chair while he makes my bed. I sit in it in a limp heap, like Irving in the last act of Louis XI. Sam entertains me, meanwhile, with stories of vessels which break their machinery when (just as we are) three days out; the rest of the voyage is made laboriously under sail, and lasts three weeks. Also he tells me of suicides (they had one for each of their first five voyages) and burials, not at all uncommon. He winds up with an account of a commercial gentleman in the next cabin who had *delirium tremens* all last voyage and required a strait waistcoat, Sam, and three supernumeraries to keep him quiet.

I wake at six in the morning to find a strange man on his knees moving his hands mysteriously over the floor. He says he is searching for my boots to clean them. He describes it as a nasty morning again and bitterly cold.

Monday afternoon.—However Sam managed to get me up on deck, I don't know. To me it was like stumbling about inside a kaleidoscope, every object going through a constant shifting and wondrous sea-change. I have a recollection of his holding me by the arm and sliding me into a deck-chair. Now, he says, the deck-steward will see after me. When he leaves me I feel as though I have lost my only friend on board, and that I am about to shed the bitterest tears of my life. I open my eyes and see a sailor in a sou'-wester dropping a thermometer overboard and pulling it up again to examine the temperature of the water. That is, I believe, to discover whether there be icebergs in the neighbourhood.

Then comes to me the deck-steward. He produces the *menu* from his inside jacket-pocket and holds it under my nose. I look at it blankly and drearily. I see beef and mutton and things fricasséed. Then I look at him and his dumb entreating eye. My white lips murmur something inarticulate; neither of us speaks, but, thank heaven, he understands me and goes.

Healthy, hearty people walk sturdily up and down the deck, talking and laughing. I get hideous whiffs of their tobacco, and the end of my deck-chair is occasionally knocked in a way that moves me to blind fury. If I had a gun handy, there are two young men I should certainly shoot. They wear Norfolk jackets and flannel trousers, they appear to enjoy the cold and the motion, the wind envelopes me with occasional clouds of the horrible mixture they are puffing at. I try to attract the attention of the captain, who is walking up and down with a pretty girl, assuring her he will get her to New York on Thursday afternoon; I have an idea that he will put those two young men in irons if I ask him to, properly.

The deck is so bitterly cold that, to avoid being frozen and affecting the thermometer which the man in the sou'-wester pulls up and down and examines carefully every half hour, I drag myself miserably into the library. The library (owing perhaps to the quantity of light literature it contains) is even more unsteady than the deck. I close my eyes and listen to two American girls chaff a fat young Dutchman in a yachting cap and a reach-me-down mackintosh with capes. He amuses them so much that they carry him off down to the saloon for afternoon tea.

I feel that if I don't speedily get below again I shall disgrace myself and my good friend Sam. I have a vision as I lurch along cabin-wards of leaping brass handrails and a long twining fire-hose, twisting like an empty snake. Fortunately, Sam is sitting in the passage amusing himself with a highly coloured American comic paper. I fall shuddering into his arms; he undresses me like a child and puts me back into the familiar berth. He looks at me mournfully, and says he will see me again presently.

Tuesday.—Nothing but shipwreck will induce me to rise, and even then I shall insist on being the last person to leave the vessel. The doctor looks at me and says to Sam, 'Fwhat shall we do to get um on deck? Shall we put powder under um?'

All day long I lie and read, not unpleasantly. I have 'Half Hours of the best American Authors,' which I took out of the library before we started, and Hardy's 'Return of the Native,' bought at Crewe. What years ago it seems since we left London in the special, since I jumped out at Crewe and bought the book. How like a dream it seems to recall the two French people sitting opposite in the luncheon car, the woman with her vivacious monkey face, cunning and shrewd, but not unpleasant; the man, handsome and sulky, with his common hands and thick legs. I set her down as a *trapézienne*, and he as the strong man who stands below steadying the rope, watching her gyrations with affected palpitations of terror. She read 'Belle-maman' when she was not quarrelling with him, and he had a crumpled copy of 'Gil Blas.' And the American ladies, in diamond earrings and tight sealskin jackets, chattering of the London shops and hotels while the pleasant English landscape slid past, with the ploughing teams on the brown uplands, the solitary figures trudging along the roads, the broad fields greenly shimmering with the winter wheat. And the wind in Liverpool, yelling through the docks, and the first sight of the *Gigantic*; and the sheaf of kindly telegrams waiting in the box in the saloon; and the steward, looking in his Eton jacket like a huge schoolboy, marking off our places for dinner and handing us each a number. How far off they all seem to me now tumbling in mid-Atlantic, how far off and yet how clear.

Wednesday.—As I stand looking at the sea, with a faint, wavering smile, a gentleman in a heavy ulster and a cap says cheerfully, 'You've had a very bad time, haven't you?' He introduces himself as the man who suffered so much in the next cabin. His face is plaster-white and tightly drawn; his eyebrows have gone up into his hair; his eyes are criss-crossed with a tangle of premature wrinkles. Really, if I looked like that, I should conceive it my duty to remain in my berth till I improved.

As I haven't been shaved since last Thursday, I tumble below (I am rapidly getting my sea-legs now) with a sort of sham hearty 'Come aboard, sir!' air, down into the barber's shop. There I find our Member of Parliament, who addresses me remarks of the courteous-foolish order. He appears to be one of those gentlemen (not altogether uncommon in the House of Commons) who mistake dullness for weight, and slowness of speech for evidence of sagacity. Like Mr. Chick, he believes in making an effort when on board ship; he never gives way, he says; he forces himself to get up on deck; he forces himself down into the saloon to eat. Which, being interpreted, simply means he isn't seasick; for if any man tells me the trouble can be overcome by mere strength of will, I have no hesitation in proclaiming him liar, of the second or self-deceived order.

When I am in the barber's chair, facing me in the glass I find a thin, white old man, with a short, dark beard, a stubby moustache, a blank, hollow eye, a wrinkled forehead. When I turn my head I see who it is; the object does the same; he mimics all my gestures; he gets shaved, just as I do. When I look up at the barber for an explanation of the phenomenon, he says in a guttural German-American tone, 'Well, I never tink I see you again. You look pretty sick, mein goodness!'

In the afternoon, as the day grows finer, I venture down into the saloon for a cup of tea. The sun blazes in upon the gilding, lavish as a Lord Mayor's barge. There is a group round the piano, practising for the concert. A young man in a light suit and a dull penny-reading baritone moans through 'In Days of Old when Knights were Bold.' He goes through the song three times, and each time misses the high note by half a tone. He doesn't seem to have a notion he's flat, though the lady accompanying him hits the right note significantly. There are good people, I believe, who will sing flat in heaven without any idea that they are spoiling the general harmony.

But, after all, how absurd it seems to complain of three or four days' sea-sickness when one remembers what people must have suffered in the old days of sailing vessels and paddle steamers; how unmanly, when on the *Gigantic* one is surrounded with every attention and comfort, even luxury, and when one knows that in other parts of the ship the old, the sickly, the badly clothed and badly fed are suffering a thousand times more, without a single comfort or attention to alleviate their misery. I stood upon the narrow bridge that runs above the part of the ship given over to the steerage passengers, and looked down upon them, grouped about in the chilly dusk and in the light that fell from their saloon-door. Bare-headed women, wrapped in shawls like factory girls, came and went busily with tin pannikins; gaunt men like drovers stood about talking and quarrelling; children tied up in shawls ran backwards and forwards, screamed at by their mothers as they stand screaming at their frowsy Whitechapel doors. A cook came out in his white jacket and threw a paper of sawdust over the side. The wind carried the sawdust back like a cloud among the women and children, and I saw a mother cover her child's eyes quickly with her hands, caring nothing for herself, anxious only to protect her child. In front of the door an old woman was sitting on a tin box, uncared for and unnoticed. The light fell on her face, ravaged by care, and age, and sickness. It was, perhaps, the first time she had ventured out to take the air since leaving Liverpool, and she sat there, like a weather-beaten statue, out of which time and trouble had gradually worn all semblance to joy, to life, and even hope. Age, and exile, and sickness, every human misery seemed to beat its bat-wings round that impassive suffering face. Later in the evening when again I looked down from the bridge, she was still sitting there, alone.

Thursday.—Land-ho! It's half-past eleven, and Fire Island is in sight. I look out of the library window and see a long, low, sandy shore, just like the last I saw of Lancashire, only that it is patched and painted with snow. I see a lighthouse, from whence they will telegraph our arrival to New York, and a wreck, heaped broken among the sand-dunes. We don't go very fast because of the fog; we keep blowing our great horn like a Triton, but we expect to be at the quay-side at five o'clock. Lunch is really rather a pleasant meal on board these huge Atlantic liners. The Member of Parliament hopes with a conciliatory smile I am 'none the worse for my resurrection.' He regards me as he regards everyone else on board—as a constituent, a possible voter, some one to be won over by the irresistible charm of his manner. The pretty American girl opposite remarks pointedly, 'It's vurry strange how folk turn up on board at the last moment whom one hasn't noticed before.' That's said partly for fear that I should flatter myself I had been noticed, and partly in revenge for a smile I couldn't help our first evening at some rather startling Americanism of hers. The table steward talks to me in the low cooing voice one uses to an invalid; he calls me by my name (no one says 'sir' on the *Gigantic*), and brings me the *menu* every two minutes. My handsome neighbour gives me an account of her sufferings (nothing to mine), and presses on me a *lemon soufflé* she and her companion have had specially made. They seem to travel in considerable luxury, for their last act before leaving Liverpool was the purchase of a number of chickens for their private consumption *en route.*

How fast the last hours on board fly in compensation for others so torturingly slow. Here's Staten Island and New York Harbour; here's the *George P. Flick*, a ferry boat ornamented with a large gilt eagle, lumbering alongside, and bringing a Customs House officer in a peaked cap. He reminds me I have a fan and a silver box to smuggle. I dispose them about my person with considerable trepidation, and go down into the saloon to sign a paper declaring I have nothing dutiable in my luggage. No more I have; they are both in my pockets. I regard with interest the Customs House officer, the first American I have seen on native soil, and can scarcely answer his questions for staring. He is a handsome weary man, exactly like one of Leech's Volunteer officers of 1860, and he writes rapidly, holding the pen between the first and second fingers.

There's Bartholdi's gigantic statue at last, and there are the piers and swing of Brooklyn Bridge. Sam has fastened up all my luggage, and we shake hands heartily. I shall never forget him and the oranges he brought me, stuck on a fork.

As I go down the gangway a crowd of faces look up at me from the dock. A twinkling Irishman darts at me with a telegraph form and a pencil; he leaves them with me with a sweet, wistful smile, and rushes away after others. My luggage is all waiting for me under my initial in the huge shed; I have to open every trunk and bag, and watch large dirty hands play over my clean linen. Sam comes to shake hands with me again, and gets me an Irishman and a truck to take my luggage to a fly. An Irishman opens the door, an Irishman drives me; the first shop I see is Michael Feeney's saloon bar.

I drive jolting over tramway lines, under elevated railways, between piles of snow as high as the early walls of Rome. I see an unmistakable Irish policeman, in a helmet with a turned-down brim, regarding with admiration a coloured lady sauntering through the slush of the sidewalk in goloshes. We are nearly smashed by a cable-car slinking along, ringing a funereal clanging bell. I see a disused lamp-post, with a dark red letter-box fastened to it; next, a tall, black, electric light pole. On the lamp-post I read, on one side, *Fifth Avenue*; on the other *East 26th Street.* On the top of a huge building there's a huge sky-sign, 'Admiral Cigarettes, Opera Lights.' On the face of it three large clocks tell the time in London, New York, and Denver. As we jolt past, up Fifth Avenue, I read on a board, 'Oh, mamie, won't you take your honey boy to see Peter F. Dailey in "A Country Sport?"' This is New York.

COMMISSIONS IN THE GERMAN ARMY.

To the Teutonic youth whose aspirations are fixed on the military red collar, which is the distinguishing mark of a German officer, various paths lie open for the gratification of his ambition, all of which differ materially from those in vogue in our own service. With us in England, except in a very few instances, admission lies through a competitive examination, and it would perhaps be difficult to devise any other scheme to meet the necessities of our peculiar position. Having but a small army compared with continental forces, we require only a very limited number of officers, whereas there is always forthcoming an unlimited supply of young men of means ambitious of holding her Majesty's commission. In Germany the conditions are reversed, and the demand being in excess of the supply, no resort need be had to competition. Again, with the single exception of the man who rises from the ranks, no British officer is obliged to have any personal experience of service therein. The reverse is the rule in Germany. The youth who has finally decided on a military career must, first and foremost, look out for a regimental commander willing to accept him, and it behoves him to be early in so doing. Notwithstanding the dearth of applicants, it is by no means a matter of course that every application will be granted. A wide discretion is left to commanding officers, and social relations and family antecedents are strictly inquired into. There is, besides, a searching medical examination. The army candidate, having found a regiment, is not permitted to join it immediately, unless he is fortunate enough to hold a certificate of having stood the test of the Abiturienten examination. This is the term applied to the final passing-out examination at one of the recognised public schools, which must be passed by all students prior to their admission to a university. The examination embraces theology, German, Latin, Greek, French, English, Hebrew, mathematics, physics, history, and geography, and the standard is so high that very few but university students attain it. For the general run of candidates a special literary test, known as the Fahnrichs (ensign) examination, is imposed, and this is by far the most popular door of admission. It very much resembles our own army entrance, and, as in England, so also in Germany, there is a host of crammers, all of whom profess to offer the best possible advantages and to have won more successes than any of their rivals. The business is supposed to be lucrative, though we are not prepared to suggest that the profits rise to the level of those of our own English army tutors. The Berlin crammer must be satisfied with moderate fees, but his teaching is nevertheless methodical and expeditious. He seldom finds it necessary to spend more than three months on the preparation of a candidate. But this is not altogether due to the excellence of his system, for admission to the examination is conditional on the production of a certificate of having reached the head class in a public school, which is a guarantee of a high standard of previous knowledge. It is true that this certificate may be dispensed with by the special permission of the Emperor, but such exemptions are the exception and not the rule.

Once the date of the examination is fixed, the candidate receives from his regiment a notification of the time when he has to present himself before the Military Examination Commission in Berlin. This is almost invariably at twelve o'clock on a Sunday. On his arrival, which must be punctual, he is introduced along with the other candidates, of whom there are about thirty, to the President of the Commission. From this moment he is treated as a soldier, and instructions are given to him which he has to obey to the letter. During the examination he resides, under military supervision, on the premises where it is held; and when it is over, and he is discharged, he is obliged forthwith to quit the city. The examination begins on Monday morning at 8 A.M., when the candidates appear in evening dress and white gloves, invariably the attire worn at all important public examinations in Germany. The event is regarded as solemn, and on all such occasions the swallow-tail is indispensable. By Wednesday evening the written examination is generally over, and the *vivâ voce* test begins. This lasts till Friday evening, and immediately upon its close the result is communicated to each candidate. He who has been lucky enough to pass, receives a military railway ticket to the garrison where his regiment is stationed. Here we will leave him for the present while we endeavour more fully to describe the Fahnrichs examination, and to indicate the requisite standard of knowledge in the various subjects which it embraces.

The examination in mathematics is confined to geometry, about equal to the first six books of Euclid; algebra up to geometrical progression, and very elementary plane trigonometry. In German two essays are set, and an accurate acquaintance with the history of the literature of the country, as well as of grammar and prosody, is required; obligatory Latin does not reach farther than Cæsar and Livy, the latter with the assistance of a dictionary, with easy questions on grammar and syntax, but the candidate is permitted to offer Cicero and Horace in addition. In French two passages for translation are given, one from French into German and the other *vice versâ*, and questions on grammar are asked. Great importance is attached to correct pronunciation, and above all to fluency in conversation. English alternates with Greek, the standard in the former being about the same as in French, and in the latter the same as in Latin. History includes (1) that of Greece and Rome; (2) that of the Middle Ages; (3) modern history, English, French, German, and Russian; (4) Prussian history. In each division two parallel questions are set, one of which must be correctly answered. Geography embraces physical, political, and mathematical geography, and the examination takes place on the same lines as in history. There is in addition an examination in a third modern language, chemistry, physics, or drawing, at the choice of the candidate. The highest mark in each subject is nine; the lowest is one. The marks obtained in the chief subjects (German, mathematics, and Latin) are multiplied by five; those obtained in the other obligatory subjects (French, Greek, or English, history, and geography) are multiplied by three, while those of the last category remain as they stand, except that to count at least five must be scored. The pass mark is 126, but the candidate is nevertheless disqualified who fails to make more than three in German—a result which orthographical mistakes entail. Those who fail are put back for three, five, seven, &c., months, depending on the number of marks short of the press standard. A candidate is then examined only in those subjects in which he has failed to obtain five, and it rarely happens that he is disqualified a second time. A third examination is only allowed by special permission.

We return to the candidate who, having passed his Fähnrichs examination, has been sent to his regiment. He is now a common soldier, and is obliged to live in barracks, where his treatment differs in no respect from that of the other privates, except, perhaps, that he is allowed to pay a comrade to perform for him the more menial part of his duties. After a few weeks' experience of barrack life he is permitted to take private lodgings, and in due course is promoted to corporal. After five months' service he applies for a certificate of efficiency in practical soldiering, and if this, which must be signed by the commander and officers of the regiment, is granted, the title of 'Fähnrich,' or, more properly, 'Portepeefähnrich,' is conferred on him by an imperial order. As Fähnrich he ranks between corporal and sergeant, and receives an increase of pay. When he has completed a period of six months' service in the ranks, the Fähnrich removes to a military college. Here he is instructed in tactics, army organisation, the military epistolatory style, the use of arms, fortification, &c.; he is taught gymnastics, fencing, riding, and swimming, and he receives lessons in Russian and French. The course lasts thirty-six weeks, and at its close the Fähnrich is eligible to present himself for examination in the military subjects included within it. Should he be successful, he returns to his regiment, whereupon he must undergo the ordeal of an election or rejection, as the case may be, by the officers of the same. The youngest records his vote first, the commander last, no ballot being employed. Should the result give a unanimous vote in favour of the Fähnrich, he is declared elected, and in due time receives the Emperor's commission. An unfavourable minority are obliged to state the grounds of their objection. These are referred to the Emperor, and on his decision as to their validity depends the result. Rejection by a majority is final; no reasons are assigned, and the rejected candidate will find it a difficult task to procure admission into any other regiment.

Another common way of entering the army is through a cadet school. They are mainly intended for the education of officers' sons, but to the extent of the available accommodation they are open to others. The programme of study is identical with that in the lower forms at public schools, the work of the higher forms being pursued at the chief cadet school at Lichterfelde. The cadets who are successful at the final passing-out examination are divided into two groups. The first hundred, or thereabouts, are granted exemption from service in the ranks and are not obliged to study at a military college. In lieu thereof they remain a year longer at Lichterfelde, which is devoted to preparation for the examination in military subjects, at which they are then eligible themselves. They afterwards receive their commissions without an election by the officers of the regiment to which they are appointed. Those who do not pass out among the first hundred at Lichterfelde are distributed as common soldiers through different regiments, and eventually become officers by the same steps as those who enter through the Fähnrichs examination. We have seen that those cadets who pass out high are relieved of service in the ranks, but there is not, so far as we are aware, any other gate by which this may be avoided with the following exception: Young men who hold a certificate of having passed the Abiturienten examination, already referred to, and who have studied at least a year at a German University, Technical High School, or Forest Academy, may be admitted to the examination in military subjects without having either served in the ranks or studied at a military college. The general effect, therefore, of the regulations on this point is to render it obligatory on all military candidates, with the exception of those who are decidedly above the average in respect of education, to submit to a short probationary training on equal terms with the men whom they are afterwards destined to command.

As it is the fashion to take the German army as the type of military excellence, it is interesting to note how totally their system of admission differs from our own. We have already remarked on the variation in the matter of competition and of service in the ranks, but the comparison may be pursued into the nature of the entrance examinations. So far as mathematics or the dead languages are concerned there is no great difference beyond this, that the English standard is decidedly higher. In history the contrast is more apparent. The German authorities consider it essential to the education of an officer that he should be well up in the history of the chief European nations as well as in that of the Middle Ages, and of ancient Greece and Rome, whereas a general knowledge of his own is deemed enough for a British officer, and not even this is compulsory. The difference of opinion between the English and German Commissioners on the relative importance of the literature of their own and of other countries is very remarkable, the latter subjecting their candidates to a searching examination on the history of literature, the grammar and the prosody of their own language, whereas the former regard German etymology and the rules of French versification as more important than the literature of the English language. The value attached to a colloquial knowledge of modern languages affords, perhaps, a still more striking contrast. It is true that under the German scheme such knowledge is not obligatory, but, in the words of a well-known German crammer, 'even a modest attempt at conversation always insures a high mark.' One-tenth of the possible total in either language is all that our own Civil Service Commissioners assign to proficiency in conversation.

There is, moreover, a wide divergence in the rules of the two countries which fix the age at which a candidate is admissible to the literary test, the German being eligible up to the age of twenty-three, whereas the English maximum is nineteen. The English service is open to all comers of unblemished character, but the discretion possessed by regimental commanders in the admission of military students, and the subsequent election which places it in the power of a single officer to raise an objection which may prove fatal, practically closes the German army to all but members of that class with which militarism is a profession, and from which officers have been for generations almost exclusively recruited.

UNCLE ONESIMUS.

It was when we were both at school that I first heard of Uncle Onesimus, as Clayton always called him. Clayton was a curly-haired little fellow whom most of us liked. We were great friends, though he was in the Lower Third form and I in the Upper Fifth and meditating the purchase of my first razor. Perhaps a good deal of Clayton's general popularity was due to his plentiful possession of pocket-money and the liberal way in which he expended it on the purchase of comestibles. I had myself passed the raspberry-tart stage of school existence; but there are other dainties, and, when I had helped Clayton in his early efforts at elegiac verse and rewritten his sentences from 'Arnold,' I was not too proud to accept offered refreshment.

After a time I learned that Clayton's pecuniary prosperity was due to frequent remittances from 'Uncle Onesimus.'

'He's awfully rich, you know,' Clayton said to me one day confidentially, 'and he lives in New York.'

'It's very nice to have a rich uncle,' I said sententiously.

'Oh, he's not really my uncle, you know,' the boy said. 'I only call him so. He was a great friend of my father's when he was alive. And one evening he came to our house and I had gone to bed—I was quite a little fellow then, you know—and he came up to my bedroom and looked at me while I was asleep, and stood looking at me ever so long and I didn't wake up. Mrs. Higgins—she was my nurse—a sort of nurse, you know—told me all about it. He went away the same night, and my father went away with him. And when my father came back he brought me a box of figs and a whole lot of playthings, and told me they came from a great friend of his and that I must write a letter and thank him.'

'What's his real name?' I asked carelessly.

Clayton laughed.

'Potts,' he said, 'and he's got such a funny lot of Christian names—Onesimus Washington Brutus Cæsar. I always write to him, "Dear Uncle Onesimus," because my father told me to.'

One day, two terms later, Clayton told me that Uncle Onesimus was coming over to Europe.

'He'll come down here,' he said, 'and get me a half-holiday. And perhaps he'll take me to London. Would you like to go too, Baywick?'

I expressed a dignified assent, as became one newly promoted to the Sixth.

'I've often written to him about you,' Clayton went on. 'I've told him you're my best friend, and that you've saved me ever so many lickings.'

Clayton got quite excited as the time for the expected visit drew near, and I think almost everyone in the school knew when the boat that was bringing Uncle Onesimus arrived at Queenstown. Then, one day, just after morning school, Clayton came running up to me with beaming face.

'He's come!' he cried out, 'and I've just been sent for. I'm sure he'll ask for you, and we'll go up to London and have a stunning good time. You'll come, won't you, Baywick?'.

He ran off with shining face, while I reflected that an afternoon in London with the pleasant prospect of a good dinner at the close was more alluring than 'The Seven against Thebes.'

Clayton came back in about fifteen minutes, looking very crestfallen.

'What's the matter, young 'un?' I said. 'Isn't Uncle Onesimus going to take you up to town?'

'Oh yes,' he replied, 'and he wants to take you too. But——'

He hung down his head, and something like a blush was visible on his cheeks. At last, with a great burst, the revelation came.

'Uncle Onesimus is a black man,' he said—'a real nigger.' He shot a rapid glance at me.

'Do you mind it very much, Baywick? Some of the other fellows have seen him, and they'll tease me dreadfully about it. But if you come up——' Something like a tear hung in the little fellow's blue eyes.

'He's asked us for dinner,' he added, 'and the Doctor's given us leave.'

I acceded with due impressiveness, and was led off to see Mr. O. W. B. C. Potts—otherwise 'Uncle Onesimus.' He was a full-blooded negro—a tall, massively built man, verging towards greyness. He was most carefully and faultlessly dressed; he wore gold-rimmed spectacles, and had a thick cane with a big gold knob. He greeted me with an air of benevolent dignity, and he gained at once a high place in my consideration by addressing me as '*Mr.* Baywick,' the dignity of the prefix being a quite unaccustomed honour.

We were soon flying up to London. Clayton was quite relieved to see that Uncle Onesimus and I got on so well, and prattled merrily. The old man smiled good-humouredly at his boyish talk, but just before we got into London he shook his head for a moment and put on a grave and magisterial air.

'There's one thing I clean forgot,' he said. 'I didn't ask you any questions about your work. Have you gotten on well with your studies?'

And then ensued a few minutes of oral examination. Uncle Onesimus began with arithmetic, in which Clayton certainly didn't distinguish himself. He did better in Latin, however, for he was able to tell Mr. Potts the English of *E pluribus unum* and *Sic semper tyrannis*. That good man beamed benignantly through his gold-rimmed spectacles, and said that there were one or two things more he would like to ask him in Latin, but he couldn't remember them just then. A little later Clayton was floored again, for he didn't know the meaning of the name 'Onesimus,' and he couldn't say in which book of the Bible it occurred. Pressed on the point, he hazarded the first book of Samuel, whereat Uncle Onesimus shook his head gravely and looked at me. I was able to set Clayton right on both points, and I think I rose some little in the old man's opinion by elaborate etymology, parading all the parts of the verb ὀνίνημι.

'I never heard it so well explained before,' he said.

Our arrival at the terminus stopped further examinations, and Uncle Onesimus proceeded to give us a good time, as he said.

He had taken a box at the pantomime, which was then in mid-career, and after that was over we went round to a jeweller's, where he bought a scarf-pin for Clayton, and consulted me as to what sort of watch would be likely to please a young friend of his about my own age. We finished with a dinner in which I made my first acquaintance with French cooking and drank my first glass of Pommery and Greno.

When we were returning, Uncle Onesimus accompanied us to the station. He put Clayton into the carriage, and drew me aside.

'You'll be a friend to him, won't you?' he said, pointing towards the boy with his broad black thumb. 'He's young, and where there's such a lot of boys he might get into mischief.'

Two days afterwards I received by post the watch which I had chosen for the friend about my own age.

. . . .

Uncle Onesimus went back to New York, and I didn't see him again for more than a year. Then I was invited to spend the Easter holidays with him and Clayton. Clayton had been doing well at school, and had been able to show a good 'report.' Uncle Onesimus gave me some of the credit of this, and I had really looked after my young charge pretty well and seen that he didn't waste his time as completely as nine boys out of ten do at an English public school. The Easter holiday was a reward for both of us, for Uncle Onesimus laid himself out to make us enjoy ourselves thoroughly. Every day he found something for us to see: he had evidently studied up the guide-books to London and laid his plans beforehand. Then there were the theatres—how I enjoyed them then! And we always had the best seats procurable, and Uncle Onesimus would look round and say between the acts:

'Do you like this piece? Are you comfortable? Or would you like to go somewhere else?'

And the dinners too!—we visited all the best restaurants in London. Uncle Onesimus would send his valet round to secure a good table, and I remember the air of *empressement* with which we were always received. The head waiter would usher us to our seats with the most obsequious politeness, and listen to Uncle Onesimus's orders with a deferential attention wonderful to see. And every now and then during the dinner Uncle Onesimus would gleam at us through his gold-rimmed spectacles and say:

'Do you like what you are having? Are you comfortable?

One or two incidents stand out with especial distinctness. Clayton had been asked where he would like to go, and had suggested the Christy Minstrels. We went there in due course, and the boy was delighted with the singing and dances, and with the venerable jokes of 'Mr. Johnson.' Glancing at Uncle Onesimus, I saw that he was looking on with an aspect of settled and unmoved gravity which was quite unusual with him. Clayton saw it too, and was surprised. He glanced once or twice dubiously at the old man's face; then an idea struck him.

‘Oh, Uncle Onesimus,’ he cried out, ‘I’m sure you don’t like this. I’m *so* sorry I came here. Shall we go away directly? I would like to!’

Uncle Onesimus beamed for a moment tenderly on his little friend.

‘Why no, Harry,’ he said, ‘we may as well see it out.’

Before the performance was over Clayton was laughing as merrily as ever, and Uncle Onesimus smiled responsively, but as we were going out he said:

‘They are not really men of colour, those performers; they only pretend to be. Not the real thing, you know, Mr. Baywick.’ And after Clayton had gone to bed, Uncle Onesimus talked with me for some time about the negro race.

‘There is a coloured University in the States,’ he said. ‘And they have some mighty smart students—B.A.’s, you know, some of them.’

And he looked at me a little doubtfully. Then he mentioned the name of Douglass, and of some other dusky notability whom I forget.

The other incident, which made a still deeper impression on me, took place in the Albert Hall. One day we had casually dropped in there for a few minutes to have a look at the huge empty building, and Uncle Onesimus began giving us some details of the great organ. He had all the figures at his fingers’ ends, how many rows of pipes, how much weight of metal, and so on.

Clayton’s young imagination was fired with the sense of the colossal, and he cried out: ‘Oh, I say, I should like to hear some one play it with all his might.’

I don’t know how Uncle Onesimus managed it, but when he, on some pretext, took us back to the Hall two days later there was some one in the organ-loft looking out for us, and in a moment or two the mighty instrument was in full operation. From what I can remember of the first piece, I think it must have been the overture to ‘Der Freischütz;’ I know I liked it very much, and so did Clayton. Afterwards came some march, and then—I presume out of compliment to Uncle Onesimus—the organist gave a sort of fantasia of American melodies. Perhaps these proved a trivial theme for so potent an instrument, but the effect on Uncle Onesimus was very striking. He followed the music silently, and seemed to forget us entirely. By-and-by there came a plaintive melody, and, looking at Uncle Onesimus, I saw the tears were rolling down his cheeks. Half to himself, half to us, he sang:

'Way down upon the Swanee river,
  Far, far away;
There's where my heart is turning ever,
  There's where the old folks stay.
All the world is sad and dreary,
  Everywhere I roam;
Oh, darkeys, how my heart grows weary,
  Far from the old folks at home.

After a while the music took a martial tone. Uncle Onesimus sprang to his feet and paced up and down in growing excitement, beating time vehemently with his gold-headed cane while the organ pealed forth thunderous chords. He was like a man transfigured, and we gazed at him for a few seconds in astonishment till he burst into speech:

'Dey was poor slaves—poor black slaves, crushed beneath the cruel masters, and no one helped them. But at last the time came—the fulness of times, and the angel of the Lord blew his trumpet, and dey was free! De poor slaves was free! Listen to it! "Tramp, tramp, tramp, the boys are marching!" Can't yo' see them, see their blue coats! Can't yo' just hear the tread of their feet? Can't yo' see the waving of the flags? It is the army of freedom—the army of the Lord's deliverance! Listen again:

John Brown's body lies mouldering in the grave,
  But his soul is marching on.'

The organ ceased and the old man sank down in a chair and covered his face with his hands. Soon the majesty of the Hallelujah Chorus was quivering through the air, but he sat still, silent, bent forward with covered face, and it was not till we were some distance from the building that he recovered his usual cheerful and benign demeanour. This was, I think, the only time when I could catch more than the faintest signs of the negro in his manner of speaking. Ordinarily he had a pretty strong American accent, but he had somehow conquered the difficulties which the African has in speaking the white man's tongue. That evening Uncle Onesimus talked to me a great deal of the great war. I heard the names of Chattanooga and Chancellorsville and the crowning victory of Gettysburg.

'Harry's father was through a good deal of it,' he said. 'It was queer the way he came to go out. He was in his club one day, just when the war broke out, along with a lot more officers;

they were all saying then that the South was sure to win, that the South were gentlemen and the North all shopkeepers, and he stood up for the North. But he couldn't talk, he never could—he was always very quiet was Harry's father; but he just went home and sold out of the army, and went over to America. He was wounded quite early in the war, and he never quite got over it. But he was the best man that ever lived, was Harry's father; I knew him out there.'

When that pleasant holiday was over, I didn't see much of Clayton for a long time. I went to Oxford and he remained at school, and we only met occasionally. But when I said farewell to Oxford and began eating my dinners at the Middle Temple, I found that Uncle Onesimus had left New York and installed himself in London. Paragraphs about his movements came up now and then in the papers, and a biographical notice with a half-page portrait appeared in one of the religious weeklies. It seemed he had been a slave, but had escaped to Canada. During the war he offered himself as a volunteer. His services were apparently not accepted, and he fitted out at his own expense a kind of ambulance waggon and followed first Halleck and then Grant. When the war was over he established himself in the state of Delaware and took to market gardening. Tomatoes laid the first foundation of his fortune, and lucky speculation in building lots made him almost a millionaire.

The journalistic interest in Uncle Onesimus was due to his having been got at by philanthropic societies. His name began to figure heavily in subscription lists, and he appeared on platforms. I remember seeing him at Exeter Hall wedged in between an evangelical peer and a colonial bishop.

When I called on him in the flat he had taken and elaborately furnished, I found a library table covered with Reports of Annual Meetings and lists of subscribers to all sorts of constitutions and societies.

It was about Clayton, however, that the old man wanted to talk. He affected to speak a little doubtfully of him at first, and wanted my opinion of his character.

'He's very quick and intelligent,' I said. 'He has plenty of ability. He can do almost anything if he gives his mind to it. And then everybody likes him. I don't think there was any boy in the school more popular than he was.'

I spoke warmly of my young friend, and Uncle Onesimus beamed with delight and opened his whole heart to me.

'Mark my words,' he said, 'that boy'll be a great man some day, and you'll live to see it, if I don't.'

He unlocked a drawer and showed me its contents. There were all Clayton's letters, beginning with the first. He chuckled over some of its childish phrases—repeated references to a box of figs amused him immensely. Then he paraded before me all the boy's school-reports, pointing with triumphant finger to the 'Good' and the 'V. Good,' which indicated satisfaction with Clayton's progress in classics.

'Why, he can read Greek just as easy as the newspaper,' the old man said radiantly. 'There's nothing that boy can't do if he gives his mind to it.'

Clayton was at this time at Cambridge. He had won a small open scholarship at entrance, and the old man referred to this enthusiastically.

'He beat them all!' he said, rubbing his hands with delight. 'There were seven competitors, but he beat them all! Ah, you and I know what he is, don't we, Mr. Baywick?'

When I met Clayton next—it was at the beginning of the Long—I saw that he had developed into something of a dandy—or rather into that interesting class of adolescent which combines the qualities of the dandy and the prig. He passed a good many supercilious judgments on matters artistic and literary, but had also some strong admirations and was very decided in both sets of views. And after a good deal of such talk he found an opportunity to wonder that I was so careless about the fit of my clothes. He offered to recommend me to Poole, and named with deep respect a famous hatter and a fashionable maker of shirts. The conversation shifted round to Uncle Onesimus, and Clayton spoke warmly of the old man.

'He's very good to me,' he said, 'pays my bills every now and then out of his own pocket, you know, when I overstep my allowance.'

The last word stirred my curiosity.

'Well,' Clayton responded, 'I don't exactly know how I stand financially. Uncle Onesimus is my guardian, it seems. My father left him sole executor. I suppose we shall have a clearing up of accounts some time.'

During the rest of Clayton's residence at Cambridge I heard a good deal about him from Uncle Onesimus. The old man would sometimes come round to my chambers to give me some news of his favourite, or to show me a letter he had received. These letters were the delight of his heart. He pointed out references to some of Clayton's distinguished friends, Lord Rippingdon and the eldest son of a famous painter.

'He mixes with the best,' the old man said triumphantly.

His pride in his young friend swelled beyond bounds when a number of the 'Granta' contained some lines of verse which Clayton had produced. Twelve lines of passable poetry, but Uncle Onesimus saw in them the promise of a new star in the firmament.

'Very likely it'll be poetry he'll take to,' he said, 'very likely, though when he goes about so much with Lord Rippingdon I think it'll be politics, and then perhaps knowing Sir Everard and being such a friend to his son will make him turn to painting. But he shall choose just what he likes, and he sha'n't be hampered by want of money at the start.'

I hadn't such a high opinion as Uncle Onesimus had of Clayton's performance in the 'Granta'—perhaps because I thought I could have made better verses myself—but I managed to praise them pretty liberally and without any evident insincerity. This encouraged Uncle Onesimus to open his heart still further, and he took from his pocket-book a sheet of note-paper. It contained some verses written by Clayton many years before when he was first at school to commemorate a birthday of the old man. They formed an acrostic on the name 'Onesimus' and were very fair verses for a boy of twelve. Uncle Onesimus gazed at them fondly.

'If he takes to poetry,' he said, 'and becomes a great poet, people will be glad enough to see the first verses he ever wrote. And they'll wonder who "Onesimus" was. The name isn't common.'

Some time after this, calling on Uncle Onesimus I found him hard at work on all the red library of Baedeker with a big map of Europe spread out before him.

'I am making out a plan for a tour,' he said. 'Harry and I are going to spend about a year travelling, and we mean to see a great deal. You know,' he went on more slowly, 'I haven't seen so much of the boy lately. It wouldn't do for me to go down to Cambridge. I should interrupt his studies, and then there are the reading parties in the summer. But we've fixed it up between us that by-and-by when he leaves Cambridge we're to have a long holiday together, and I'm going to show him Europe.'

This was more than a year beforehand, but the old man began to devote a great deal of time to looking up routes and studying all the *Merkwürdigkeiten* of foreign cities. He spoke on the subject to me now and then, as the skeleton plan got made out and the outline began to be filled in.

'It's not easy,' he said once, 'to make everything fit in just right. Perhaps we shall be nearer two years than one, as we shall want to see everything.'

Clayton alluded to the tour himself on a chance visit he paid me.

'I think it won't be bad,' he said. 'You know,' he added, 'some men wouldn't like trotting round with a negro. But I'm quite above these prejudices. Only where other people are concerned, you know, one has to be a bit careful. It wouldn't have done to have had him at our reading parties. He wouldn't have been comfortable.'

'Are you quite comfortable?' I quoted, recalling our first holiday with Uncle Onesimus.

Clayton laughed at the reminiscence.

'We did enjoy ourselves then,' he said; 'at least I did. The old man has been very good to me all along. But do you know I can't get any proper accounts out of him. He always puts me off. And what makes it rather queer is that I haven't a single relation in the world that I know. My father quarrelled with his family, or they did with him, and so I've never seen any of them.'

We fell to talking of the examinations, then not far off, and Clayton confessed that he hadn't worked very hard at Cambridge and that the reading parties hadn't amounted to much.

'They were too jolly to do much work in, you know,' he said. 'I must try and get a first somehow,' he added, 'or Uncle Onesimus will be disappointed. I think he expects to see me somewhere near the top of the list.'

Clayton's tone was very confident, but when the classical tripos list was published, he was in the second class and not too near the top. Uncle Onesimus, however, did not show any signs of disappointment. Perhaps he was consoled by a speech which his favourite had made at a recent debate in the Union, and which was something of a success.

'Perhaps it'll be politics after all,' the old man said; 'especially as he and Lord Rippingdon are such friends. I think Lord Rippingdon wants to come with us on our tour. I don't think

Harry exactly knows how to refuse him, though he says he'll put him off if he can.'

I inquired when they would leave England.

'Pretty soon,' the old man said, 'but we'll see you again. We shall have a set-off dinner, a farewell dinner, you know, and you shall come and no one else.'

A month or two passed, and I got no invitation from Uncle Onesimus. I supposed he had forgotten me, and was quite surprised to get a call from him towards the end of September.

'Why, Uncle Onesimus!' I said, 'I thought you were abroad. According to the plan you ought to be just getting to the Italian Lakes.'

The old man shook his head and smiled rather feebly.

'No,' he said, 'I didn't go. The young people will get on better without me. They don't want an old black nigger round with them everywhere.'

His disappointment, though he tried to hide it, was evident in his tones. I essayed some clumsy consolation.

'Perhaps,' I said, 'Clayton thought you mightn't like Lord Rippingdon; you don't know him very well, and——'

'Well,' he said, 'perhaps that's so. I don't believe but what Harry himself would have been pleased to have me along. . . . Why,' he broke off suddenly, 'there isn't a place I couldn't have told him something about!'

By-and-by I learned the real object of the old man's visit. Clayton had written only twice, and more than a fortnight had elapsed since the receipt of the last letter.

'I am afraid something may have happened to the boy,' he said, 'and perhaps he don't like to write, or perhaps he can't.'

After a little more circumlocution, he brought out his proposal, which was that I should take a trip abroad at his expense, and see if I could send any news of the two.

'Of course,' the old man said, 'you wouldn't say anything about me. You'll meet them quite by accident. Just as if you were making a trip and were quite surprised to see them. But they'll tell you what they've been doing and where they're going to next.'

I made some demur about accepting this offer, but the old man's eagerness and the remembrance of a picture I had once seen of the lower end of Lago Maggiore soon removed my scruples.

Uncle Onesimus took out of his pocket a portly roll of banknotes, and mentioned the 11 A.M. train from Holborn Viaduct.

'You can get a sleeping-car through to Bâle,' he said.

I agreed to this too, and said I would start packing at once, whereat Uncle Onesimus wrung my hand and turned to go. He stopped at the door, however, and told me that as soon as I wanted more money I was to let him know. I had counted the notes and said that I was sure I should bring half of them back again, but the old man still hesitated, with his hand on the knob of the door. At last he said:

'There's just one thing more, Mr. Baywick. Harry's always been a good boy. He's never been wild, as far as I know. But you know young men will be young men, and maybe he'll get mixed up in some foolishness. I don't want to hear anything of it, only just to know that he is in no trouble—that's all.'

I found Clayton and his friend at Stresa. They complained of the heat, and spent a great part of their time in playing billiards. They intended to see Venice and perhaps Florence, but as soon as the hunting season commenced they were going back to England. Clayton had promised to stay for a few weeks at Conover Towers, the country seat of the Earl of Leominster, Lord Rippingdon's father.

I took this news back to Uncle Onesimus, who seemed not at all displeased.

'It'll be politics,' he said; 'you'll see!'

For Lord Leominster had once had a seat in the Cabinet.

He pressed me for details of what we had done during the few days I had stayed with the two, and pointed out triumphantly how we had missed seeing things which we ought to have seen. I told him that once, when we were boating on Lake Como, Clayton had leaned over to me and said, in a low voice, 'Uncle Onesimus would enjoy this.'

This delighted him immensely.

'The boy doesn't forget me,' he said. 'We'll take our trip together still, only we'll do it in sections.'

I saw Clayton on his return to England. He was in most boisterous spirits at the prospect of hunting with the East Sandshire hounds. Uncle Onesimus had bought him a splendid hunter, so that he wouldn't be altogether dependent on the Conover stables.

About Christmas I saw him again, considerably changed. His cheerfulness was gone, and his youthful cynicism; he was moody and fitful, spoke little, and sighed a great deal.

I soon found out the reason of the transformation. He was in love. When once this great confession was made, he could talk of nothing but of Lady Blanche, who was Lord Rippingdon's sister. She was so clever and brilliant, and so very, very beautiful. They had read poetry together, and criticised contemporary fiction. They had ridden together. Lady Blanche followed the hounds sometimes, and there was one day when they both got thrown out and had a long ride home side by side. They had danced together, and there was an evening when they had sat out together, though Lady Blanche's card was full and two promised partners were dreadfully disappointed. Lord Rippingdon didn't think half enough of his sister, which was perhaps to be accounted for by the principle of primogeniture and the law of entail.

Clayton's variations on the theme of Lady Blanche were all *allegro*, but the thought of Lord Leominster sent a terribly jarring note athwart the heavenly harmonies. Clayton admitted that he was a little afraid of the Earl, but he meant to screw up his courage, and he named a day when the Earl would be in town.

Some days after that important date he called at my chambers in the most absolute dejection.

'It's all up with me,' he said, after he had wrung my hand fervently. 'I'm the most miserable man in existence. And I've been an awful fool all along—simply an awful fool.'

He groaned and shook his head, looking the picture of abject misery.

'Do you know,' he said at last sharply, 'that I'm a beggar—an absolute beggar? And I always thought my father left me well off. But it seems that when he died there was just about 50*l.* left after paying his debts. It's Uncle Onesimus who has done everything for me all along. He sent me to school and to Cambridge, and he's given me everything. I've been just a pauper living on charity, though I never knew it; and a miserable beggar like me goes and proposes for the hand of Lady Blanche Pembridge!'

'Ah!' I said, 'you've spoken to Lord Leominster?'

'Yes,' he said, 'that's how it all came out. And I find that I am "entirely dependent on the caprice of an old man"—that's the way Lord Leominster puts it. And I'm not to go to the house any more, not to see her again, not to write to her.'

He relapsed into absolute incoherence, and then into silence. I murmured sympathy.

'Uncle Onesimus has treated me very badly,' he broke out again, 'in keeping this all in the background. I know he's been very good to me, but it's all ended in making me the most wretched man alive. If I had known I was poor I might have done something by now!'

He passed an hour in this way, alternately sighing and raving. At one moment he declared that life was over so far as he was concerned, that there was nothing now worth living for; in the next he talked of building up a sudden fortune in some way that he would find out by-and-by.

'How much do they give the editor of the *Times*?' he asked once, and I could hardly help smiling at the evident connection of ideas.

He was in the midst of another outburst against gods and men when Uncle Onesimus knocked at the door. Clayton turned away from him and pretended to bury himself in a book. But the old man was not offended by his fit of sulkiness and sat down by his side.

'Harry,' he said, 'you've kept away from Uncle Onesimus these last few days, and perhaps you're angry with him. That isn't right, Harry. Didn't you think that perhaps the old man who'd known you so long and looked after you ever since that night he saw you asleep in your little bed—didn't you think that perhaps he'd see you through this trouble? Perhaps you didn't know how much he could do.'

Clayton turned a searching gaze on Uncle Onesimus.

'Why, Harry,' the old man went on, 'you've been keeping away from good news. It's all fixed up now as right as anything. Uncle Onesimus has seen the great lord and had a long talk—a very long talk. And then he saw him again and some lawyers too—some lawyers, Harry, and now it's all fixed up right. If there's some one you want to see badly, you can go round to her house to-morrow and her papa will be pleased to see you again, and perhaps she'll be pleased as well.'

Clayton's sudden joy was as vehement as his depression had been. He seized both the old man's hands and vowed everlasting gratitude. The thought that perhaps a letter from Lady Blanche might be waiting at his rooms took him off in a great hurry. Uncle Onesimus lingered for a moment or two.

'These fine lords you have over here know how to drive a hard bargain,' he said, which set me wondering.

I caught a glimpse of Clayton a week or two later and got him to come round to my chambers, where he stopped till the small hours. He tried hard not to talk of Lady Blanche, but without much success. I learned that Uncle Onesimus's deed of gift was complete, and was told the figures of Clayton's income, and how much had been settled on his wife. The sum was considerable.

'I didn't think Uncle Onesimus was rich enough to spare so much,' Clayton said. 'Isn't it awfully good of him? Dear old Uncle Onesimus!'

The happy lovers were married at the close of the London season. The wedding was like most other fashionable weddings, and was reported fully in the ladies' papers, where justice was done to everything—from the bride's dress, a miracle of art, to the brooches, the 'gift of the bridegroom,' which helped to adorn the bridesmaids.

The 'breakfast' was spread at Lord Leominster's, and was a highly imposing function. Lady Blanche looked very pretty in her wedding dress, and wearing in her hair a tiara of diamonds, which was the present of Uncle Onesimus. The old man beamed benevolence on the happy pair. Lord Leominster proposed his health before we separated, and made quite a speech in his best parliamentary style, while the subject of his praises looked grave. The toast was drunk with enthusiasm, and then Clayton proposed three cheers for Uncle Onesimus. We cheered and lifted our glasses again, and the bride smiled her sweetest and clapped her little hands vigorously, and the old man had his brief moment of triumph and happiness.

When the bride rose to change her dress, the bishop who had conducted the ceremony tried to interest Uncle Onesimus in some new benevolent scheme. But no cheque was forthcoming, and the bishop was a little disappointed.

'I hope you're not giving up philanthropy, Mr. Potts,' he said in a half-jocular tone. Uncle Onesimus bowed only.

When the happy pair had driven off, Uncle Onesimus and I walked away together. He had become very low-spirited.

'Harry and I'll never take our trip together now,' he said, 'never!'

A little later he added:

'Seems to me that I shall be a bit lonesome without the boy.

Perhaps I'll look in and see you sometimes in the evening, Mr. Baywick.'

But I was leaving England, and I told Uncle Onesimus so.

. . . .

I was away from my native land for nearly three years. During that time events which I need not mention here had brought my name into the newspapers, and on my return to London I found myself a society lion. Lady Blanche Clayton was naturally one of the first to utilise me in that capacity, and my presence helped on more than one occasion to fill the drawing-rooms in Park Lane which she presided over. Besides these great occasions I dined with the Claytons as often as my other engagements would permit, and talked over our schoolboy days with my host. One day I inquired after Uncle Onesimus, and Lady Blanche informed me that she believed he had gone back to America.

'I expect our variable climate didn't suit him,' she said.

Clayton looked a little confused as this statement was made, and when we were alone he came back to the subject.

'It may seem rather strange,' he said, 'but I don't really know what has become of the dear old man. The fact is, Lady Blanche didn't take kindly to him and didn't like his calling here. And I am afraid that he got a "not at home" once or twice. And the last time he had seen me go in not long before him—we had passed him in fact driving—and he felt very much hurt. He went down the steps crying, it seems. I heard about it afterwards. It was an awful shame, you know, and I would have liked to call on him, but I didn't know exactly where he lived, and then one's time is so dreadfully filled up. But I've felt very bad about it several times since.'

I felt a little uneasy about the old man, and all the more when I heard that the furniture of his flat had been sold by auction directly after the wedding. I made some inquiries, but could learn nothing. Uncle Onesimus had disappeared and left no trace. I told Clayton what I had done and the negative result one day when five o'clock had taken me to taste Lady Blanche's tea.

'Oh, he's gone to America,' that lady said confidently, 'and he's much better there, poor dear man.'

Just then a letter was brought in for Clayton, who read it and seemed disturbed.

'It is from Uncle Onesimus,' he said. 'And he's ill, very ill, I am afraid. He wants me. I must go and see him.'

'Remember you have to take me out to dinner,' Lady Blanche said.

The address from which Uncle Onesimus had sent his one line of summons was Denmark Street, Finsbury Park. Appealed to by Lady Blanche, I had to say that Clayton's going might endanger the dinner.

'It is nearly six,' I remarked, 'and Finsbury Park is a long way off. And if Uncle Onesimus were really very ill you might not like to come away at once.'

'Just so,' said Lady Blanche; 'it's quite clear you can't go now.'

I relieved Clayton's scruples by offering to go myself, and to let him know if the old man's illness was at all serious.

'But how does he come to be living at Finsbury Park?' Clayton asked. To which neither Lady Blanche nor I replied, though I think we both guessed why.

At any rate I was not very much surprised to find that Denmark Street was a very poor sort of thoroughfare, and that the room in which Uncle Onesimus was lying was very poorly and scantily furnished. But I was surprised and immeasurably saddened to see how very ill the old man was. The doctor happened to be making his call, but I didn't need his authority to tell me that my poor old friend had only a few hours to live. He was then asleep, and a professional nurse sat at the bedside.

'She's only just come,' the doctor explained. 'I got her on my own responsibility. But he has some wealthy friends, it seems—he wrote to somebody in Park Lane, I suppose he's a sort of *protégé* of theirs. I suppose I did right?' he said interrogatively.

'Quite right,' I said, and as he was leaving I asked him to forward a telegram to Clayton. I took my seat at the head of the bed opposite the nurse and sat there waiting till the old man should wake. This happened in about an hour, and at first he took me for Clayton.

'Harry, dear boy,' he said.

I told him that Clayton would soon come, very soon. He nodded feebly.

'Yes, he'll come,' he said. 'Harry'll come. I haven't seen him for so long, and the door was shut in my face. But it wasn't Harry's fault.'

He closed his eyes wearily, and soon it was clear his mind was wandering. He was back in the scenes of his youth, babbling of scattered reminiscences to which I had no key.

Now and then he murmured scraps of song. One of them I had heard before—

> All the world is sad and dreary,
> Everywhere I roam;
> Oh, darkeys, how my heart grows weary,
> Far from the old folks at home.

Waking about midnight, he saw that Clayton had taken my place. His face lighted up at sight of his 'dear boy,' but he seemed too weak to speak. After some time he said in his old manner, 'Are you pretty comfortable, Harry?'

Perhaps his mind had gone back to the past. He said nothing more, and his eyes soon closed again. Clayton's gaze wandered round the room and turned from the cheap furniture and dingy curtains to look inquiringly at me.

After a while he bent over to me and whispered:

'Was he really poor, do you think? Did he give me everything?'

I nodded gravely, and he turned to the nurse.

'He is sure to get better, isn't he?' he breathed hoarsely. The nurse shook her head.

'He's an old man,' she said in low tones, 'and he hasn't been looked after properly; he'll hardly live through the night.'

Our light whispering was enough to disturb the sleeper. He opened his eyes and fixed them intently on Clayton.

'Harry,' he said faintly, 'be a good man, like your father. . . . Uncle Onesimus can't help you any more, and he won't see. . . .'

The effort of speaking was too great; he relapsed into sleep, and for more than two hours we sat still listening to the feeble breathing which showed that the old man was still alive.

Suddenly he moved and half sat up in the bed with his eyes wide open.

'I can hear the drums!' he cried out. 'Dey's coming dis way! Listen!

> John Brown's body lies mouldering in the grave,
> But his soul is marching on.

Dey's going forth to de fight, de grand army, de army ob de Lord's deliverance!'

And he fell back and lay very still and quiet.

Clayton bent over the pillow.

'Uncle Onesimus,' he cried out, 'you must get better and you must come and live with us always. As soon as ever you can move you must come!'

But Uncle Onesimus was past all hearing.

. . . .

The old man had a funeral which astonished Denmark Street, Finsbury Park. And notices of his death appeared in the religious papers and put Societies and Associations in a state of expectancy. But they got no legacies. After the funeral a full-length portrait of the old man which had been relegated to some obscure corner in the house in Park Lane was brought down and given a position of honour in the drawing-room, where I fancy it often puzzled the curious. And once—it was about a year after the old man's death—I heard Lady Blanche directly questioned on the subject. Her answer was ready.

'That,' she said blandly, 'is the portrait of a negro whom Harry's father met in America. He was very fond of Harry, and Harry always called him Uncle Onesimus.'

'A faithful servant of the family,' the fair querist continued, scanning the portrait; 'the affectionate dependant, I understand?'

'Exactly,' Lady Blanche replied, and met my glance without wincing.

Her husband noticed that I overheard what had been said, and he alluded to it when we were alone.

'Lady Blanche's version of the story is rather a shame,' he said, 'but she's very sensitive about—about where our money came from, you know. And after all it makes no difference to dear old Uncle Onesimus now.'

'No,' I said, 'I suppose it makes no difference to Uncle Onesimus now.'

CASTLES IN THE AIR.

One of the curiosities of the New World, and one of its most perplexing curiosities, is the rock dwellings on the cañons of Colorado. Here in the face of limestone precipices are whole ranges of habitations at a great height, only to be reached by means of ladders or ropes from above.

No one knows when these singular dwellings were occupied, nor by whom.

We have become familiarised with those puzzling troglodyte habitations through illustrated papers in magazines, and through books published in America and circulating in England.

It has not occurred to any that within twenty-four hours of London are to be found precisely identical phenomena, just as curious and just as mysterious.

The entire region of the lower chalk in the ancient Périgord, and that of the Jura limestone in the old province of Quercy, and the sandstone of Lower Limousin are honeycombed with an incredible number of mysterious, unexplored, and to some extent inexplicable, remains of rock dwellers. The limestone crags on the banks of the Lot and the Dordogne, the chalk cliffs on the Vézère, rise to great heights—three hundred to five hundred feet—and whenever a softer bed has intervened between hard strata, there the rain and frost have scooped out much material, leaving ledges with overhanging roofs.

These have been occupied from a vastly remote period, even from the Glacial epoch, but we are not now going to speak of the natural caves and shelters, but of such as have been cut out by man, with windows and doors, with wells, silos, stables, bed-chambers, kitchens, banqueting-halls and guard-rooms.

The visitor whirls along the valley of the Lot or Vézère in the train, and notices natural caves and holes in the precipices which he assumes to be natural. But if he is walking, and pauses to examine the faces of the cliffs, he very soon becomes aware that the precipices at some time or another, especially such as face the sun, were alive with human occupants. He discerns square-cut windows, and if he has an opera-glass can discern within them the notches for bars whereby these windows were closed. High up in a sheer cliff he will see a hole with a pole athwart it, which has undoubtedly been there placed for hauling provisions up to such as were hid in this cave.

To reach these dwellings is no easy matter. They are accessible only by rope from above or by ladder from below. Indeed, in many cases two or more ladders must be tied together, or, better still, a peculiarly tall poplar tree be cut down and set against the face of the rock, and the door to these habitations is reached by a scramble up the poplar. But in other cases notches may be discerned, cut in the face of the rock, to receive the fingers and toes, precisely as in Colorado. These, however, are so worn by the weather that they can hardly be used at present, unless deepened with a pickaxe. To a cliff-dwelling called Cazelles, on the road from Tayac to Sarlat, this was the method of ascent. As boys frequently attempted the scramble, their fathers have cut away the notches, lest accidents should happen, and now the series of chambers can be reached only by a ladder.

When by some means or other the terrace has been reached where these habitations are, then it is found that the rock has been burrowed into so as to form a series of chambers, that received light from windows cut in the thin face of rock which was allowed to remain. Or else where the friable bed had been hollowed out to a considerable depth—sometimes as much as forty feet—by atmospheric influence, walls have been run up to divide the space into chambers, separated by doors, and the face has been closed as well by walls with windows in them. The walls have in many cases, if not most, been broken down, but the foundations remain, and in the rock may still be seen the holes in which the door hinged and turned. Store chambers have been excavated, and the marks of the tools on the rock are everywhere discernible. These store chambers were frequently closed by wooden divisions, and the grooves for the planks and the sockets for the sustaining beams remain.

In the sandstone habitations very generally the faces of the caves were not walled but boarded. There can be no doubt about this, the traces are distinct.

The bedrooms can be always made out, as the beds were cut in the rock, and much resemble the *arcosolia* in the Roman Catacombs. Where the bed was high above the floor, a notch was cut in the rock for the foot to rest in, to assist in the ascent into the place of repose. There were cupboards of all sizes in the rock chambers, and grooves remain for the shelves and also for the doors which closed them.

One interesting feature, moreover, in these rock habitations is the elaborate pains taken to keep them dry. The rock itself, being of hard chalk or limestone, is dry enough, but after cold weather, when there comes up a warm west wind from the Atlantic, a film of moisture forms on the rock, and trickles down or drops. This was very unpleasant to the dwellers in the caves, therefore they grooved their walls and cut channels over them at an incline leading to receptacles for the condensed water, scooped out of the living rock. A notch allowed these when brimming to overflow into a little channel cut in the floor, which conveyed the tiny rill to the edge of the precipice. In many places, where every other trace of human occupation has disappeared, these precautions against wet remain to attest that the cave shelters were once tenanted by human beings.

The feasting rooms can also quite well be made out by the benches cut in the rock at a suitable level for seats. The fireplace is less easily ascertained, as the fire destroyed the rock wherever it reached it. Nevertheless some fireplaces with chimneys remain, and in others the discolouration and decomposition of the rock shows where the fires have been. The ovens are usually constructed of wall stones, and in many cases remain in a ruinous condition.

In more than one instance a well has been bored in the rock to a great depth, so that those living in the cliff colony were independent of the springs at the feet of the precipices. In such cases the holes in which the windlass worked for drawing up the water can almost always be made out.

In one of these rock habitations, called La Roque de Tayac, that overhangs the Vézère, a path cut in the cliff leads to a chasm, purposely made, in face of a yawning cavern. Marks in the rock show that a drawbridge formerly crossed this gap, deliberately cut in face of the cave, to a ledge beyond, by means of which the grotto is entered. When entered it is found to be a great stable for horses or cows. There are nineteen stalls cut in the rock with mangers, and even the holes remain through which were passed the halters that attached the beasts. In the floor of this stable is a well, and immediately above the well the rock is cut through to an upper storey. Through a second opening in the roof of this cave stable, by means of a ladder this upper storey is reached, when it is found to have been that in which the men lived whose cattle were in the dwelling below. They could draw water for the beasts in the stable or for themselves through the hole cut in the stable roof.

A natural ledge extends from this range of dwellings for some distance along the face of the cliff. It is so narrow that it can only be walked along by one who has a steady head. After continuing some distance, it is seen that the rock has been cut away for a space of fifteen feet, beyond which the ledge continues again. This was done to prevent an enemy approaching by this shelf. For the convenience of those occupying the rock the ledge was artificially widened by a wooden floor being placed over it; the marks of the beams let into the rock remain, as well as the indications of the supports on the narrow edge of the terrace. This ledge or terrace has not a perpendicular face, but overhangs about forty feet.

The little river Beune, that flows into the Vézère at Les Eyzies, is so charged with lime that it encrusts the roots of the water plants that occupy its marshy bed, and gradually kills them. Thereupon a fresh layer of vegetable growth forms above the petrified bed. This has now been arrested by deep drains, but it continued as a regular process from year to year till recently. The whole river valley from source to mouth is, and was still more so, a vast morass, swarming with mosquitoes. The valley is inclosed within precipitous cliffs, and the plateau on both sides is forest land. No road led up the valley till within four years, and the valley was almost inaccessible. Now it has been opened out, and reveals itself to have swarmed at one time with inhabitants who scooped out houses for themselves in the cliffs on both sides. Those who lived there were safe as they could be nowhere else. If assailed from the plateaux above, they could escape over the morass, and defy their enemies from the rock fastnesses on the other side of the marsh, across which they alone could thread their way. Here may be found the stables and the remains of solitary habitations and of whole communities, in great numbers.

A mediæval castle occupies a promontory between the Beune and a little tributary rill.

The rock on which the thirteenth-century towers rise is honeycombed with dwellings. A very extensive group under it consisted of stables and bed-chambers and hall on one level, reached only by a door bored through a projecting buttress of rock, and then still further protected by the ledge being cut away and crossed by a fall bridge. Here also, as at La Roque de Tayac, no one could traverse the bridge without being exposed to the weapons of those occupying the cave. Moreover a guard-room has been deliberately scooped out of the rock, for one sentinel to command the bridge, with access from the rock dwelling in the rear, and with windows by means of which he could thrust down any unwelcome visitor who ventured across.

It is interesting at this place, Commarque, to compare the stone of the ruined castle with the rock of the cave dwellings. The former looks as of yesterday. Moreover, in the side glen the face of the cliff is grooved and scooped out, and scrabbled all over with the marks of men's hands making homes for themselves in the living rock, or against it; and here are the quarries whence was raised the stone of which the mediæval castle was built. In quarrying the building stone many of the earlier habitations seem to have been destroyed.

The ruins of Commarque have been purchased by the Belgian Prince de Croye, and he is now engaged in the restoration of the castle, and in making roads by which it can be reached through the forests and over the rocks. It is to be hoped that in the necessary excavations some evidence may be obtained which will give a clue to *who* it was who occupied these puzzling, mysterious habitations.

Till the prince brought workmen to the spot, the head streams of the Beune were an absolute solitude, where neither man nor beast was to be seen.

There is a further evidence of antiquity in the dwellings at Commarque. The bed of the valley has risen to such an extent, owing to the gradual upheaval of the bottom through petrifaction of the water plants and moss, that only the crown of the caves can be seen, and in some cases the beds are level with the bog plants. At least five feet, probably a great deal more, has been slowly built up by incrustation since these habitations were first excavated. It is hardly conceivable that this can have been done in three or four hundred years.

At the place called Les Eyzies, one very famous among prehistoric antiquaries for its deposits of the reindeer period, and of the men who hunted them and the mammoth, in the face of a cliff facing north is a range of overhanging ledges, high up, 270 feet above the level of the valley, and the cliff rises about 100 feet above. This is locally called the Castle and Church of the Great Guillem. Children are still frightened by their nurses with the name of Le Gros Guillem, who is said to carry off and eat little children.

A steep scramble up short grass and rubble leads to this cliff, and here remains of a gateway in masonry give access to the rock, up which ascent is made by steps in this rock. This, however, is not for more than a dozen feet, and then a terrace is reached under several overhanging ledges of rock, forming conchoidal chambers, some of which have been separated from each other by masonry, and the whole of which was formerly faced up with walls that have now completely disappeared. An upper storey of chambers cut out in the rock is at present utterly inaccessible, and it is not easy to see how it ever was reached except by a balcony thrust from the walled-up face over the precipice, from which balcony a ladder planted on it would admit to the door above. The first of the shell-shaped chambers has in it five beds cut in the rock: this is called the Castle. The next has crosses cut in the floor: for what object is inconceivable. This, of course, is L'Eglise. A third chamber has in it a bench and stalls cut in the rock, and a well-like hole, perhaps natural, but trimmed round the edges leading down to water. Farther on is a tunnel entering the mountain in a winding course, with a vessel like a holy-water stoup at the entrance, cut out of the rock, which was probably a collecting hole for water condensed on the rock.

No records of this habitation or castle remain. It is absolutely unmentioned in mediæval history; and yet, almost certainly, it was inhabited during the Hundred Years' War.

On the banks of the Lot, below where the Célé enters it, the river is commanded by a huge buttress of the limestone plateau above, that stands forward and plunges its feet into the clear river. This rock is fissured on its upper face, but the rent does not extend through it. The opening, which is up-stream, is walled up and battlemented, with door and windows. Within is a huge wedge-shaped vault with side-chambers like guard-rooms, all natural. In the floors of these have been found the remains of the reindeer, cave lion, mammoth, and the tools of contemporary man, of flint and bone. But the walls are undoubtedly mediæval, and the name of the place is La Défilée des Anglais. The story goes that it was held by a band of Free Companions, sold to the English, and that they commanded all communication along the river from this point. A road carried through a tunnel has been blasted athwart the rock beneath this castle in the air.

In the Célé valley above are numerous rock habitations more or less artificial, and mostly with their walls filling up the natural openings, and the natural caves artificially enlarged. A most singular castle in the air is that of Brengues. Here a terrace about 250 feet above the river was blocked at both ends by a mediæval gateway. One remains; the other has been destroyed. A miller wished to reconstruct his mill below in the valley, and the simplest way of getting stones was to destroy the gateway and roll down the hewn blocks.

Midway between these gates is the Château des Anglais suspended like a swallow's nest under the eaves of an overhanging cliff, which serves as roof to it. It is tolerably perfect, for the very good reason that no one can get at it to pull it to pieces. Ladders must be constructed against the rock, cramped to it, to enable anyone to mount to the door. It cannot be reached from above, as the rock overhangs too much for that.

On the same river, a little lower, is a much more extensive castle in the air, consisting of a series of caverns helped out with walls. This is believed to have been one of the last refuges of Duke Waifre of Aquitaine in the middle of the eighth century. Pepin hunted him from place to place. Dislodged from his rocky castle at Brengues, Waifre escaped into Périgord, and hid among the chalk lurking holes, where it was impossible for him to be caught. Pepin knew this, and he offered bribes to his servants. Corrupted by these, some of them assassinated him when he was asleep on the night of June 2, 768. Pepin despoiled the body of the gold bracelets adorned with pendant gems which the unfortunate duke had been accustomed to wear, and gave them to the Abbey of St. Denis, where they remained for centuries, and were called 'the pears of Waifre.' The body of the duke was transferred to Limoges, and his tomb is under the present cathedral, and is marked by a curious piece of carving and an inscription let into the wall of the crypt that contains it.

There can exist no doubt whatever that many of these rock habitations were converted into strongholds by the Free Companies that terrorised the country during the English domination; but it is singular how few of them are mentioned by the historians of the period by name as such.

There is one, still called the Castle of the English, which occupies an impregnable position in the face of the cliff in the great *cirque* of Autoire, which was held by the freebooter Perducat d'Albret, who, however, served the English and the French alike, or rather he served himself first, and sold his sword alternately to the English and to the French. Nevertheless, the castles held by these French freebooters are all attributed to the English, as, indeed, is every mysterious and daring work of which the ruins remain through the country. Autoire is a superb limestone cirque facing north, and opening into the broad plain of the Dordogne. The cliffs rise 400 feet from the river bottom, and the river shoots over them into the lap of the great basin in a fall of which the Alps need not be ashamed. From the precipices all round issue streams that have travelled underground, and in frosty weather they steam as if they were boiling. As they rain down the white cliffs they nourish mighty beds of luxuriant maidenhair fern.

More than halfway up the side of this vast cauldron is the castle. It is built on a ledge only twelve feet wide, three of which are taken up by the castle wall. There is space only for a circular tower, and then for a cordon of chambers seventy feet long. Outside the round tower are the oven and remains of domestic buildings.

In the event of the garrison of this structural castle being hard pressed, two means of escape were reserved. By climbing like a cat up the face of the precipice with hands and toes, a narrow ledge hardly three feet wide is reached, which gives access to chambers scooped in the rock.

The other means of escape was by running along the ledge on which the castle is built, up the side of the cauldron to a point where formerly a tall tree grew out of the rock. Tradition says that the garrison were able to escape that way to the plateau above. They ran like squirrels up the tree, and leaped from a bough into an ivy bush that clung to the rock, and from which they were able to ascend to the barren plain above.

It was from this castle at Autoire that Villandrando made a sudden swoop upon Figeac in 1372, and plundered it of treasure to the amount of 50,000 gold francs, and would not give up the town to the French king before he was promised and paid 120,000 more francs.

Perducat d'Albret was in England on the occasion of Wat Tyler's rebellion, and he armed and stood by the king. Richard, for his readiness, gave him the Castle of Caumont, where he died in 1382. Froissart has a good deal to say about him.

One very singular 'castle in the air' is that of La Roque Gageac on the Dordogne. It is built on a shelf in the face of an overhanging precipice, and was quite inaccessible till about three years ago, when it was reached by driving pegs into the face of the cliff, thus forming a precarious stair. The peg-holes remained, but the original series of wooden steps had long ago disappeared. This castle is in very tolerable preservation, partly because it could not be reached, and partly because, when accessible, if thrown down, its stones would have crashed into the roofs of the little town that clings to the roots of the precipice. The history of this stronghold is pretty well known. It belonged to the Bishop of Sarlat, and it never fell into the power of the English, who, however, held the rocky *bastide*, or free town, on a height on the opposite side of the river.

On the Vézère, opposite Le Moustier, is a huge sheer cliff, 2,000 feet long. A seam runs along it halfway up from end to end, and at the base it overhangs some thirty to forty feet. The whole of this upper seam, which forms a terrace overhung by the natural rock, has been inhabited, and presents a series of chambers. Not only so, but below as well, all the overhanging lower rock has been utilised for buildings. At some remote period huge masses of rock that leaned forward have fallen, and form a pile of rock ruin beyond the line to which the overhanging rock reaches at present. All this agglomeration of rock is cut about into staircases, basements for walls, windows, doorways, passages. Apparently at one time a town existed there, which has disappeared, and not a soul remains there now.

As it happens, we do know something of this place. We know that about 990 Froterius, Bishop of Périgueux, built a castle there to defend the valley from the incursions of the Normans. We know also that the place existed through the Middle Ages till the year 1401, when the English-minded captain, the Seigneur of Limeul, took it by surprise on Passion Sunday from the Seigneur Adelmar, who was of the French allegiance, and hanged every man found therein. Since that date it is never mentioned.

Now it so happened, when the writer visited the spot recently, that some masons had been turning over the soil under the overleaning cliffs in quest of sand, and they had pitched on the kitchen midden of the inhabitants. They had disclosed vast masses of bones and pottery, but all the pottery was of the beautiful black paste that is distinctive of the early iron age. Consequently this rock dwelling must have been occupied by the early Gauls, ages before the Bishop of Périgueux built his fortress. There can be no question, had the men gone a few feet deeper, they would have unearthed the remains of the bronze and polished stone age, and some feet below that again the flint and bone weapons of the first inhabitants of the soil, when glaciers covered the centre of France, and rolled down the Vézère as far as Brive.

Of the 'castles in the air' the peasants have a tradition. They relate that they were held by the English—*les brigands, mais c'étaient des Anglais, c'est la même chose*—and that they were reduced in this wise. The peasants collected brushwood, molten pitch and fat in casks on the summit of the rocks, and lighted the whole mass, which they rolled over upon the troglodyte habitations below.

Now had these brigands, the English, been content with dwelling in the holes of the rocks, this would not have injured them, but they had constructed galleries of wood to form means of communication from one set of chambers to another. They had also built out projecting apartments, and the molten flaming matter poured over and ignited these structures, which blazing, licked the cliff, and sent fiery tongues and volumes of smoke into the cave dwellings.

Wherever chalk is touched by fire it goes to pieces, and the faces of the chambers crumbled away. The occupants were smothered or burnt.

That this actually was the manner in which some of these strongholds were reduced cannot be doubted. The marks of fire are present still. Where the chalk has been burnt and it crumbles it assumes the look of brown sugar, and wherever this brown sugary appearance is present about the rock windows and doors of one of these castles in the air, we know the manner of its reduction.

In conclusion, the writer ventures on a guess in etymology. Rock dwellings in the old English Guyenne—it was English for three hundred years—are called *Rouffes*, and those who inhabited them *Rouffiens*. Is it not possible that our English word 'ruffian' may be a reminiscence of these freebooters who had their strongholds in the rock, when Guyenne was a province attached to the English crown?

CHARACTER NOTE.

THE SQUIRE.

Il n'y a pour l'homme qu'un vrai malheur, c'est d'avoir quelque chose à se reprocher.

He is fine, fresh-coloured, upright, and over seventy years old. The old gaffers in the village remember him in his youth as the straightest rider in the county. 'Our Squire was a game un,' says one of them with a twinkle in his ancient eye. He is, for that matter, game still. He drives even now twenty miles to the Derby, in a sporting coat with a rose in his button-hole and a fine expectation of enjoyment on his brave old face. There is still about him a certain freshness, keenness, and vigour very pleasant to see. He is yet as good a judge of a horse as any man in the neighbourhood. He has organised and presides over the village cricket team, and is proud that his eleven should be the terror of other persons' elevens for miles round.

The Squire lives in a great stone house which has been in his family for many generations. His estate and his tenants are admirably looked after. He walks over his property with a fine elastic tread that is almost youthful, every day except Sundays. His people are a little afraid and infinitely fond of him. To his servants he is perfectly just, strict, and kind. There is not one of them who would dare to neglect his duty, nor one who is not certain of finding in his master a great justice and liberality.

His charity is as little abused, perhaps, as any man's. Even the people to whom he gives speak well of him. The little village girls, after a fine simple old custom, drop him the profoundest of courtesies. He knows nearly every one of them by name —has known by name their parents and grandparents before them. He walks regularly with his family, rather slowly and with a good deal of dignity, to church every Sunday morning. The gaffers, remembering his wild youth, wink at each other sometimes as he passes thus. But, indeed, even his wildness has been characterised by a blameless honour and generosity, and there is no man to-day who can remember against him anything unworthy of an upright and honest gentleman.

The Squire is sprucely dressed upon all occasions. On Sundays, particularly, he recalls to one's mind the dandyism of his youth.

He always has a flower in his coat, and his grey felt hat is perfectly trim and well brushed. Upon Sunday, too, he wears gloves, and has a fine solemn air with him, which of itself almost makes one feel Sabbatical.

He reads the lessons in church with perfect conviction and simplicity. 'He do do it beautiful!' says Granny, who is deaf and has not heard a word. But his reverent old face and fine devout air impress her perhaps, as they impress many other simple people. The Squire says his prayers in a sitting posture, with one hand hiding his face. One can distinguish his deep 'Amen' among the rustic responses. He does not turn to the east at the creed to gratify the prejudices of an enlightened youthful vicar. He is quite conservative and narrow-minded. His feelings are a great deal hurt and wounded when singing is introduced where saying has been the fashion ever since he can remember. His religion, indeed, is so perfectly simple and faithful and behind the times that it seems very little different from the childish religion he learnt—Heaven knows how many long years ago—at his mother's knee. Perhaps it is not different at all, and in this brave old heart the simple, tender little ideas of a simple little mother still live and bear fruit a hundredfold.

The Squire is, as he should be, the hottest of Tories. The little village constitutes an absurd little branch of the Primrose League. The Squire gives the Primrose League two suppers and a series of village entertainments every year to keep up its political energy. He addresses it with a great deal of vigorous simplicity, which suits it admirably. Perhaps his arguments are not very good. It is not an argument at all, very likely, to say that Mr. Gladstone is a double-dyed villain. But in this case the statement does as well or a great deal better than an argument. The first article in the village political creed is to believe what the Squire says. And indeed, in many things, the village might do worse.

After the politics the Squire's daughters, who are plain, kindly and middle-aged, play duets, the Vicar's wife sings one of her three little songs, and the Squire reads an extract out of Dickens. The Squire is not a literary man in a general way. He believes in the Bible and Sir Walter Scott, and sometimes in the mellow, lamp-lit evenings he takes his Byron and re-reads some of those wild love lyrics which in his youth, at a certain romantic time, he very likely knew by heart. He looks up from the book sometimes, with very kindly old eyes, at Madame sitting opposite to him.

Madame is still upright, and handsome in spite of grey hairs and wrinkles. The world finds her, indeed, a little too quiet and dignified for its liking.

And the Squire says, with a smile half tender and humorous, 'Do you remember this, Mary?' and reads her a line or two in some such voice as he reads the Song of Solomon in church.

And the faintest delicate colour starts in Madame's old cheeks, and there is a little tender droop about her lips, and she remembers it—very well indeed.

The Squire is quite devoted to Madame. Perhaps to him she is still bright-eyed and one-and-twenty. Or perhaps he thinks that seventy-two is the most charming and becoming age in the world. The old couple are still quite enterprising. Now the children are well advanced in middle life Madame feels she may safely leave them—for a few weeks, that is—to themselves. So every autumn the old pair take a trip abroad. The Squire's attitude towards Madame is quite chivalrous and protecting and considerate. The Squire studies Murray and Baedeker through his gold-rimmed spectacles, and tells Madame, who is horribly submissive and old-fashioned, where it will be best for them to go next. The Squire speaks languages in the perfectly precise and grammatical manner in which he learnt them in his youth, and which considerably astonishes the natives. Madame does a great deal of standing-by and following her husband. She was young when such an attitude was common to all women. She is not learned. She is not at all ambitious. She is quite loving and simple. She knows very well how to manage a house. She is very proud of her table linen and her china. She used to be fearfully and wonderfully learned with her babies. She is ever so little shy and chilling in her intercourse with strangers, and is devoted to her husband with all the depth and strength of her faithful heart.

The Squire is pre-eminently the master in his own house. To Madame he is master also, but a master how infinitely kind, loving, just, and tender only Madame knows. He reads Prayers—a solemn chapter out of the Bible and a long supplication compiled by a prosy old bishop—at eight o'clock every morning. Madame kneels by his side, with grey bent head, and devout, folded hands. After breakfast the Squire leaves her to her household duties and takes a ride. His costume is admirably correct and youthful. His fine fresh-coloured old face glows with the exercise.

He is still 'game' enough to occasionally drive four-in-hand. To be complimented as the best whip in the county causes his honest, dignified old face to redden pleasantly with pride. In the afternoons he watches the cricket or his daughters playing tennis. 'A fine game,' he says. 'A very fine game.' He thinks all games fine almost, and those in which horseflesh can be introduced the finest of all. He would play tennis himself only Madame is anxious about his heart, and when he handles a racquet comes into the garden with a face so appealing and distressed as to cause him to desist immediately.

But after all it is Madame herself who first goes the way of all flesh. She dies very quietly indeed. The Squire is by her bedside, and holds her feeble fingers to the last in his strong old hand.

'We have been very happy, my dear,' says the wife.

'Ay, ay, Mary. God has been very good,' answers the Squire in his simple fashion. The daughters, who have known the devotion which the old couple have borne to each other, are surprised at their father's steady courage and composure when the end comes.

'You must take comfort,' says the Vicar.

'I have taken it,' says the Squire. 'I am not far from eighty years old. I shall not be long without her.'

At the funeral in the little churchyard, surrounded by his children and by the poor people who have received a thousand tender charities from the dead woman, the Squire's fine old face stands out with a great courage and serenity against the wintry sky.

Afterwards, when he has reached home, he goes to the stable and gives some orders about Madame's pony. 'Don't work her any more,' he says to the groom. 'Let Nellie enjoy herself. Her mistress would have wished it.' And Nellie answers him with a neigh, and rubs her old nose against his black coat. When he gets back to his library, he writes in a firm old hand to beg that the village football match may not be postponed on account of 'my great loss.'

And for the first time the full extent of that loss comes upon him. In the short winter twilight his eldest daughter, who is a plain, homely little woman, with a great loving heart, finds him sitting, with bent head and dreary eyes, looking into a lifeless fire.

'Will you come to tea, father?' she says softly. 'We are waiting for you.'

'Presently, presently,' he answers in an old voice. Above him is a picture of Madame at three-and-twenty years old, sweet, bright, and blushing.

He remembers her to-night just as she was then. He recalls the beautiful, rapt maternity upon her face as she bent over the first of their children. The child died a baby. It comforts the Squire's brave, simple old heart to think that the two are together to-night. He goes back in fancy, no doubt, as he sits in the darkening room beneath her picture, to a thousand trivial incidents of their quiet married life. They have been very happy. There have been troubles indeed, but they have shared them. There has been the poor old human need for forbearance. He thinks to-night that such a need made them care for each other not less, but more. If his memories are sad, as at such a time they must needs be, they are not bitter at all. He has been blessed, is still blessed, above other men. When he joins his daughters, a sad little party in the lamp-lit drawing-room, there is a courage and even a certain hope and cheerfulness upon his rugged face.

Such a courage and cheerfulness mark all his life afterward. He shoots pheasants in the autumn in the home coverts as he used to do, and appears to enjoy the sport as he has always enjoyed it. He takes the same interest in the horses and dogs and the farming. The estate is as carefully looked after as ever. 'But he thinks on her,' says Granny. 'He thinks on her all the time.' Granny is right, perhaps, though she has only the wisdom of the simple. The Squire is very particular that none of Madame's charities should be neglected. He himself audits the modest accounts of her Clothing Club. He desires that one of his daughters shall distribute, in her place, simple remedies for the poor old people's aches and pains. He likes still that the house shall be cheerful, and to see happy faces about him. He does not very often talk of the dead wife. It is his habit, instead, to do as she would wish. His children are startled sometimes to see how faithfully her smallest desires are remembered and obeyed. By a tacit consent her place by the Squire's side in church is always left vacant. But except this, his fashion of mourning her is almost wholly practical. He calls in sometimes in the afternoon to chat with a certain small farmer whom Madame, in her fine goodness and innocence, thought she was going to reclaim from habits of inebriation. He takes out her great retriever every day for a long walk, Madame having had a theory that Don's internal arrangements required an abnormal amount of exercise.

One of his daughters tells the story long after, smiling, and with tender tears in her eyes, how he even wears the warmest and scrubbiest of underclothing during the winter in accordance with one of the dead Madame's fond and anxious wishes.

There are a thousand ways in which the brave old man is faithful to her memory. With his simple faith in the Unseen, he fancies that she looks down from some happy Heaven, and is glad, as she would have been on earth, to see him well, active, and so far as may be, contented.

The villagers always follow his stalwart, solitary old figure with the comment that 'he do bear up wonderful.'

He is so to the end. To the end the brave old face has a cheery look for every man. To the end he is a fine, honest, sportsmanlike, God-fearing country gentleman. To the end he has a mind fresh, keen, active, a great love for his dogs and his horses, a great generosity, a great manliness. To the end he has a heart full of kindly and noble thoughts—with one most faithful and abiding memory.

And in that Place whither his works shall follow him he joins Madame at last.

WITH EDGED TOOLS.

CHAPTER XLIII.

A LONG DEBT.

The life unlived, the deed undone, the tear
Unshed.

'I RATHER expect—Lady Cantourne,' said Sir John to his servants when he returned home, 'any time between now and ten o'clock.'

The butler, having a vivid recollection of an occasion when Lady Cantourne was shown into a drawing-room where there were no flowers, made his preparations accordingly. The flowers were set out with that masculine ignorance of such matters which brings a smile—not wholly of mirth—to a woman's face. The little-used drawing-room was brought under the notice of the housekeeper for that woman's touch which makes a drawing-room what it is. It was always ready—this room, though Sir John never sat in it. But for Lady Cantourne it was always more than ready.

Sir John went to the library and sat rather wearily down in the stiff-backed chair before the fire. He began by taking up the evening newspaper, but failed to find his eye-glasses, which had twisted up in some aggravating manner with his necktie. So he laid aside the journal and gave way to the weakness of looking into the fire.

Once or twice his head dropped forward rather suddenly so that his clean-shaven chin touched his tie-pin, and this without a feeling of sleepiness warranting the relaxation of the spinal column. He sat up suddenly on each occasion and threw back his shoulders.

'Almost seems,' he muttered once, 'as if I were getting to be an old man.'

After that he remembered nothing until the butler, coming in with the lamp, said that Lady Cantourne was in the drawing-room. The man busied himself with the curtains, carefully avoiding a glance in his master's direction. No one had ever found Sir John asleep in a chair during the hours that other people watch, and this faithful old servant was not going to begin to do so now.

'Ah,' said Sir John, surreptitiously composing his collar and voluminous necktie, 'thank you.'

He rose and glanced at the clock. It was nearly seven. He had slept through the most miserable hour of Millicent Chyne's life.

At the head of the spacious staircase he paused in front of the mirror, half hidden behind exotics, and pressed down his wig behind either ear. Then he went into the drawing-room.

Lady Cantourne was standing impatiently on the hearthrug, and scarcely responded to his bow.

'Has Jack been here?' she asked.

'No.'

She stamped a foot, still neat despite its long journey over a road that had never been very smooth. Her manner was that of a commander-in-chief, competent but unfortunate in the midst of a great reverse.

'He has not been here this afternoon?'

'No,' answered Sir John, closing the door behind him.

'And you have not heard anything from him?'

'Not a word. As you know, I am not fortunate enough to be fully in his confidence.'

Lady Cantourne glanced round the room as if looking for some object upon which to fix her attention. It was a characteristic movement which he knew, although he had only seen it once or twice before. It indicated that if there was an end to Lady Cantourne's wit, she had almost reached that undesirable bourne.

'He has broken off his engagement,' she said, looking her companion very straight in the face, '*now*—at the eleventh hour. Do you know anything about it?'

She came closer to him, looking up from her compact little five-feet-two with discerning eyes.

'John!' she exclaimed.

She came still nearer and laid her gloved hands upon his sleeve.

'John! you know something about this.'

'I should like to know more,' he said suavely. 'I am afraid ——Millicent will be inconvenienced.'

Lady Cantourne looked keenly at him for a moment. Physically she almost stood on tip-toe, mentally she did it without disguise. Then she turned away and sat on a chair which had always been set apart for her.

'It is a question,' she said gravely, 'whether anyone has a right to punish a woman so severely.'

The corner of Sir John's mouth twitched.

'I would rather punish her than have Jack punished for the rest of his life.'

'*Et moi?*' she snapped impatiently.

'Ah!' with a gesture learnt in some foreign court, 'I can only ask your forgiveness. I can only remind you that she is not your daughter—if she were she would be a different woman—while he *is* my son.'

Lady Cantourne nodded as if to indicate that he need explain no more.

'How did you do it?' she asked quietly.

'I did not do it. I merely suggested to Guy Oscard that he should call on you. Millicent and her *fiancé*—the other—were alone in the drawing-room when we arrived. Thinking that I might be *de trop* I withdrew, and left the young people to settle it among themselves, which they have apparently done! I am, like yourself, a great advocate for allowing young people to settle things among themselves. They are also welcome to their enjoyment of the consequences so far as I am concerned.'

'But Millicent was never engaged to Guy Oscard.'

'Did she tell you so?' asked Sir John with a queer smile.

'Yes.'

'And you believed her?'

'Of course—and you?'

Sir John smiled his courtliest smile.

'I always believe a lady,' he answered, 'before her face. Mr. Guy Oscard gave it out in Africa that he was engaged to be married, and he even declared that he was returning home to be married. Jack did the same in every respect. Unfortunately there was only one fond heart waiting for the couple of them at home. That is why I thought it expedient to give the young people an opportunity of settling it between themselves.'

The smile left his worn old face. He moved uneasily and walked to the fireplace, where he stood with his unsteady hands moving idly, almost nervously, among the ornaments on the mantelpiece. He committed the rare discourtesy of almost turning his back upon a lady.

'I must ask you to believe,' he said, looking anywhere but at her, 'that I did not forget you in the matter. I may seem to have acted with an utter disregard for your feelings——'

He broke off suddenly, and, turning, he stood on the hearthrug with his feet apart, his hands clasped behind his back, his head slightly bowed.

'I drew on the reserve of an old friendship,' he said. 'You were kind enough to say the other day that you were indebted to me to some extent. You are indebted to me to a larger extent than you perhaps realise. You owe me fifty years of happiness—fifty years of a life that might have been happy had you decided differently when——when we were younger. I do not blame you now—I never have blamed you. But the debt is there—you know my life, you know almost every day of it—you cannot deny the debt. I drew upon that.'

And the white-haired woman raised her hand.

'Don't,' she said gently, 'please don't say any more. I know all that your life has been, and why. You did quite right. What is a little trouble to me, a little passing inconvenience, the tattle of a few idle tongues, compared with what Jack's life is to you? I see now that I ought to have opposed it strongly instead of letting it take its course. You were right—you always have been right, John. There is a sort of consolation in the thought. I like it. I like to think that you were always right and that it was I who was wrong. It confirms my respect for you. We shall get over this somehow.'

'The young lady,' suggested Sir John, 'will get over it after the manner of her kind. She will marry some one else, let us hope, before her wedding-dress goes out of fashion.'

'Millicent will have to get over it as she may. Her feelings need scarcely be taken into consideration.'

Lady Cantourne made a little movement towards the door. There was much to see to—much of that women's work which makes weddings the wild, confused ceremonies that they are.

'I am afraid,' said Sir John, 'that I never thought of taking them into consideration. As you know I hardly considered yours. I hope I have not overdrawn that reserve.'

He had crossed the room as he spoke to open the door for her. His fingers were on the handle but he did not turn it, awaiting her answer. She did not look at him, but past him towards the shaded lamp, with that desire to fix her attention upon some inanimate object which he knew of old.

'The reserve,' she answered, 'will stand more than that. It has accumulated—with compound interest. But I deny the debt of which you spoke just now. There is no debt. I have paid it, year by year, day by day. For each one of those fifty years of unhappiness I have paid a year—of regret.'

He opened the door and she passed out into the brilliantly lighted passage and down the stairs, where the servants were waiting to open the door and help her to her carriage.

Sir John did not go downstairs with her.

Later on he dined in his usual solitary grandeur. He was as carefully dressed as ever. The discipline of his household—like the discipline under which he held himself—was unrelaxed.

'What wine is this?' he asked when he had tasted the port.

'Yellow seal, sir,' replied the butler confidentially.

Sir John sipped again.

'It is a new bin,' he said.

'Yes, sir. First bottle of the lower bin, sir.'

Sir John nodded with an air of self-satisfaction. He was pleased to have proved to himself and to the 'damned butler,' who had caught him napping in the library, that he was still a young man in himself, with senses and taste unimpaired. But his hand was at the small of his back as he returned to the library.

He was not at all sure about Jack—did not know whether to expect him or not. Jack did not always do what one might have expected him to do under given circumstances. And Sir John rather liked him for it. Perhaps it was that small taint of heredity which is in blood, and makes it thicker than water.

'Nothing like blood, sir,' he was in the habit of saying, 'in horses, dogs, and men.' And thereafter he usually threw back his shoulders.

The good blood that ran in his veins was astir to-night. The incidents of the day had aroused him from the peacefulness that lies under a weight of years (we have to lift the years one by one and lay them aside before we find it), and Sir John Meredith would have sat very upright in his chair were it not for that carping pain in his back.

He waited for an hour with his eyes almost continually on the clock, but Jack never came. Then he rang the bell.

'Coffee,' he said. 'I like punctuality if you please.'

'Thought Mr. Meredith might be expected, sir,' murmured the butler humbly.

Sir John was reading the evening paper, or appearing to read it, although he had not his glasses.

'Oblige me by refraining from thought,' he said urbanely.

So the coffee was brought, and Sir John consumed it in silent majesty. While he was pouring out his second cup—of a diminutive size—the bell rang. He set down the silver coffee-pot with a clatter, as if his nerves were not quite so good as they used to be.

It was not Jack, but a note from him.

'MY DEAR FATHER,—Circumstances have necessitated the breaking off of my engagement at the last moment. To-morrow's ceremony will not take place. As the above-named circumstances were partly under your control, I need hardly offer an explanation. I leave town and probably England to-night.—I am, your affectionate son,

'JOHN MEREDITH.'

There were no signs of haste or discomposure. The letter was neatly written in the somewhat large caligraphy, firm, bold, ornate, which Sir John had insisted on Jack's learning. The stationery bore a club crest. It was an eminently gentlemanly communication. Sir John read it and gravely tore it up, throwing it into the fire, where he watched it burn.

Nothing was farther from his mind than sentiment. He was not much given to sentiment, this hard-hearted old sire of an ancient stock. He never thought of the apocryphal day when he, being laid in his grave, should at last win the gratitude of his son.

'When I am dead and gone you may be sorry for it,' were not the words that any man should hear from his lips.

More than once during their lives Lady Cantourne had said:

'You never change your mind, John,' referring to one thing or another. And he had invariably answered:

'No, I am not the sort of man to change.'

He had always known his own mind. When he had been in a position to rule he had done so with a rod of iron. His purpose had ever been inflexible. Jack had been the only person who had ever openly opposed his desire. In this, as in other matters, his indomitable will had carried the day, and in the moment of triumph it is only the weak who repine. Success should have no disappointment for the man who has striven for it if his will be strong.

Sir John rather liked the letter. It could only have been written by a son of his—admitting nothing, not even defeat. But he was disappointed. He had hoped that Jack would come—that some sort of a reconciliation would be patched up. And somehow the disappointment affected him physically. It attacked him in the back, and intensified the pain there. It made him feel weak and unlike himself. He rang the bell.

'Go round,' he said to the butler, 'to Dr. Damer, and ask him to call in during the evening if he has time.'

The butler busied himself with the coffee-tray, hesitating, desirous of gaining time.

'Anything wrong, sir? I hope you are not feeling ill,' he said nervously.

'Ill, sir!' cried Sir John. 'D—n it, no; do I look ill? Just obey my orders if you please.'

CHAPTER XLIV.

MADE UP.

My faith is large in Time,
And that which shapes it to some perfect end.

'My dear Jack,—At the risk of being considered an interfering old woman, I write to ask you whether you are not soon coming to England again. As you are aware, your father and I knew each other as children. We have known each other ever since—we are now almost the only survivors of our generation. My reason for troubling you with this communication is that during the last six months I have noticed a very painful change in your father. He is getting very old—he has no one but servants about him. You know his manner—it is difficult for anyone to approach him, even for me. If you could come home—by accident—I think that you will never regret it in after life. I need not suggest discretion as to this letter.—Your affectionate friend,

'Caroline Cantourne.'

Jack Meredith read this letter in the coffee-room of the Hotel of the Four Seasons at Wiesbaden. It was a lovely morning—the sun shone down through the trees of the Friedrichstrasse upon that spotless pavement, of which the stricken wot; the fresh breeze came bowling down from the Taunus mountains all balsamic and invigorating—it picked up the odours of the Seringa and flowering currant in the Kurgarten, and threw itself in at the open window of the coffee-room of the Hotel of the Four Seasons.

Jack Meredith was restless. Such odours as are borne on the morning breeze are apt to make those men restless who have not all that they want. And is not their name legion? The morning breeze is to the strong the moonlight of the sentimental. That which makes one vaguely yearn incites the other to get up and take.

By the train leaving Wiesbaden for Cologne, 'over Mainz,' as the guide-book hath it, Jack Meredith left for England, in which country he had not set foot for fifteen months. Guy Oscard was in Cashmere; the Simiacine was almost forgotten as a nine days' wonder except by those who live by the ills of mankind. Millicent Chyne had degenerated into a restless society 'hack.' With great skill she had posed as a martyr. She had allowed it to be understood that she, having remained faithful to Jack Meredith through his time of adversity, had been heartlessly thrown over when fortune smiled upon him and there was a chance of his making a more brilliant match. With a chivalry which was not without a keen shaft of irony, father and son allowed this story to pass uncontradicted. Perhaps a few believed it; perhaps they had foreseen the future. It may have been that they knew that Millicent Chyne, surrounded by the halo of whatever story she might invent, would be treated with a certain careless nonchalance by the older men, with a respectful avoidance by the younger. Truly women have the deepest punishment for their sins here on earth; for sooner or later the time will come—after the brilliancy of the first triumph, after the less pure satisfaction of the skilled siren—the time will come when all that they want is an enduring, honest love. And it is written that an enduring love cannot, with the best will in the world, be bestowed on an unworthy object. If a woman wishes to be loved purely she must have a pure heart, and *no past*, ready for the reception of that love. This is a *sine quâ non*. The woman with a past has no future.

The short March day was closing in over London with that murky suggestion of hopelessness affected by metropolitan eventide when Jack Meredith presented himself at the door of his father's house.

In his reception by the servants there was a subtle suggestion of expectation which was not lost on his keen mind. There is no patience like that of expectation in an old heart. Jack Meredith felt vaguely that he had been expected thus daily for many months past.

He was shown into the library, and the tall form standing there on the hearthrug had not the outline for which he had looked. The battle between old age and a stubborn will is long. But old age wins. It never raises the siege. It starves the garrison out. Sir John Meredith's head seemed to have shrunk. The wig did not fit at the back. His clothes, always bearing the suggestion of emptiness, seemed to hang on ancient-given lines as if the creases were well established. The clothes were old. The fateful doctrine of not-worth-while had set in.

Father and son shook hands, and Sir John walked feebly to the stiff-backed chair, where he sat down in shamefaced silence. He was ashamed of his infirmities. His was the instinct of the dog that goes away into some hidden corner to die.

'I am glad to see you,' he said, using his two hands to push himself farther back in his chair.

There was a little pause. The fire was getting low. It fell together with a feeble, crumbling sound.

'Shall I put some coals on?' asked Jack.

A simple question—if you will. But it was asked by the son in such a tone of quiet, filial submission, that a whole volume could not contain all that it said to the old man's proud, unbending heart.

'Yes, my boy, do.'

And the last six years were wiped away like evil writing from a slate.

There was no explanation. These two men were not of those who explain themselves, and in the warmth of explanation say things which they do not fully mean. The opinions that each had held during the years they had left behind had perhaps been modified on both sides, but neither sought details of the modification. They knew each other now, and each respected the indomitable will of the other.

They inquired after each other's health. They spoke of events of a common interest. Trifles of every-day occurrence seemed to contain absorbing details. But it is the every-day occurrence that makes the life. It was the putting on of the coals that reconciled these two men.

'Let me see,' said Sir John, 'you gave up your rooms before you left England, did you not?'

'Yes.'

Jack drew forward his chair and put his feet out towards the fire. It was marvellous how thoroughly at home he seemed to be.

'Then,' continued Sir John, 'where is your luggage?'

'I left it at the club.'

'Send along for it. Your room is—er, quite ready for you. I shall be glad if you will make use of it as long as you like. You will be free to come and go as if you were in your own house.'

Jack nodded with a strange, twisted little smile, as if he were suffering from cramp in the legs. It was cramp—at the heart.

'Thanks,' he said, 'I should like nothing better. Shall I ring?'

'If you please.'

Jack rang and they waited in the fading daylight without speaking. At times Sir John moved his limbs, his hand on the arm of the chair and his feet on the hearthrug with the jerky, half-restless energy of the aged which is not pleasant to see.

When the servant came it was Jack who gave the orders, and the butler listened to them with a sort of enthusiasm. When he had closed the door behind him he pulled down his waistcoat with a jerk, and as he walked downstairs he muttered 'Thank 'eaven!' twice, and wiped away a tear from his bibulous eye.

'What have you been doing with yourself since—I saw you?' inquired Sir John conversationally when the door was closed.

'I have been out to India—merely for the voyage. I went with Oscard, who is out there still, after big game.'

Sir John Meredith nodded.

'I like that man,' he said, 'he is tough. I like tough men. He wrote me a letter before he went away. It was the letter of—one gentleman to another. Is he going to spend the rest of his life "after big game?"'

Jack laughed.

'It seems rather like it. He is cut out for that sort of life. He is too big for narrow streets and cramped houses.'

'And matrimony?'

'Yes—and matrimony.'

Sir John was leaning forward in his chair, his two withered hands clasped on his knees.

'You know,' he said slowly, blinking at the fire, 'he cared for that girl—more than you did, my boy.'

'Yes,' answered Jack softly.

Sir John looked towards him, but he said nothing. His attitude was interrogatory. There were a thousand questions in the turn of his head, questions which one gentleman could not ask another.

Jack met his gaze. They were still wonderfully alike, these two men, though one was in his prime while the other was infirm. On each face there was the stamp of a long-drawn silent pride; each was a type of those haughty conquerors who stepped, mail-clad, on our shore eight hundred years ago. Form and feature, mind and heart, had been handed down from father to son, as great types are.

'One may have the right feeling and bestow it by mistake on the wrong person,' said Jack.

Sir John's fingers were at his lips.

'Yes,' he said rather indistinctly, 'while the right person is waiting for it.'

Jack looked up sharply, as if he either had not heard or did not understand.

'While the right person is waiting for it,' repeated Sir John deliberately.

'The right person——?'

'Jocelyn Gordon,' explained Sir John, 'is the right person.'

Jack shrugged his shoulders and leant back so that the firelight did not shine upon his face. 'So I found out eighteen months ago,' he said, 'when it was too late.'

'There is no such thing as too late for that,' said Sir John in his great wisdom. 'Even if you were both quite old it would not be too late. I have known it for longer than you. I found it out two years ago.'

Jack looked across the room into the keen, worldly-wise old face.

'How?' he inquired.

'From her. I found it out the moment she mentioned your name. I conducted the conversation in such a manner that she had frequently to say it, and whenever your name crossed her lips she—gave herself away.'

Jack shook his head with an incredulous smile.

'Moreover,' continued Sir John, 'I maintain that it is not too late.'

There followed a silence; both men seemed to be wrapped in thought, the same thoughts with a difference of forty years of life in the method of thinking them.

'I could not go to her with a lame story like that,' said Jack. 'I told her all about Millicent.'

'It is just a lame story like that that women understand,' answered Sir John. 'When I was younger I thought as you do. I thought that a man must needs bring a clean slate to the woman he asks to be his wife. It is only his hands that must be clean. Women see deeper into these mistakes of ours than we do, they see the good of them where we only see the wound to our vanity. Sometimes one would almost be inclined to think that they prefer a few mistakes in the past because it makes the present surer. Their romance is a different thing from ours—it is a better thing, deeper and less selfish. They can wipe the slate clean and never look at it again. And the best of them—rather like the task.'

Jack made no reply. Sir John Meredith's chin was resting on his vast necktie. He was looking with failing eyes into the fire. He spoke like one who was sure of himself—confident in his slowly accumulated store of that knowledge which is not written in books.

'Will you oblige me?' he asked.

Jack moved in his chair, but he made no answer. Sir John did not indeed expect it. He knew his son too well.

'Will you,' he continued, 'go out to Africa and take your lame story to Jocelyn—just as it is?'

There was a long silence. The old worn-out clock on the mantelpiece wheezed and struck six.

'Yes,' answered Jack at length, 'I will go.'

Sir John nodded his head with a sigh of relief. All, indeed, comes to him who waits.

'I have seen a good deal of life,' he said suddenly, arousing himself and sitting upright in the stiff-backed chair, 'here and there in the world; and I have found that the happiest people are those who began by thinking that it was too late. The romance of youth is only fit to write about in books. It is too delicate a fabric for every-day use. It soon wears out or gets torn.'

Jack did not seem to be listening.

'But,' continued Sir John, 'you must not waste time. If I may suggest it, you will do well to go at once.'

'Yes,' answered Jack, 'I will go in a month or so. I should like to see you in a better state of health before I leave you.'

Sir John pulled himself together. He threw back his shoulders and stiffened his neck.

'My health is excellent,' he replied sturdily. 'Of course I am beginning to feel my years a little, but one must expect to do that after—eh—er—sixty. *C'est la vie.*'

He made a little movement of the hands.

'No,' he went on, 'the sooner you go the better.'

'I do not like leaving you,' persisted Jack.

Sir John laughed rather testily.

'That is rather absurd,' he said; 'I am accustomed to being left. I have always lived alone. You will do me a favour if you will go now and take your passage out to Africa.'

'Now—this evening?'

'Yes—at once. These offices close about half-past six, I believe. You will just have time to do it before dinner.'

Jack rose and went towards the door. He went slowly, almost reluctantly.

'Do not trouble about me,' said Sir John, 'I am accustomed to being left.'

He repeated it when the door had closed behind his son.

The fire was low again. It was almost dying. The daylight was fading every moment. The cinders fell together with a crumbling sound, and a greyness crept into their glowing depths. The old man sitting there made no attempt to add fresh fuel.

'I am accustomed,' he said with a half-cynical smile, 'to being left.'

CHAPTER XLV.

THE TELEGRAM.

How could it end in any other way?
You called me, and I came home to your heart.

'THEY tell me, sir, that Missis Marie—that is, Missis Durnovo—has gone back to her people at Sierra Leone.'

Thus spoke Joseph to his master one afternoon in March, not so many years ago. They were on board the steamer *Bogamayo*, which good vessel was pounding down the West Coast of Africa at her best speed. The captain reckoned that he would be anchored at Loango by half-past seven or eight o'clock that evening. There were only seven passengers on board, and dinner had been ordered an hour earlier for the convenience of all concerned. Joseph was packing his master's clothes in the spacious cabin allotted to him. The owners of the steamer had thought it worth their while to make the finder of the Simiacine as comfortable as circumstances allowed. The noise of that great drug had directed towards the West Coast of Africa that floating scum of ne'er-do-welldom which is ever on the alert for some new land of promise.

'Who told you that?' asked Jack, drying his hands on a towel.

'One of the stewards, sir—a man that was laid up at Sierra Leone in the hospital.'

Jack Meredith paused for a moment before going on deck. He looked out through the open porthole towards the blue shadow on the horizon which was Africa—a country that he had never seen three years before, and which had all along been destined to influence his whole life.

'It was the best thing she could do,' he said. 'It is to be hoped that she will be happy.'

'Yes, sir, it is. She deserves it, if that goes for anything in the heavenly reckonin'. She's a fine woman—a good woman that, sir.'

'Yes.'

Joseph was folding a shirt very carefully.

'A bit dusky,' he said, smoothing out the linen folds reflectively, 'but I shouldn't have minded that if I had been a marryin' man, but—but I'm not.'

He laid the shirt in the portmanteau and looked up. Jack Meredith had gone on deck.

While Maurice and Jocelyn Gordon were still at dinner that same evening a messenger came announcing the arrival of the *Bogamayo* in the roads. This news had the effect of curtailing the meal. Maurice Gordon was liable to be called away at any moment thus by the arrival of a steamer. It was not long before he rose from the table and lighted a cigar preparatory to going down to his office, where the captain of the steamer was by this time probably awaiting him. It was a full moon, and the glorious golden light of the equatorial night shone through the high trees like a new dawn. Hardly a star was visible; even those of the southern hemisphere pale beside the southern moon.

Maurice Gordon crossed the open space of cultivated garden and plunged into the black shadow of the forest. His footsteps were inaudible. Suddenly he ran almost into the arms of a man.

'Who the devil is that?' he cried.

'Meredith,' answered a voice.

'Meredith—Jack Meredith, is that you?'

'Yes.'

'Well, I'm blowed!' exclaimed Maurice Gordon, shaking hands—'likewise glad. What brought you out here again?'

'Oh, pleasure!' replied Jack, with his face in the shade.

'Pleasure! you've come to the wrong place for that. However, I'll let you find that out for yourself. Go on to the bungalow; I'll be back in less than an hour. You'll find Jocelyn in the verandah.'

When Maurice left her Jocelyn went out into the verandah. It was the beginning of the hot season. At midday the sun on his journey northward no longer cast a shadow. Jocelyn could not go out in the daytime at this period of the year. For fresh air she had to rely upon a long, dreamy evening in the verandah.

She sat down in her usual chair while the moonlight, red and glowing, made a pattern on the floor and on her white dress with the shadows of the creepers. The sea was very loud that night, rising and falling like the breath of some huge sleeping creature.

Jocelyn Gordon fell into a reverie. Life was very dull at Loango. There was too much time for thought and too little to think about. This girl only had the past, and her past was all comprised in a few months—the few months still known at Loango as the Simiacine year. She had lapsed into a bad habit of thinking that her life was over, that the daylight of it had waned, and that there was nothing left now but the grey remainder of the evening. She was wondering now why it had all come—why there had been any daylight at all. Above these thoughts she wondered why the feeling was still in her heart that Jack Meredith had not gone out of her life for ever. There was no reason why she should ever meet him again. He was, so far as she knew, married to Millicent Chyne more than a year ago, although she had never seen the announcement of the wedding. He had drifted into Loango and into her life by the merest accident, and now that the Simiacine Plateau had been finally abandoned there was no reason why any of the original finders should come to Loango again.

And the creepers were pushed aside by one who knew the method of their growth. A silver glory of moonlight fell on the verandah floor, and the man of whom she was thinking stood before her.

'You!' she exclaimed.

'Yes.'

She rose, and they shook hands. They stood looking at each other for a few moments, and a thousand things that had never been said seemed to be understood between them.

'Why have you come?' she asked abruptly.

'To tell you a story.'

She looked up with a sort of half smile, as if she suspected some pleasantry of which she had not yet detected the drift.

'A long story,' he explained, 'which has not even the merit of being amusing. Please sit down again.'

She obeyed him.

The curtain of hanging leaves and flowers had fallen into place again; the shadowed tracery was on her dress and on the floor once more.

He stood in front of her and told her his story, as Sir John had suggested. He threw no romance into it—attempted no extenuation—but related the plain, simple facts of the last few years with the semi-cynical suggestion of humour that was sometimes his. And the cloak of pride that had fallen upon his shoulders made him hide much that was good, while he dragged forward his own shortcomings. She listened in silence. At times there hovered round her lips a smile. It usually came when he represented himself in a bad light, and there was a suggestion of superior wisdom in it as if she knew something of which he was ignorant.

He was never humble. It was not a confession. It was not even an explanation, but only a story—a very lame story indeed—which gained nothing by the telling. And he was not the hero of it.

And all came about as wise old Sir John Meredith had predicted. It is not our business to record what Jocelyn said. Women—the best of them—have some things in their hearts which can only be said once to one person. Men cannot write them down; printers cannot print them.

The lame story was told to the end, and at the end it was accepted. When Sir John's name was mentioned—when the interview in the library of the great London house was briefly touched upon—Jack saw the flutter of a small lace pocket-handkerchief, and at no other time. The slate was wiped clean, and it almost seemed that Jocelyn preferred it thus with the scratches upon it where the writing had been.

Maurice Gordon did not come back in an hour. It was nearly ten o'clock before they heard his footsteps on the gravel. By that time Jocelyn had heard the whole story. She had asked one or two questions which somehow cast a different light upon the narrative, and she had listened to the answers with a grave judicial little smile—the smile of a judge whose verdict was pre-ordained, whose knowledge had nothing to gain from evidence.

Because she loved him she took his story and twisted it and turned it to a shape of her own liking. Those items which he had considered important she passed over as trifles; the trifles she magnified into the corner-stones upon which the edifice was built. She set the lame story upon its legs and it stood upright. She believed what he had never told; and much that he related she chose to discredit—because she loved him. She perceived motives where he assured her there were none; she recognised the force of circumstance where he took the blame to himself—because she loved him. She maintained that the past was good, that he could not have acted differently, that she would not have had it otherwise—because she loved him.

And who shall say that she was wrong?

Jack went out to meet Maurice Gordon when they heard his footsteps, and as they walked back to the house he told him. Gordon was quite honest about it.

'I hoped,' he said, 'when I ran against you in the wood that that was why you had come back. Nothing could have given me greater happiness. Hang it, I *am* glad, old chap!'

They sat far into the night arranging their lives. Jack was nervously anxious to get back to England. He could not rid his mind of the picture he had seen as he left his father's presence to go and take his passage to Africa—the picture of an old man sitting in a stiff-backed chair before a dying fire. Moreover he was afraid of Africa; the Irritability of Africa had laid its hand upon him almost as soon as he had set his foot upon its shore. He was afraid of the climate for Jocelyn; he was afraid of it for himself. The happiness that comes late must be firmly held to; nothing must be forgotten to secure it, or else it may slip between the fingers at the last moment.

Those who have snatched happiness late in life can tell of a thousand details carefully attended to—a whole existence laid out in preparation for it, of health fostered, small pleasures relinquished, days carefully spent.

Jack Meredith was nervously apprehensive that his happiness might even now slip through his fingers. Truly, climatic influence is a strange and wonderful thing. It was Africa that had done this, and he was conscious of it. He remembered Victor Durnovo's strange outburst on their first meeting a few miles below Msala on the Ogowe river, and the remembrance only made him the more anxious that Jocelyn and he should turn their backs upon the accursed West Coast for ever.

Before they went to bed that night it was all arranged. Jack Meredith had carried his point. Maurice and Jocelyn were to sail with him for England by the first boat. Jocelyn and he compiled a telegram to be sent off first thing by a native boat to St. Paul de Loanda. It was addressed to Sir John Meredith, London, and signed 'Meredith, Loango.' The text of it was:

'I bring Jocelyn home by first boat.'

. . . .

And the last words, like the first, must be of an old man in London. We found him in the midst of a brilliant assembly; we leave him alone. We leave him lying stiffly on his solemn four-post bed, with his keen proud face turned fearlessly toward his Maker. His lips are still; they wear a smile which even in death is slightly cynical. On the table at his bedside lies a submarine telegram from Africa. It is unopened.

THE END.

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