FRANCESCA CARRARA.

VOL. II.

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FRANCESCA CARRARA.

BY

THE AUTHOR OF

ROMANCE AND REALITY, THE VENETIAN BRACELET,

&c. &c.

——— "Must we in tears
Unwind a love knit up by many years?
I cannot break my faith—cannot re-send
The truest heart that lover e'er did lend."

KING.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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FRANCESCA CARRARA.

CHAPTER I.

"To people who have naturally very intense feelings, nothing is so wearing to the heart as the curtailed affections which are the offspring of the world."

DEVEREUX.

MARIE MANCINI returned with her sister to Paris, and, for the next week, the whole hôtel was hurry and confusion with the approaching nuptials. Her manner to Francesca was very unequal. Sometimes it had all the frankness of their early intimacy; at other times it was forbidding, and even petulant. On the very night before her marriage, when, at a late hour, Francesca was seeking her own room, as she passed along the corridor, Marie's door opened, and Marie herself appeared.

"I knew your step—do come in, for the last time here."

Francesca, softened by the kindly tone, and still more by observing that the other had been

weeping, entered immediately; and Marie, drawing one fauteuil into the large old window, motioned to her companion to take another already there. After amusing herself for a brief time with picking to pieces some mignonette which filled a box on the window-sill, Marie threw the flowers from her, and exclaimed,—"And here we are seated together, as we used to talk away half the night in Italy. Good Heavens! how we are altered!"

"I am sure I am altered," replied Francesca.

"Not so much for the worse as myself," continued the other; "and yet, perhaps, I am not changed, as I said—I was always vain and selfish. I have only lately had good opportunities of displaying my amiable qualities. Still, I have had my moments of compunction, though I own the fits have at every recurrence briefer duration and longer intervals. I daresay I shall soon not feel them at all, and shall therefore make the most of them when they arrive, as I have done to night. How unkind I have been to you, Francesca!—how I have envied and hated you!"

"Ah, Marie! I cannot understand your hate—what cause have I ever given? and envy—what could you find to envy in the lot of one who, save for yourselves, were a friendless orphan?"

"Don't say yourselves—say my sister, at once. Henriette has been your friend, not I; and as to envy—look at your face in yonder glass—wasted on you, I must say; for beauty, properly managed, is woman's power. Now I understand the management, while you have the means, and, as I said before, quite wasted upon you."

Francesca could not help laughing, as she asked, "Why, what would you have me do?"

"It is not to be taught!—but how many opportunities have I seen you throw away! Ah! beauty without vanity is but a sort of barbaric gold, unfit for any of the purposes of civilised life. I can only supply its place by the delusions of self-love—by deceiving people into the belief that they are thinking of me, when they are in reality thinking of themselves. How often am I obliged to speak *mal à propos*, because my features are not sufficiently charming in a state of repose!—how often is my ingenuity racked to find a word, when a look would have been far better! I am compelled to be amusing, in my own despite."

"A great misfortune, truly."

"Yes, it is; for amusement destroys interest. There is nothing for which people are less grateful than for being entertained; in their hearts they are ashamed of not being able to entertain

themselves, and therefore seek consolation in despising, or at least undervaluing, those to whom they owe that very entertainment."

"But, dearest Marie, thinking as you do, of what avail is your exertion?"

"Why, life's high places have many paths, and we do not choose our own. I must make the best use I can of my own gifts, even while those of others are better. I desire as much of the wealth and as many of the honours of this life as I can obtain; and in France their royal road is royal favour. It was a brilliant dream which you, Francesca, destroyed!"

"I!" exclaimed the other, in amazement.

"Yes. Louis's admiration of those superb dark eyes opened mine to the perils and chances of the way I was pursuing."

"You allude to the bracelet. Blessed Madonna! how little admiration had to do with a gift dictated by a most generous courtesy!"

"I believe you were simple enough to think so—I was not. I saw at once I was mistaken in my calculations of Louis's feeling. At the very age of fantasies, he was likely to be caught by one, and then another;—nothing short of *une grande passion* could have answered my purpose. For the first time I steadily reviewed the obstacles

—and to consider them was at once to see they were insuperable. I penetrated my uncle's ambition by my own. I felt convinced, had there been even a probability, he would have aided me—his opposition shewed me that he thought the attempt hopeless. In the meantime, the Queen's jealousy was aroused. Had my original project remained, I would have conciliated; as it was, I irritated. Her fear led direct to my establishment; and the more that was excited, the more brilliant would the terms be by which she might purchase security. I made but one error—giving way to petulance in the earlier instance; that lost me the Prince of Conti. Temper is bourgeois indulgence, though I own to a predilection for it. However, I corrected myself in time. I tormented my uncle still, but it was on principle—it is the best method of managing him. I frightened the Queen—the best method of managing her; and, having lost the chance of Louis's heart, tried for his confidence. I assure you, though you may not think it, I have told him such charming things about you!—the subject has its interest, *ma belle*."

"To me none," said Francesca, somewhat gravely.

Without noticing the interruption, her companion continued.

"Well, the dénouement has succeeded beyond my expectations. To-morrow I am Comtesse de Soissons. The Comte is a fool, like the Prince of Conti, but of a more manageable kind. He is avaricious, and yet ostentatious; I shall always make him hear reason through his interests. I see already the advantages of my early friendship with the King—the habit of confidence, once acquired, is indeed difficult to break. I shall try that best of flattery—divining his tastes, and adapting myself to them. Attraction will be the secret of my society; and let who will be Queen of France, I shall be Queen in my own circle."

"And does not this anticipation of perpetual intrigue, anxiety, and exertion—this want of affection—this utter severing of all the deeper and dearer ties of life, weary you even in contemplation?"

"The deeper and dearer ties of life!—what ties can be so deep or so dear as those which bind me to myself? or what is there so very depressing in the anticipation of a brilliant and animated future?"

"With nothing to really interest—nothing on which the heart can rely."

"Ah! you are romantic—it suits your style of countenance; my features do not express superb

disdain with any effect. That is the reason, I firmly believe, why Cleopatra poisoned herself, while Zenobia walked in the triumph of the Roman conqueror. The one knew she would not look well—the other knew she would."

"And can you be contented to pass through life, unloving and unloved?"

"Unloved?—I don't know; unloving, certainly; but feared, admired, and courted. I believe we must all sacrifice *quelque petit brin de sentiment;* and, thanks to my early fancy for your brother, my sacrifice is made."

Francesca bit her lip, while the colour came into her cheek; nothing said of herself could have inflicted half the pain of this careless allusion to one whose feelings were so strong, and ought to have been so sacred.

Marie in an instant observed her change of countenance.

"Poor Guido! how like you look to him at this moment—with those large dilating eyes I never saw but in yourselves. I know you think me very unfeeling—and so I am; and yet at this very moment I am sadder than I seem. I shall never be so loved again—nothing can evermore call, even into momentary existence, the many kind

and good thoughts which I had then. Tell me, does Guido ever speak of me?"

"Nay," answered Francesca, "your pity is unavailing, even if I wished to excite it. Whatever may be Guido's emotions, to me they are holy."

Marie remained a short while in silence, and then said,—"After all, it was not my fault; circumstances threw us together, and over these circumstances I had no control. It was from no choice of my own that I was brought up in an out-of-the-way pallazzo, with nothing to do but to fall in love. Constancy, to say nothing of its not being in my nature, would in my case have been insanity. You might, but I could not pass my life among myrtles and ruins *filant le parfait amour*. But, come, I must shew you the Queen's present;" and, first retrimming the lamp, she opened a casket, containing a lustrous set of emeralds.

"There are some pleasures in matrimony," said she, twisting her necklace round her fingers.

"How beautiful their colour is as you catch the light upon them!" exclaimed Francesca, examining the various ornaments with a very natural delight.

"It is four o'clock, I declare!" cried Marie.

"Good night, for, as it is, we shall look like ghosts to-morrow."

Her prediction was not accomplished; for when Francesca saw her enter the chapel, glittering with jewels, and radiant with triumph, she thought that she never had seen Marie look so handsome. Both Anne and Louis, who had returned the day before from Sedan, were present; and Francesca marked the Queen's quick eye turn more than once on her son, as if she would fain read his inmost thoughts. It was very obvious he had no emotion to conceal.

Marie went through the ceremony rather with the appearance of elation than of timidity. But when it was over, and the bridegroom approached to lead her forth, Francesca saw her change colour, and a slight shudder ran through her whole frame, and saw too that Marie's eyes were fixed on herself, as if recalling the resemblance of another. It was but for a moment; and she instantly turned to the Comte de Soissons, and took his offered hand, with a glad smile and a slight gesture, which made up with courtesy what it wanted in tenderness.

Nothing could exceed the ease and grace with which she accepted the congratulations of Louis. Those of the Queen were met with less *empresse-*

ment—it was not her good favour that the Countess intended to conciliate. A group of the noblest of the court crowded round; and as Francesca's gaze dwelt on the waving plumes, the golden embroidery, the many-coloured lights flashing from the profusion of gems, she involuntarily asked herself, "Can Marie, now the centre of this gorgeous circle, be the same with whom I have so often gathered wild flowers and wood strawberries?"

The star of Cardinal Mazarin's destiny had rays for many beside himself. Let a fortunate man do what he will for his own fate, he nevertheless works the most for the benefit of others.

CHAPTER II.

"The scenes through which of late I have conducted my readers are by no means episodical: they illustrate far more than mere narration the period."

DEVEREUX.

BRIEF as had been the young King's campaign, it was quite sufficient to produce a sensation at Paris. Henri Quatre was in every body's mouth in the way of presage and comparison. In reconnoitering the trenches, Louis's temple had been grazed by a bullet; and the exaggeration of praise and anxiety would have been ridiculous but for its entire sincerity. From that period may be dated the rise of that personal devotion which marked all the earlier part of his reign.

It has been said, with that degree of truth which is necessary to give effect to point, that the French character has been determined by two rhymes, *gloire* and *victoire*. Of this character Louis was the *beau idéal*. Young, brave, chivalrous, handsome, and graceful, he was every

Frenchman's perfection of himself. One proof of a great man is fitness for the circumstances in which he is placed. That talent may reasonably be doubted which is never exercised; but no one could be more suited to his station than Louis. He possessed the genius of representation,—a genius especially requisite among a people who require to be both excited and impressed. His ambition was but the then voice of the nation carried into action—his wars were the public will; change was only brought about by the humiliation of defeat. His tastes were magnificent — such as belonged to the monarch of a rich and great country; and a more enlightened age would have added utility. His original character was generous and high-minded, though tried in after-years by the too severe ordeal of constant gratification and unvarying success, whose certain result is selfishness.

We cannot understand what we have never experienced; and we need pain, were it only to teach us sympathy. It is a good lesson of mortal instability; and we should be sorry to lose the touching spectacle of the noble firmness with which the aged King met the defeats and disasters which overwhelmed him in his old age. But, for his own sake, Louis's misfortunes should have

happened earlier in life; what wholesome corrections they would have been to his overmuch prosperity! As, in after-time, we read the annals of his court, we are revolted by his self-indulgence, his utter thoughtlessness of others, his ingratitude, his cruelty—and all is summed up in the conviction, This man knows nothing of suffering—he cannot measure the pain which he inflicts. Truly, we need human infirmity to teach us human nature, and that to Louis had been as a sealed book; he had only seen the coloured and gilded outside: too late he had to decipher the rough and gloomy page within. His natural impulses were good, and these are all most manifest in youth—the truth is, time wears them out; and manhood needs principle, which he had not. The beginning was promising. Look at his constant and attentive affection to his mother; his unvarying gratitude to the Cardinal; the energy with which, on Mazarin's death, when government came to be necessity, he devoted himself to the duties of his high station. No pleasure, no idleness, ever trespassed on the hours given to business.

But it is the earlier and lighter part of his career with which our readers have to do; and the present period at Paris was as gay as fêtes of every kind could make it. The youthful monarch

was, of course, the centre of all; but Francesca could not but perceive, that while others addressed their flatteries to him, his were addressed exclusively to her.

The attention of which she was now the object would have amused if it had not embarrassed her. It was as if some spell had changed both herself and her situation. Every one seemed suddenly to have discovered some merit in the once neglected stranger. Homage came from every quarter, and adulation from every lip. No one was more ready to caress and bring her forward than the Comtesse de Soissons, who appeared to think every party incomplete without her early friend; and Louis passed almost every evening at her house, where restraint and ceremony were equally banished.

Madame de Mercœur's health now scarcely allowed her to stir from home; and Francesca would never willingly have left her. But this her good-natured friend would not hear of: "No, no; Marie has come to her senses. She is as fond of you as I am, and very much gayer; so go about with her. When will you ever enjoy yourself, if you do not now?"

It was useless contesting the point; and Francesca secretly longed for the period of the

Duchesse's confinement, when she would have an undeniable excuse for remaining with her. "And by that time," thought she, "Guido will be returned; we will then fix on our future plan of life. Ah! I should be happier in our old dwelling than here. Guido, I know, loves his native land the best; and we, in seeking each other's pleasure, shall both find our own. Surely we have both said farewell for ever to the vain dreams with which we came to Paris."

There was vanity and pleasure enough around her now to have turned many a young head, and to have supplied many excuses for the turning. But Francesca was thoughtful beyond her years. The traces of her early disappointment were indelible; not that she sunk or pined away under the blow—she owned, after the first shock was past, and the beating heart severely tasked, that life had still many duties, and even some enjoyments. Were it only as a debt to Madame de Mercœur's kindness, some appearance of cheerfulness was necessary; and assumed cheerfulness often becomes more real than is always acknowledged. But, unlike the generality of her age, love now occupied no place in the future. How could she ever believe in the worthiness of any

one? or, if she believed, it could never so interest her again.

One morning she accompanied Madame de Soissons to the fair, then the favourite lounge and amusement. The Comtesse bought every trifle that caught her eye, while Francesca looked on. Now it is not in human nature—at least, in feminine nature—to see pretty things, yet not wish for them; and while her look lingered on many a graceful toy, the young Italian, conscious they were far beyond her slender finances, could not help contrasting her own necessity of debarring herself even from a slight purchase, with the lavish expenditure of her companion.

She had scarcely returned home an hour, and was giving Madame de Mercœur a full account of how Madame de Chatillion found out that it was so cold whenever l'Abbé Fouquet approached, and put on her black velvet mask, thus not allowing him to see her beautiful face even at a distance,—how the Duc d'Anjou was inseparable from *la belle cousine*, who consulted his taste in all her purchases; when several packages were brought in, directed to Mademoiselle de Carrara. They were opened, and found to contain all kinds of toys, gloves, laces, ribands, &c., till the floor was strewed

with their glittering contents. Not the slightest indication appeared as to who was the donor.

"Some anonymous lover," exclaimed Madame de Mercœur. "This is really too delightful. Who can it be?" and she began to guess every person she could remember as having even spoken to Francesca.

"For pity's sake," said the latter, laughing, "do stop; for I am really alarmed lest you should end with l'Abbé Fouquet himself; and I have really no ambition to succeed Madame de Chatillion."

"Now, out upon such a supposition!" replied the Duchesse; "I am too much charmed with the gallantry to wish to destroy the illusion. But is not this fortunate?" continued she, taking up a superb plume of white ostrich feathers, fastened by a small agraffe, enamelled so as to represent a bunch of violets; "this is just what you wanted for the velvet cap you are to wear at Madame de l'Hôpital's masked ball."

"Oh! but I do not like to wear it. It is so disagreeable to accept favours from you do not know who."

"On the contrary, you are saved from all obligation; for what is the use of being grateful, and

to a wrong person, perhaps? Wear these exquisite feathers you must."

"I would much rather not."

"How very ridiculous! But I shall not argue the point,—I shall only command; and you know how contradiction disagrees with me. I will not be made ill, that you may look well; so, silence, *ma mignonne*. Here, Mariette," continued she, addressing one of her women, who had just entered; "place this plume in Mademoiselle de Carrara's cap,—and, remember, in the most becoming manner."

Both parties had their differing convictions. Madame de Mercœur, who always looked to what she wished, instantly recalled the admiration she had observed her beautiful protégée had excited in the Duc de Candale, and immediately determined that he was the generous incognito. Francesca's suspicions were less pleasant, but more true. She never for a moment doubted but that Louis was the donor, while the Comtesse de Soissons was the purchaser. She was certain that she recognised many of the toys. The feathers she did not recollect; but she remembered her own bunch of violets which Louis had taken the evening previous to his departure for Sedan. Should

she mention her belief to Madame de Mercœur? —her natural frankness prompted this course; but it was opposed by every reason that could suggest itself. If she were mistaken, and it was just possible that she might be so, how monstrous, and, worse, how ridiculous, would her vanity appear! and, even if it were true, Madame de Mercœur was scarcely the person to consult—in her circle, the King was every thing; who there would think of gainsaying his pleasure? She felt rather than acknowledged, that between their ideas of right and wrong and her own, there was, indeed, a wide gulf. She considered, too, how slight was her claim upon the kindness of the Mercœurs; she had no right even to run the risk of embarrassing them:—on herself, therefore, must be her sole dependence. The Comtesse evidently was making a tool of her, by encouraging the King's predilection. Provided he was attracted to the Hôtel de Soissons, she cared not how; Francesca, or any one else, might be the magnet.

Madame de Mercœur had herself arranged her dress, which was splendid white silk, damasked with silver flowers; but it was with much internal misgiving that she put on the graceful cap and plume.

At first, she had resolved to wear none of the other gifts; and then it struck her, that this would indicate a secret preference for the tell-tale agraffe, —better choose amid the others, avow her present openly, and take refuge in unsuspecting pleasure and gratitude.

On her arrival at the Hôtel de Soissons, she saw that the keen eye of the Comtesse scanned her from head to foot. She evidently did not recognise the plume; but a peculiar smile passed over her face as she noticed the gloves, fan, and bouquet; still, she made no remark beyond the general exclamation, "How well you look to-night! 'tis a pity to put on your mask!"

Francesca immediately began to tell her of the good fortune of yesterday. She listened; but added, with an incredulous sneer, "And so you have not an idea who sent them? You are fortunate in such an anonymous lover!"

Francesca made no answer, but followed the Comtesse in silence, whose manner confirmed all her previous suspicions, and who, during the drive, turned the conversation on the most general subjects. They arrived at Madame la Marechale de l'Hôpital's, where the scene was equally gay and gorgeous.

Let no one dispute the influence of good and

evil stars, after witnessing the progress of Madame la Marechale. She commenced life as a washer-woman, and now, in its meridian, was residing in one of the best hotels in Paris, wife to a man of the highest rank, surrounded by the élite of the court, Louis at her fête, and herself wearing a set of pearls larger than the Queen's; but this was a delicate subject, for it was well known that Anne piqued herself on the size of her set. Now, it is not so much La Marechale's matrimonial achievements that prove the good graces of her ruling planet, as her success in society. It was not so wonderful that the very pretty girl should marry a man whose years and wealth had alike multiplied; nor that the still prettier widow should turn the head and heart of de l'Hôpital, both being a little the worse for use. The wonder was, how well she succeeded in her new element. Her house was one of the most frequented in Paris, and even *la superbe* Mademoiselle deigned to pronounce that she was "*une bien bonne femme;*" and yet nothing could be more prominent than her ignorance, more *pronounced* than her vulgarity. Perhaps, if she had been more refined, she would have been less successful. Though there was a want of information, there was no want of talent. She had a good sort of coarse

cleverness, admirably fitted to get on in the world; she possessed those two first requisites, a good constitution and a good temper; she had little feeling, and less delicacy; she soon saw that even people of the utmost refinement sometimes permitted themselves to be amused by its very reverse—and she cared little for affording amusement even at her own expense. Let those laugh who win, is the very axiom of vulgar policy, and on that hint she acted. It was now settled that every body was to be amused by her coarse jest and her odd expressions, and therefore every body was amused. Moreover, there was another great secret of her popularity; all in her company luxuriated in a little complacent sense of their own superiority,—one of the most agreeable of the senses to indulge. Such was the enterprising individual whose saloon was to-night a representation of the Field of the Cloth of Gold. Among other things understood of the Marechale was, that less ceremony was to be practised at her house than elsewhere. All were to do as they pleased, if they could; for, verily, to please one's self is no such easy task.

Dancing commenced; and during the course of the evening, Francesca and the Comtesse de Soissons paused for a moment to rest themselves

in a small room fitted up as a tent with amber-coloured silk. The King and the Duc d'Anjou entering at the same minute, a lively conversation began, which the Comtesse almost entirely supported. Suddenly the Duc caught sight of himself in a mirror opposite: "Mon Dieu!" exclaimed he, "I am too fair to remain here—I am quite overpowered by this colour; for mercy's sake, madame, come and dance with me, in pity to my complexion."

He took Marie's hand, and they quitted the tent, thus leaving his brother and Francesca to an inevitable *tête-à-tête*. Louis was silent, and seemingly somewhat embarrassed; and it was not till a slight movement of his companion indicated an intention of rising, that he said, "Pray do not go, Mademoiselle—I want to know how you like the fête."

"It is very gay," replied she.

"I have not enjoyed it till this moment," exclaimed her companion. "Ah! it is so irksome to have your attention distracted by every one excepting that one to whom it is devoted."

Francesca could only bow with as little of the air of taking the speech to herself as possible; but a young lover, like a child in the dark, gains courage from the sound of his own voice. Louis

proceeded rapidly, shewing her the little bunch of violets which he had taken the evening before he left Compeigne, though so dry and faded that nothing remained to indicate that they once were flowers but their perfume lingering round the envelope.

"You see how precious I have held even these few withered leaves—and your bouquet to-night is formed again of violets."

"They were an anonymous present, sent this morning."

"And you do not the least suspect the donor?" said the King, smiling.

"My suspicions," replied Francesca, "are far too presumptuous for utterance."

"Presumption is not a word for a mouth so lovely—it belongs rather to the one who ventured on such unworthy offerings, more than repaid by the happiness of their acceptance."

"Your Grace forgets," answered Francesca, "that there might be circumstances which made their refusal more embarrassing than their acceptance, however painful that was and is."

"Ah! you fear my mother, or the Cardinal's anger," exclaimed Louis; "but I am, and, when I choose, can be, the master. Madame de Soissons told me how timid you were; but, surely, my

power is absolute—you may command rank far beyond your utmost expectations—wealth——"

"I pray you hear me for one moment," interrupted Francesca; "the Comtesse de Soissons has somewhat misinformed you as to my timidity, for I find that I have courage to tell you the truth."

"And truth made beautiful by coming from your lips."

"It is a pity to waste any thing so graceful as your flattery—and on me it is wasted. It would be affectation were I to misunderstand your meaning; and I tell you frankly, that, so gained, I should despise wealth and loathe rank."

Louis's brow wore its deepest gloom as he said, "There are few in yonder room who would so cavalierly reject my love."

"Love!" exclaimed Francesca; "do not use the word—say a vain and passing fantasy—ay, and born of the flattering instigations of others—unworthy, I must hope, of me, and still more unworthy of yourself."

"I see nothing so unworthy in the admiration of beauty."

"A truce to these compliments, which suit me as little to hear as you to offer. Allow me to address myself to you earnestly and seriously. I do implore your forbearance. Look through your

whole court, you can find no one so unprotected, so friendless, as myself. A dependant on your dependants, what refuge have I but in your own sense of right? Madame de Soissons may shew what I have to expect from an early friend—my happiness is nothing compared with the advantage of attracting you to her house for even a few passing evenings. I repeat to you calmly and truly, your pursuit may annoy, but it cannot alter me. The worst thing that I shall have to forgive will be, your own destruction of my high and respectful admiration."

"Who is the flatterer now?" asked Louis, but with a much less moody aspect.

"I do but give utterance to the universal feeling; and I can only entreat your pardon, and throw myself on your generosity."

"Allow me, Mademoiselle, to lead you to the ball-room; and the only pledge I ask of your forgiveness is, that if ever I can render you favour or service, you will not forget that I shall venture at least to place myself on your list of friends."

Francesca's eyes were filled with tears of gratitude; she could not trust her voice to speak, but a look was sufficient answer; and, with marked and kind courtesy, the young monarch took her hand, and led her into the adjoining chamber.

"If I had known that your dread of the yellow silk was equivalent to positive banishment," said Louis, addressing the Duc d'Anjou, "I should not have waited so long for your return, for I wanted to consult Madame de Soissons about the ballet to-morrow. My mother, with the Père Vincent's good leave, has decided on honouring it with her presence."

So saying, Louis led the Comtesse a little apart. Francesca saw them talking—the King earnestly, his companion at first sneeringly, but the sneer subsided into silent attention. No one knew better than Louis, even at that early age, how to insure obedience.

As she returned home, Francesca observed, under the veil of more than ordinary politeness, a concealed constraint in her companion. Both were glad to separate: and, to the shame of a good conscience be it spoken, the embarrassment of the injured, as usual, exceeded that of the injurer.

CHAPTER III.

> "For what will love's exalting not go through,
> Till long neglect, and utter selfishness,
> Shame the fond pride it takes in its distress?"
>
> LEIGH HUNT.

"A TRAVELLER sees many wonderful sights," said the Chevalier de Joinville, as he entered Madame de Mercœur's apartment; "and such have I seen at Fontainebleau — De Bethune and his Armida *filant l'amour parfait*, in a style which it would be worth Scuderi's while making a journey there to study. I was riding through the forest, when suddenly (pray correct my phraseology if too worldly — you know I am not well read in these epics of the heart) I saw a knight and his lady traversing one of the glades; the golden sunshine fell athwart the green leaves, and shewed their white steeds and whiter plumes, while the air around grew musical with their gentle words and laughter."

"*Gage!*" exclaimed Madame de Mercœur,

"that you have been rehearsing this description at the feet of Mademoiselle Scuderi herself."

"Pardon me," replied De Joinville; "your presence has been my sole inspiration. But to return to my Amadis and Oriana; you know I am not a selfish person, so I could not keep the pleasure of my company to myself; and urging my horse into a more rapid pace, I overtook them, rich in all the news of Paris, garnered for a week or more."

"Well, in spite of *le parfait amour*, I can readily believe you were gratefully received. Ah! the country teaches us to appreciate people."

"For once in your life you are mistaken. By the by, is not the novelty of the sensation rather agreeable? But the case is sufficiently extraordinary to leave even your sagacity at fault. I was actually *de trop*."

"Pray," interrupted Francesca, "did you find the novelty of the sensation agreeable?"

The Chevalier laughed, and said, "Yes, one likes to add to one's experience, and to find that the impossible does sometimes occur. I began telling them the wonders of the world which they had quitted; but they had no smiles but for each other, no ears but for honied words—each sank into a tender silence, and had I come from the

antipodes instead of Paris, they could not have listened with less interest to my tidings. I soon took pity upon them and on myself, and rode off; but before I had crossed the aforesaid green glade, I heard their voices and laughter rising gaily as before. Very impertinent!"

"I hear," said the Duc de Mercœur, "that they are extremely poor."

"Most imprudently so," replied De Joinville; "what a neglect of the future in them to marry!"

"Were there not some unusual circumstances connected with the marriage?" asked Francesca.

"Why, the chevalier, finding the parents on both sides inexorable, ran off with the fair lady; and really that was a degree of violent exertion to which now-a-days we are little accustomed. Both in the desperation before, and the love afterwards, they are at least a hundred years behind their age."

"I propose that they should be maintained," said Mercœur, "at the public expense, for setting so good an example."

"They certainly," continued De Joinville, "cannot be maintained at their own. Ah! the Roman emperor, who desired that his slavery might be alleviated by his fetters being made of

gold, was a very rational person. I have always considered it an allegory, shewing the necessity of marrying for money."

"I prefer lighter chains," said the Duc de Mercœur; "it is strange that we should affect, as we do, to undervalue that love, which is at once the ideal of the heart, and the daily sweetener of common life."

"It were still more strange," replied De Joinville, looking for an instant towards the Duchesse, "were I to question your experience; but I was speaking of ordinary cases. Now, I hold that, in most matrimonial instances, it is as well to provide for repentance; and wealth has its advantages and its alleviations in affairs of the heart, as in all other affairs. It was by means of a golden bough that Æneas passed the evil spirits of Tartarus, and gained Elysium in safety."

"I believe," said Madame de Mercœur, "they will find in their own strong attachment the best resource against whatever evils may await their choice."

"That is," added De Joinville, "if they do not exhaust that resource *en avant*. But I consider that all individuals have but a certain portion of love in their composition, and it is a pity to exhaust it at once. Who are the persons with

whom we remain on good terms to our old age?—why, those whom we never cared much about."

"What a selfish idea!" exclaimed Madame de Mercœur.

"I am only speaking the truth, which, to be sure, I might have put into finer words. Had I talked of inconstancy, the misery of unreciprocated feelings, of love enduring as love never yet endured, both yourself and Signora Carrara would have been equally charmed and touched. Ay, ay, merge the selfishness in the sentiment, and it will be sure to take; people will be so thankful to you for a decent excuse!"

"Have you, then, no belief," asked Madame de Mercœur, "in disinterested and lasting attachment?"

"*Passe pour cela*," exclaimed the Chevalier; "I will not answer for all the vain beliefs that may have passed through that receptacle of confusion called the human mind; but this I will say, that the causes of inconstancy are much misunderstood. It is commonly said that love never lasts. Now, that is not so much from change, or that it exhausts itself, as that it is mixed up with the paltry cares and daily interests of life; thus losing its ideality, which constitutes its great charm. Two lovers begin by reading poetry, and end by

casting up bills together. The real reason why an unfortunate attachment outlasts the one more happy is, that it is less confounded with the common-place of existence."

"I must say," cried the Duc de Mercœur, "you are the very last person I should have suspected of thus subtilising on sentiment."

"Ah!" replied De Joinville, "the truth is, that nobody knows any thing about any body. Our nearest and dearest friends have a thousand thoughts and feelings which we have never even suspected. We look in them only for what reflects our own. Our very sympathy is egotism."

"Nay," said Francesca; "there is nothing which appears to me so much exaggerated as the common exclamations about the selfishness of human nature. We are a great deal better than we make ourselves out to be."

"If Mademoiselle Carrara speaks from her own personal experience, I for one will not contradict her."

"Nay," answered she, "I will not be complimented out of my position—mine was a general assertion. Kind and generous impulses are rife in our nature. Look at the pity which springs spontaneously at the sight of affliction—witness the admiration so ready to welcome any great

action; and call to mind the thousand slight acts of kindness, almost unmarked, because of such daily occurrence."

"I felicitate you on your experience," said the Chevalier, rising, "and will now depart, and at least try to preserve so agreeable an impression."

True enough was the Chevalier's assertion, that we know but little of even our most intimate friends—and yet this does not originate from want of sympathy; it is rather owing to the extreme sensitiveness of all our more imaginative feelings. How many emotions rise in every heart which we never dream of communicating! They are too fine, too fragile, for expression, like those delicate hues on the atmosphere, which never yet could painter embody. Moreover, there is an odd sort of satisfaction which we all take in making ourselves other than we are. This is a species of deception which defies analysis, and is yet universally practised. Some make themselves out better, some worse, than they really are; but none give themselves their exact likeness. Perhaps it is that the ideal faculty is so strongly developed in us, that we cannot help exercising it even upon the reality of ourselves.

CHAPTER IV.

> "There, talking with the ladies, you may see,
> As in some nest of faery poetry,
> Some of the finest warriors of the court."
>
> LEIGH HUNT.

BUT the grand subject of discussion—the perpetual theme to which all referred, was the fête about to be given by Mademoiselle de Montpensier. It was to be a *bal costumé;* and the taste and ingenuity of the whole court were to be taxed to their utmost. So, although every fête to which she had gone had been duly declared to be the last, yet Madame de Mercœur felt obliged to attend this one, as the very last indeed. It was a sort of visible sign that the heroine of La Fronde was reinstated in royal favour, and meant to be, as she had no longer any hopes of being Queen, a loyal and devoted subject for the rest of her life.

Mademoiselle Montpensier's history and character could only have belonged to her time,—a period devoted to, and distracted by, the very

smallest interests that ever agitated a whole country. High born—and, Heavens! how, at that time, the privilege of noble blood was honoured! the world seemed but made for "*nous autres grands;*" rich—for she was the greatest heiress in France; handsome—for she possessed that high and superb style of beauty which suited so well with her state,—it would seem as if fortune had delighted in heaping all her gifts on a favourite.

But fortune takes a strange pleasure in mocking herself, and sometimes bestows all her gifts only to shew how unavailing she can make them. Few lives have had more mortifications crowded into their brief space than that of Mademoiselle la Grande, Mademoiselle Princesse, Duchesse, et Comtesse of domains and denominations enough to escape any memory save a herald's or her own. The usual history of the heart was reversed in her case. Generally speaking, ambition grows upon the ruins of disappointed love; and we ask from honours and interests that delusion which we can no longer find in affection. But with her, ambition came first, and love afterwards. A throne was the vision of her youth; and the Cardinal Mazarin's soul must have much to answer for in purgatory for the many disappointments which

originated with him. The war of La Fronde was the festival of her life, and, like most other enjoyments, dearly expiated. Some slight degree of personal predilection for the Prince de Condé perhaps dictated her celebrated order for the cannon of the Bastile to fire on the King's troops; but not much —only that transitory flutter of gratified vanity which is so often mistaken for a deeper sentiment. If Madame la Princesse had died—as nobody does die—precisely at the very moment to please others, the alliance might have taken place, but with as little expense of mutual feeling as could well bring two people together. The Prince would have allowed the principalities of Montpensier, Doubes, d'Eu, &c. &c. to exclude for the time *les beaux yeux* of Madame de Chatillion; and Mademoiselle would have considered "*mon devoir à moi-même,*" "*mes justes prétensions,*" satisfied by a marriage with the head of the house of Condé.

A long, dull exile, only alleviated by household dissensions—and quarrels are the common resource of the unoccupied—followed the exciting period of her brilliant career in Paris. At length she returned to Paris, still to see crowns passing by, which rested not on her brow, till religion or romance became her only refuge.

It is a great error for the heart to hoard up that romance which is only graceful in youth—and it is dangerous, too; for the feeling is as real and as keen, though no longer likely to meet return or sympathy.

Still beautiful, surrounded by flattery, and well aware of all that she had in her power to lavish on the man she loved, Mademoiselle de Montpensier may be pardoned for believing in the reality of his attachment, and for loving M. de Lauzun. Love him she certainly did, with the most earnest and disinterested passion. I know nothing more melancholy than the vain regrets, and vainer hopes, still raised, and only to be disappointed, of her lonely and irritating condition during her lover's weary imprisonment; unless it might be his return, achieved by her at such a price, and then to find herself neglected, duped, and reproached. It was the almost inevitable consequence of their disparity of years; but I never, for the life of me, could discover what consolation there is in knowing that we are suffering from our own folly. To my taste, it rather aggravates the ill; for there is always a sort of comfort in being able to lay the blame on others.

But the period of which we are writing belongs to one of the pleasanter episodes in her existence.

Mademoiselle was but just returned to court, and enjoying all the gaieties of its brilliant scenes with the double relish of long seclusion; and that evening, as she walked up and down the terrace of the Luxembourg, waiting the arrival of her guests, she looked indeed native to the atmosphere. The lightly powdered hair sparkled with diamonds; and her fair pure skin needed no contrast to set off its transparent whiteness. The plumes which she wore suited well with the stately turn of her head; and if there be one thing more than another which marks the inherent aristocracy of gentle birth and breeding, it is the grace with which feathers may be worn—but a grace to be found, like truth, in "ah, how few!" Her scarlet satin robe swept the ground, trimmed with pearls and black ribands. A gold chain descended from her waist, and from it was suspended a curiously chased smelling-bottle; while the stomacher, arms, and throat, glittered with gems. There was a consciousness, too, about her, which is infinitely becoming—she felt that the Mademoiselle of to-night sustained her reputation. Her's was not the only brow brilliant with its own belief of beauty, nor the only toilette destined to be too charming!

It is curious, in any great festival, to note the various motives that animate its crowd. Some—

and these are the very young—are joyful in the mere delight of being dressed, and of going out; some—and these are the very happy—look forward to meeting the individual at once their dream and their destiny. Ah! the anxiousness of the question, "Will they be there?" and the delicious knowledge of seeing them the first, the only object in the throng! A third set go for the credit of the thing—it is a sort of social trophy to be seen at such a place. Others go as a matter of course; society is the business of their life, and attendance on a fête is a moral duty. Some go to see—more, to be seen; some to be flattered—others, to flatter. Some go for the sake of their jewels—others, for themselves; and at the close of the festival, how few come away but worn out with lassitude and discontent!

Poor Francesca set out with these feelings. She had none of those pleasant, vague hopes which know not what they ask or what they seek, but which give such buoyancy and such gladness to youth. True, that her broken engagement with Evelyn was a relief; but it had been dearly bought, at the price of many illusions—of gratified vanity, of agreeable expectation, and an emotion the deepest and the tenderest that life can ever know. She felt such an utter want of interest in

what was going on, that it was with difficulty she kept her attention sufficiently alive to go through the common routine of society.

As she stood before the mirror, gathering up her rich black tresses into the silken net which formed part of the Italian costume assumed for the evening, how often did the glossy braids escape from her hand! Climax of feminine indifference, she did not care how she looked!

CHAPTER V.

"This is to be alone: this—this is solitude."
BYRON.

I HAVE heard a great deal said of the cheerfulness of music, lighted rooms, and a gay crowd. I only know, that the most melancholy moments of one's life are passed in such scenes. There is such a feeling of solitude—so much conversation going on in which you can take no interest—so many persons who care not whether you are living or dead—so many forced words and smiles—so much fatigue—such a mockery of gaiety—such a dragging together of strangers, who can have nothing in common—and so much neglect, impertinence, and indifference. A large festival always appears to me a funeral on a grand scale of all human graces, affections, and kindlinesses. Like dancing, it is a remnant of ancient barbarism—fit for the days of the Chaldeans or the Babylonians, when people were only amused through their eyes—the

sole entertainment of which savage nations are susceptible.

Madame de Mercœur and Francesca promenaded through the crowded rooms till they gained a seat near where Mademoiselle was standing. One of the diamond buckles of her sandal was unfastened.

"*Ah!*" exclaimed the Maréchal d'Hôpital, "*voilà une demoiselle proprement chaussée à faire la fortune d'un cadet!*"

Mademoiselle gave him one of her haughtiest frowns, and turned away. In so doing, the glittering buckle dragged on the ground, and a youth, strikingly handsome, and dressed with just coxcombry enough to indicate that he was not indifferent to the opinion of others, stepped forward, and, dropping on his knee, entreated permission to fasten the buckle. Scarcely looking at him, the Princess accepted his services; the cavalier fastened the clasp, and, bowing profoundly, drew back.

"Splendid diamonds!" said some one at his side.

"Mon Dieu!" exclaimed the youth; "I saw nothing but *le plus joli pied du monde!*"

A personal compliment paid from the sudden impulse of the minute, no woman ever yet resisted;

and Mademoiselle, turning round with a most gracious smile to her young assistant, for the first time remarked how very handsome he was.

Ah! the slight things in life are the irrevocable. The actions on which we calculate and decide never bring the important consequences which we expected from them. It is the thoughtless, the careless, the unmarked of the minute, that set their seal upon our fate—that are the final and the fatal in their results. That youth was Lauzun. I do believe, that the rule of love at first sight, like all other rules, admits of exceptions—while so many characters and temperaments exist, no one law can extend to all; but this I also believe, that love at first sight belongs to the highest and most imaginative order of passion—it stamps it at once with the seeming of destiny. All my readers may not assent to the truth of this assertion; but there must be some who will acknowledge, that at the first introduction of an individual, they felt that one was fated to influence all their after-life—and when did such presentiment prove erroneous?

"You really," said the Chevalier de Joinville, "must come into the next room—Madame de l'Hôpital is astonishing us all by her skill in

fortune-telling. Do pray go, and be introduced to the future."

He handed Madame de Mercœur, and the Duc de Candale conducted Francesca.

"Are you very anxious," asked he, "to consult the sibyl?"

"Nay," replied Francesca; "I want faith."

"You will," replied he, "nevertheless be amused with Madame de l'Hôpital's tact; she knows enough of the history of the individuals around to give a shrewd guess at the favourite fantasy of each, and that it will be successful is the summing up of her prophecy. She tells each what he wishes, and so obtains an easy belief."

"She would be puzzled to tell mine," answered his companion, "for I am sure I wish for nothing."

"I cannot emulate your philosophy," said the Duc, in a hurried tone. But a sudden movement of the crowd interrupted their conversation, and brought them directly in front of the table. The Chevalier de Joinville was in the very act of having his futurity unveiled.

"A most monotonous piece of business this," said Madame la Maréchale, "to have only good to prophesy—nothing but hearts and diamonds. You are sadly uninteresting, Chevalier; I wish I

could foresee a few misfortunes, but your whole life is *en rose*—very sweet and very insipid. However, I must do you the justice to say you find thorns yourself."

"For the benefit of others, I hope," replied the Chevalier, laughing.

"Madame de l'Hôpital has been quite *la fée bienfaisante*," said Lauzun, who, like others, had been consulting the oracle. "I am bewildered by my future good fortune. I quite anticipate being married, if it is to bring me all that she predicts."

Mademoiselle blushed deeply. Now, the necessity for such a blush must have been in her own thoughts, to dissipate which she began talking, with great animation and little connexion, to the Duc d'Anjou, who stood near. Fortunately, he was too much occupied in observing the folds of his azure silk cloak, bordered with silver stars, in a glass opposite; and the incoherency of his cousin's discourse was lost in the regularity of its ornaments.

"Shall I tell your fortune, dear?" asked La Maréchale of Francesca, who would fain have refused; but a negative would only have drawn more attention, so she submitted to her fate with as much resignation as could be assumed with a

good grace. The Maréchale spread out the cards, looked at them with a sudden change of countenance, and then, with a forced smile, swept them all together again.

"I cannot tell your fate—it is beyond my art. I suppose my science is limited to my own country." But her manner was evidently constrained; and, with a momentary superstition, it struck Francesca how unusually dark the cards appeared when spread out—while the next moment she smiled at her own folly.

The Duc de Candale followed, and again the ominous pack was shuffled and cut; again Madame the sibyl seemed disconcerted.

"You must beware of long journeys," said she; "but really I am getting stupid and tired—I will finish your fortune some other night, *mon cher*. You are young enough to wait."

The dancing, which had been suspended, now recommenced with additional animation, and De Candale claimed Francesca's hand; but the rooms were crowded, and they stood for some time loitering on one of the terraces.

"How beautiful are these orange flowers!" said Francesca, pointing to a superb stand of that most lovely shrub, where the golden fruit, the snowy flower, and the polished blossom, hung together.

"I know no other plant that brings my own country and my early childhood so immediately before me. We had them in such profusion round the old palazzo!" and, unconsciously, her eyes filled with tears as she stood gazing on the well-known boughs.

"Do you like France?" asked De Candale; "has it equalled your expectations?"

Francesca shook her head as she answered, "Ah! expectations are such unreasonable things! It was impossible for even France to realise the dreams of youth and solitude! What ever embodies our idea of perfection?"

"I have seen mine realised," said he, gazing upon her earnestly.

Nothing so completely excludes the idea of another lover as being already occupied by one; and Francesca had been too utterly engrossed by Evelyn ever to believe in the possibility that she could be loved, and not by him. The Duc de Candale's admiration had been remarked by all but herself. Perfectly indifferent, she never thought about him; and she now listened to his words, quite unconscious that they had any latent meaning as regarded herself.

De Candale misconstrued her gentle silence; and the downcast eyes before which were flitting

far-off scenes, gave him more encouragement than any other expression that she could have worn. Naturally impetuous, disappointment was to him better than suspense. They were alone on the terrace; and Francesca started from her dream of early and betrayed hopes, to hear the passionate avowal that was being uttered by her unsuspected lover.

Surprise for a moment kept her silent; but to surprise succeeded a bitter sense of regret. "Not to me," exclaimed she; "pray do not address these words to me; you cannot think how they are wasted."

"Do you love another?" asked De Candale, in an altered voice.

She hesitated; under any circumstances a woman is reluctant to own her affection—it is so difficult to say what it is so easy to feel; and, in her place, how painful was the confession! How can the heart bear to own that it has been given, and in vain?

Again her silence was misunderstood. "I have been too sudden," whispered he, in a gentler tone; "only say that you will let me hope."

Francesca felt that not to speak now was, indeed, giving false encouragement; yet, scarcely could she command her words. She was so grate-

ful—so touched; but the very name of love conveyed almost an impression of terror—it was a word which she never wished to hear again. Briefly, but decidedly, she told the Duc de Candale that his suit was in vain.

With him, anger was rapidly taking the place of softer emotions. "Certainly," he exclaimed, in no very gracious tone, "the folly of woman exceeds all that has ever been said about it. What can or do you expect beyond what I offer you?"

Now, when you have acted upon impulse, there is something exceedingly provoking in being suspected of acting from some interested motive; and Francesca rather warmly replied, "I am not aware of any right which you have to question me; but my expectations can have little to do with what is a mere matter of liking."

"Well," said the Duc, with that outward calmness of manner which anger often affects; "so you do not like me? I am sorry for your bad taste! and I bid you good night, quite convinced that you will repent your refusal; and I daresay you will never get married at all."

So saying, he left the terrace; while Francesca remained for a few minutes, bewildered by the suddenness of the scene, and half inclined to laugh at the Duc's parting denunciation. "The

very idea of my repenting my refusal! his rank were too dearly purchased by himself. I can imagine no lot in life more wearisome than a union of interest and indifference! The contrast were too terrible, thinking of what hope once dreamed such a union could be made by mutual attachment. Ah, love has henceforth no part in life for me! Deceived, slighted, humiliated!—I loathe the very name!"

They say many a heart is caught in the rebound;—not when the heart has been really won. Pride may be soothed by the ready devotion of another; vanity may be excited the more keenly by recent mortification. But the great characteristic of deep and true love is its entire indifference to all feelings and opinions except its own; and, in such a case, and especially to a sensitive and reserved temper like Francesca's, the first disappointment is final.

CHAPTER VI.

"The hour of sacrifice
Is near. Anon the immolating priest
Will summon me."—*The Hunchback.*

The usual circle were assembled the following morning at Madame de Mercœur's apartment, when the Duc himself entered.

"What have you been hearing, seeing, or saying?" asked Madame; "for you look as if you had something extraordinary to tell us!"

"I have, indeed!" was his answer; "but even more shocking than surprising. The Queen of Sweden has had her chamberlain murdered—executed, as she calls it—at Fontainebleau!"

His intelligence was received with a universal exclamation of horror!

"How very dreadful!" cried Madame; "and to think that such an act should have been committed by any body that we all know!"

"Why, to be sure, our knowing her is a great

aggravation of the offence," said her husband, half smiling at what was, nevertheless, a very natural conclusion.

We daily hear of crimes of all kinds—we are perfectly aware of their existence; but we never think of their being perpetrated by those whom we actually know. We always deem our own circle secure.

"But what led to this atrocious deed?" asked Francesca.

"Some act of treachery on the part of Monaldeschi, regarding some letters which he ventured to open, is assumed as the reason. The truth seems little known. But I have just had a letter from the Comte l'Escars, detailing all the circumstances that came to his knowledge;" and, taking out the scroll, the Duc read as follows, adding, "I have omitted the first part of the letter, as being on my own business."

"You must pardon my thus hurrying over your affair, to say nothing of its being so incomplete; but my whole mind is so impressed with the strange tragedy of yesterday, that I can think, speak, write of nothing else. The ex-Queen of Sweden has had one of the gentlemen of her suite put to death in a manner equally sudden and barbarous; and what excites in me a strong personal

feeling on the subject is, that Monaldeschi, the cavalier in question, dined with me the very day of his murder, as I must call it. Such a gay dinner as we had! for Monaldeschi—lively, unscrupulous, and sarcastic—was a most amusing companion. His spirits, far higher than his usual bearing, carried us all along with them; and I remember saying to him, 'I envy your gaiety; why, Monaldeschi, you are as joyous as if there were nothing but sunshine in the world.' He changed countenance, and becoming suddenly grave, exclaimed, 'Do not call me back to myself. I feel an unaccountable vivacity, which I know is the herald of disaster.' But again he became cheerful, and we rallied him on the belief, which he still gaily maintained, that great spirits were the sure forerunners of misfortune. 'Well,' was my answer, 'I should like mine to be so announced.' The dessert was being put down, when a messenger came from the palace, and commanded his immediate attendance on his queen. He turned pale as death, but prepared to obey the summons; and, taking up a glass, filled it with wine. The slender Venetian glass shivered in his hand before he could raise it to his lips. 'Are you superstitious, Count?' asked some one at the table; 'the delicate crystal of Venice is said to

shiver when treachery is at hand.' This careless observation seemed to affect my guest far beyond what a slight pleasantry could be supposed to occasion. His face became livid; and, snatching up a silver cup, he filled it to the very brim, and drank it down; then he stood for a moment, as if lost in thought, when, flinging his cloak around him, he hurried from the room, utterly forgetful of our presence, without even a gesture of farewell. His strange agitation left its own gloom behind, and our party soon broke up.

"Have you never, Mercœur, felt that vague fear, that feverish restlessness, for which you can give no rational cause; but which seems as if something extraordinary must happen, though you have not the slightest ground for expectation? I ordered my horse, and rode out; and the pleasantness of the evening led me further than I intended, so that the moon was up as I returned homewards. On my way, I had to pass the churchyard, which is about a quarter of a mile from the town. The moonlight was shining full on the lowly graves, over which the branches of an old yew-tree swung to and fro mournfully. To my great surprise, from the lateness of the hour, when the funeral rites are but rarely performed, I saw a group of persons gathered round a grave

which was in the very act of being filled up. I distinctly heard the falling of the clods.

"Reining up my horse beside the low stone wall—prompted by I know not what curiosity—I asked who it was that had been buried? 'Count Monaldeschi,—executed this evening for treason against his rightful sovereign, Queen Christina,' replied a man in the uniform of one of her guards. I let the bridle fall from my hand. Good God! had he, then, gone forth from my dinner-table to his death! Could my cheerful companion of but a few hours since be lying there, cold as the damp earth they were trampling down upon his body? Were those brilliant spirits but lights of destruction?

"I know not how I regained the town, for the image of Monaldeschi floated before my eyes; now animated with all the warmth and hues of life—now pale, as I could fancy him after the fatal blow; but brought vividly before me, as objects are brought only in periods of strong excitement. I afterwards learnt the following details, partly from a page of his own, partly from le Père Mantuony:—

"On arriving at the palace of Fontainebleau, Monaldeschi was shewn at once into the Queen's presence, who, with quick steps, was pacing the apartment, holding in her hand a packet of letters,

which she had only just refolded. The Count dropped on his knee; when, hastily turning towards him, she bade him go to the *galerie aux cerfs*. He obeyed, and there he found the Chevalier di Sentinelli, the chief captain of her guards. Sentinelli is a man who never changed feature or colour in his life; and now, with the utmost coolness, he bade the unfortunate Count address himself to the priest in attendance; 'and,' added he, 'make your confession short, for my orders for your execution are immediate.'

"Monaldeschi staggered against the wall, and remained for a few minutes in a state of almost insensibility, when the Chevalier, drawing his sword, pointed to the Father, who stood nearly as pale and aghast as the man whose confession he was called upon so suddenly to receive. The prisoner sprung forwards, and throwing himself at the Confessor's feet, implored him piteously to hasten to Christina, and intercede for his life. At first, the Captain Sentinelli objected to Mantuony leaving the room with his penitent unshriven; but respect for the holy man at last induced him to allow his proceeding on what he warned him would be a fruitless mission.

"The priest found Christina in the same apartment, apparently entirely occupied with a

volume of Swedish history. 'You come,' said she, rising from her seat, 'to announce that my orders have been obeyed.' 'I come,' replied the Father, 'on a more fitting errand for the minister of our Saviour; I come in his name to entreat your pity and pardon for yonder miserable offender. Please your Grace to think, that you may take life away, but cannot give it!' 'You will leave your penitent to die unconfessed,' was her only answer; 'I would not destroy both soul and body; but on your own heads be the sin, if you waste the time allowed to prepare for eternity.' 'Lady, for your own soul's sake,' cried the agitated old man, 'be merciful! remember, his blood will rise to the skies, and cry aloud for judgment, even at the last day!' 'Between me and Heaven be the reckoning,' exclaimed she, resuming her seat. 'For the love of our Lady, be pitiful! Only see him; you cannot order a fellow-creature from your own presence into eternity!' The Queen started from her chair. 'I have,' said she, white with anger, which yet affected not her calm and measured words,—'I have laid down most of the possessions of my ancestor; but once a Queen always a Queen; and treason shall not pass in my household unpunished while I retain but one faithful follower to avenge

the cause of his Queen and of his mistress. Ay, by my own hand!' continued she, in a louder tone, half drawing a sabre that lay on the table, and returning the glittering blade to the scabbard with a force that made it ring again,—'by my own hand should the traitor perish, rather than his daring treachery should go unpunished! Now, will you back, and shrive the coward? or must he die with his guilt on his head? Yonder clock wants five minutes of the hour,—when that hour strikes, it will sound the knell of a traitor—as it strikes, he dies!'

"The Father left the room, and found the Count in a state of stupefaction. In vain he adjured him to turn his thoughts to prayer; in vain he offered to him the cross, and implored him to think on Him who died to save; but the agony of his fear was too great for prayer. The clock struck, and Sentinelli drew his sword; the noise roused Monaldeschi, who, springing up, rushed to the window, and endeavoured to throw himself out, —it was fastened. Sentinelli followed, and tried to stab him. The first blow only resounded against the chain armour which he wore under his clothes; but at the second the blood rushed in torrents from his side; the third brought him to his knee, and then Sentinelli passed his sword

through him. The miserable man dropped on the floor, which was died crimson with his struggles, for still he writhed; when the executioner, pressing him down with his foot, extricated the blade; and as he drew it forth, Monaldeschi sunk back —dead!

"The corpse was immediately put into a coach, and buried in the church-yard with all possible speed; and, but for the horror in men's minds, there would not be a trace left of the unfortunate, even if guilty, Monaldeschi. I hear, however, that one horrible trace does remain: the floor was so saturated with the blood shed in his dying struggles, that no efforts can efface the stain; in vain buckets upon buckets of water have been poured upon the place,—the crimson is there fresh and red as ever."

It was some time before any one broke the silence that followed upon the gloomy narrative.

"And what do his Grace and the Queen say? for I believe you come from their presence," asked Madame de Mercœur, at last.

"Why, the Queen proposed that it should be notified to Christina, that her presence was no longer desired in France; but to this Louis objected. 'The power,' said he, 'of life and death is in the hands of the sovereign. Christina is

still Queen in her own household. It only behoves us, by some sign of coldness, to shew that we resent the indignity of having our palace made a slaughter-house.' "

"Settled with his Majesty's usual sense of the royal dignity—wonderful in such a youth!" said an officer of the household; one of those elderly courtiers, whose whole life had been an adulation.

But Francesca, unaccustomed from her childhood to the ideal reverence with which the royal person and power were then regarded in France, could think of the ex-Queen's act as a murder only, not as a judgment. Was it possible, then, that such an offence against the laws of humanity—a human being's life sacrificed with such vindictive cruelty—that this crime against nature and womanhood, was held as light in the balance when weighed with a want of respect to one of the royal residences! Well, custom is a surprising thing; and when we think how, from earliest infancy, we are surrounded by false impressions, undue rights, privileges, and prejudices, we may well marvel that there is such a thing as truth in the world. That it should be concealed, is far less wonderful than that it should ever be discovered. After all, the great error in human judgment is not so much wilful perversion, as that we judge according to situa-

tion, and always make that situation our own; while the chances are, that we really have not one thought, feeling, or habit, in common with those on whom we yet think ourselves qualified to decide.

CHAPTER VII.

"You know I am fond of the news, though I have as little curiosity as any man."—*The Wife.*

"We have always some reigning mania," said the Chevalier de Joinville, when, in common with others of the court, he came in to Madame de Mercœur's, on his way to a fête given by Madame de Soissons, whose hôtel was more than ever the rallying point of the court. "Every body now is making what they call portraits of themselves and of their friends. Pastoral phrases are called into requisition; and under some name just stepped out of an eclogue, our dames and cavaliers flatter themselves and their friends, and are *tant soit peu maligne.*"

"I heard one or two of these candid confessions read the other evening," replied Francesca; "and I could not but smile at the modest avowal of one lady, that she had the very whitest teeth in

the world! qualifying it, however, by the regret, that she really had not spirits enough to shew them! While another takes up a graver tone, and thanks God, who gave her only inclinations conformable to her duty, and confesses to *une grande passion* for pictures, jewels, and furniture!"

"I could soon give my own portrait," said Madame de Mercœur; "I should at once candidly confess that I thought myself very pretty, very amiable, very good; and trust to my friends' kindness to take the assertion for granted."

"I would never," cried the Chevalier, "trust to my friends' kindness for any thing. We all in our hearts hate each other!"

"What a monstrous assertion!" exclaimed she.

"All profound truths startle you in their first announcement."

"I am sure," replied the Duchesse, "I hate no one."

"You are too young. But wait a little; have a few mortifications, a few disappointments—a few of those surprises of falsehood, slander, and treachery, with which all experience is well supplied—and you will be astonished to find what a stock of hate you have for use. But you are sitting quite absorbed," continued he, turning to Fran-

cesca; "are you sketching portraits in your own mind?—I hope it is one of our cavaliers? What do you say to that of the Duc de Candale?"

The truth was, De Joinville, who took that constant interest in the affairs of others, called philanthropy or curiosity according to circumstances, had noted Francesca's *tête-à-tête* of the former evening, and wished to draw some conclusion of its result from her manner. He was disappointed—she was too indifferent for confusion; and, far above the singularly small vanity of conquest, she answered him with entire composure.

"I would describe him in three words—*chivalresque*, *romanesque*, and *pittoresque*. I heard Madame de Mercœur say that he was going to Spain, and he appears to me an admirable specimen of your court—he will do you credit."

"Have you seen Madame de Soissons' portrait of herself?" asked de Joinville, who now thought that the subject of the Duc de Candale was too uninteresting for further question.

"No," said Madame de Mercœur; "I suppose Marie felt that she could tell me nothing new."

"I have a copy; so, if you please, you can judge for yourself," and the Chevalier read as follows:—

"*Portrait of Madame de Soissons, by herself.*—Portraits are just now the rage; and as others are drawing theirs, I will also draw mine, for I hold it expedient to follow whatever may be the ruling fashion. Singularity is never forgiven; it is taken as a personal affront by all from whom we differ; it is an assumption of superiority; and why should the general taste not be good enough for the generality? I, for one, am content to do like the rest; thereby escaping that responsibility which is, at best, an invidious and, worse—a useless distinction.

"I am not pretty, though I pass for such; for my face always flatters who ever looks at it. I have a slight and manageable, rather than a positively good figure; and I dress to perfection.

"Why should so much skill in colouring, so much taste in arrangement, be bestowed on a picture, when half the same attention would produce a still more charming effect bestowed upon real life? A careful toilette is a perpetual flattery—it shews that you desire to please, and people like that; for we all attach an undue value to our own suffrage. I would here observe, as one of the results of my observation, that all gentlemen prefer bright colours in feminine attire; it is on the principle

of contrast,—their taste is dictated by their vanity. A woman in sombre hues does not sufficiently throw out their own dark dress.

"I am *franche coquette*, and I confess it; and sometimes my *adorateurs* are disappointed, from an expectation of my constancy, which it is not in my nature to realise. Yet, methinks their complaints are unreasonable; their worst reproach is that of being indebted to me for some agreeable hours. I beg to plead the excuse offered by some Athenian orator, who, announcing a victory to the people, induced them to proclaim a fête, crown themselves with flowers, and to pour out libations, both on the gods' account and their own. The next day, the tidings arrived of defeat, and loud were the exclamations against the deceitful Cleon. 'Nay, my friends,' replied he, 'can you blame me for making you pass a pleasant day?—rather give me your thanks.'

"I have very buoyant spirits, and hence am easily amused. This makes me a charming companion; for many seeing me entertained, set down the entertainment to their own powers, and admire me out of compliment to themselves.

"I am obliging and caressing, and really do like people very much when I see them. I own my memory is not good; the fact is, that life is

too short to be occupied by aught but the present —hope and remembrance are equally a waste of time.

"I am given to flattery, not from any interested motive, but because I like to say agreeable things. My own vanity, which is great, makes me sensitive to that of others. And here I would observe, that love of admiration seems scarcely to be properly appreciated; it is the only bond of society—we could not otherwise endure each other. It is the true source of the sublime, and, my conscience obliges me to add, of the ridiculous. Still, it is the strong necessity of admiring each other, and the being admired in our turn, that has built cities, congregated multitudes, and organised what we call our present state of civilisation.

"I am lively—a sort of temper very popular, for it makes no troublesome demands upon our civility; and am entirely carried away by the impulse of the minute. Hence, I am incapable of every profound or lasting attachment. I should forget my own identity, could I be parted from myself for a week.

"I incline mostly to look at things on the ridiculous side, and this makes me an amusing companion; and I rarely think much of my

trouble, for any body's applause is better than nobody's. Novelty has to me great attraction. A new acquaintance and a new silk alike rapidly lose their gloss. Unfortunately, I am soon wearied; for most individuals, resembling short stories, are soon read to the end.

"I am more easily entertained than interested, and rather object to having my feelings much excited, emotion being bad both for constitution and complexion. I am heedless of getting into scrapes, but very ingenious at extricating myself. My genius is fertile in inventions, excuses, and remedies. I consider myself clever; have tact and shrewdness; and whatever wits I may possess, I have them always about me."

"Good," exclaimed Madame de Mercœur; "*se non è vero, è ben trovato.*"

"After all," said the Chevalier, "these portraits—Madame de l'Hôpital's fortune telling—the pleasure we take in a lover or a physician—may all be referred to the same cause,—we do so enjoy talking about ourselves; and yet we feel some sort of excuse necessary. It must be admitted, that we are ready in pretexts."

"Is this declaration," asked Francesca, "preparatory to sketching your own portrait?"

"Nay," said he, "I feel quite inadequate to

my own merits; or, to be candid in my confession, I have a conversational reputation to support, and cannot venture upon paper. Half the character of wit must rely upon what is forgotten."

CHAPTER VIII.

> "Near and more near
> They bent, with pale inquiry and close ear:
> Her eyes were shut,—no motion—not a breath,—
> The gentle sufferer was at peace in death."
>
> LEIGH HUNT.

"THE very image of his mother,"—"but with his father's eyes,"—"a perfect picture." Such were the usual run of exclamations that greeted the little Marquis de Mercœur. Fortunate it is for the tranquillity of the new-born infant, if he have any turn for philosophy, that he understands none of the nonsense consecrated by old usage to the commencement of existence. The birth of an heir seems a sort of security taken of fate,

> "For the old honours of some ancient line;"

and the young heir of the illustrious house De Mercœur was received with due joy and reverence. The satin curtains of the cradle were heavy with the many quarterings of the broidered arms, and were put aside by no less a hand than that of

Anne of Austria, who, gazing on the speck of humanity enveloped in cambric and lace, pronounced that it "was a most promising child." Her Majesty is not the only person who has decided on unseen merit. The mother was as well as possible; and perhaps that week there was as much hope and happiness in the Hôtel Vendome as under any other roof in Paris.

The christening was to be unique in its splendour, and the Duchesse had fallen asleep during its details. There had been a slight shower, when suddenly the sun shone out, as it shines in that bright uncertainty which precedes another rain, and Francesca, fearing that the light should fall on Madame de Mercœur's face, rose to draw the curtain. She was not sleeping, for her eyes were open; and as her companion approached, they looked up with a strange and earnest expression. Francesca went to the bed-side, and asked, in a gentle whisper, "Did she want any thing?" No answer was returned, but the features still wore the same appearance. She took the Duchesse's hand; but when she loosed her hold, it fell quite powerless on the bed. Again she spoke, and aloud; but there was no answer. Seriously alarmed, she called to the attendants, one of whom was instantly sent for the physician. He was

scarcely five minutes in arriving; but these five minutes seemed an age. A slight change came over even his guarded countenance, as he looked upon his patient. He withdrew without uttering a word, and Francesca followed him to the antechamber.

"Young lady, there is no hope; one side of the Duchesse is struck with palsy; she retains her senses, and will, most probably, to the last; but she cannot live through the night."

"Good God!" exclaimed Francesca; "and the Duc de Mercœur left Paris this morning!" For a moment all command over herself was lost, and she sank on a seat, sick and faint with sudden agony.

"You must not give way to your feelings, at least now," said the physician, kindly taking her hand. "Madame is sensible, and you seem to be the only near friend about her. Go you to her room, while I send to the Cardinal, and summon my colleagues."

Francesca wrung her hands in suppressed anguish, and seated herself by the bed-side; it was evident, from the look of gratitude, that her friend recognised her; and she never afterwards moved from her sad watch beside the dying sufferer.

The physician soon returned, with two others.

After a few minutes of silent observation, they retired to the adjacent apartment, for the purpose of consultation: it was evidently but nominal; there was no power on earth that could close the grave now yawning for the young, the lovely, the beloved, and, but an hour since, the seemingly healthy Duchesse de Mercœur.

A thousand confused images arose in mournful succession as Francesca bent over that melancholy pillow. Who could tell the husband, who had that morning left her with no other anxiety but that gentle solicitude inseparable from love,—who could tell him that his idolised wife had breathed her last—and not in his arms? Who, in after years, could supply a mother's place to the bereaved child, in whom affection's sweetest fountain must remain for ever unstirred? There was something inexpressibly painful in the monotonous nursery song with which the ancient nurse was mechanically soothing its unconscious sleep.

A momentary restlessness in the features of the Duchesse induced Francesca to attempt altering her position; and with the aid of the attendants, this was soon accomplished; but observing that Henriette followed her with an anxious gaze, she seated herself on the bed, and supported her head with her arm, so that she could watch the slightest

change. Madame de Mercœur looked up with a faint smile; her lips moved, yet no sound was audible; but Francesca felt the pressure of her hand returned.

It was a strange instance of the contrasts wherewith Fate delights to mock her toy and prey—the human race—to mark the opposite scenes of that night. The Duchesse de Mercœur lay palsy-stricken on her death-bed; while her husband was full of his occupation, exerting his utmost powers of persuasion in a secret and difficult negotiation with the Duc d'Orleans,—one of those intrigues whose successes are such certain steps in the ladder of ambition. Madame de Soissons was full of triumph, to find that Louis admitted readily her plea of unbounded devotion to his lightest wish, as full excuse for somewhat of duplicity practised towards, not only Francesca, but himself. He was to sup with her that evening, and it would not be her fault if the young Italian was missed, as she had assembled every various attraction of wit, youth, and beauty. Her supper would be brilliant, while her sister was dying.

The Cardinal, as he stood beside the Queen's chair that night, during the performance of the ballet, would seem to have drawn around himself a charmed circle of prosperity; he was the real

sovereign of that gorgeous court — wealth and power were in his right hand; and his enemies — where were they? — who now was bold enough to call himself Mazarin's enemy? — all was submission, varnished by flattery. Some passing allusion on the stage was adroitly turned into a personal compliment, and the whole audience marked their perception by their applause. Just then, one of his suite entered, and whispered a few words; — the Cardinal became deadly pale; he muttered some hurried and inaudible apology, and rushed from the box. He attempted to open the door of the first carriage he saw — his hand trembled too much. The servants, seeing a stranger, were about to repulse him, when some one recognised him. He was assisted in, and they drove with all speed to the Hôtel Vendôme.

Rapidly he passed through the silent and lonely chambers, till he reached one, the most silent of all. For her sake who was suffering there, he paused to repress his emotion; but his step was unsteady, and his face ghastly, as he approached the bed. His niece knew him instantly; and a gleam of joy passed over her countenance, too beautiful for sickness or death. The fever which consumed her gave a deep colour to her cheeks — a flashing light to her eyes; while the

disordered braids of her rich auburn hair lay like dark gold round her white brow and throat.

"My darling—my own sweet child! speak to me!" She smiled; but though the lips moved, not the faintest whisper was heard.

Still he gazed earnestly upon her; a joyous and deceitful incredulity sprang up within his heart. He drew the physician aside.

"Is there no hope in that bright and blooming face?"

"None," was the low, but decided answer.

Mazarin again approached the bed, but the effort was too much; he bowed his face down, and wept like a child.

Francesca, who still maintained her watch by the pillow, saw, by Madame de Mercœur's face, that she observed her uncle's distress—the large tears gathered on her own eyelids.

"For her sake," whispered Francesca, "I pray your Grace's composure."

The Cardinal had not been aware of her presence till that instant. He rose, walked across the room, and, drawing a chair forwards, seated himself, with one of Henriette's hands in his own.

"We will watch together," said he.

Madame de Mercœur looked from one to the other with a grateful and affectionate gaze, and

again reclined with closed eyes on Francesca's shoulder. How long did that silent and dreary night appear! At last the dim tapers grew pale before the warm red light that came in gleams through the curtained windows.

"Give us air!" exclaimed Francesca; "she is faint;" for the drops stood on the Duchesse's forehead, while a low gurgling sound in the throat indicated some inward struggle. But again she sunk, reposed, in Francesca's arms.

"Holy Virgin! the hand I hold is cold and stiff!" said Mazarin, starting.

An aged attendant drew nigh, and looked on,—"Mademoiselle, it is a corpse you are embracing!"

Sick, faint, and weary, for the first time Francesca relaxed her support. The woman laid the Duchesse back upon her pillow.

"It cannot be!" cried her uncle, gazing upon her features, whose fevered colour still lingered.

"Bring a looking-glass!"

They brought a little mirror, one which had often reflected the smiles of the living—it now reflected the fixed image of the dead. The eyelid had closed for ever; the crystal gave back the yet red lip, the still rose-touched cheek; but it gave them back unstained—no breath, as in former

times, came from life to sully life's image. The mirror placed before the mouth was clear as at first. The silence was sacred no longer. Whose ear now could be disturbed by the voice of lamentation and of weeping?

A woman's office is always to support and to console; and Francesca was roused from her own stupor of sorrow by the Cardinal's agony of regret. It was needful to perform the last offices of the dead; to fasten the dropping mouth, to straighten the convulsed limbs; but still Mazarin knelt by his dearest relative, and wasted on the inanimate ear his passionate entreaties, that his most beloved child would not leave him desolate in his old age. Francesca took his hand, and led him to the next room: exhausted by grief, he submitted to her gentle control like an infant. He asked for a glass of water, but the medical attendant gave it him with a strong opiate: he was scarcely conscious when led, or rather carried, to his carriage. At that moment a horseman galloped, as if for life or death, into the yard. Francesca's heart misgave her—it was the Duc de Mercœur. In an instant he had reached the Duchesse's chamber—they had just finished laying her out.

CHAPTER IX.

"And that should teach us
There's a divinity that shapes our ends,
Rough-hew them how we will."

Life has no experience so awful as our first acquaintance with death; it comes upon us—that which we never really believed till we witnessed. It has, as it were, a double knowledge to acquire,—when it visits old age, and when it visits youth. Francesca had once before wept over the sudden severing of all human ties, save the sad and fragile links of memory. She had been equally shocked and grieved by the sudden and violent end of her grandfather; but death is the expected of old age—we anticipate its approach even before we know what it is; the full of years seems but to have fulfilled his destiny. Sorrow is subdued by strong necessity; there is no cause why life should be lengthened for our love; and we feel that the worn and the decrepit do but go down into that

grave which had received youth, health, beauty—all that made existence precious—long before. But when the blow comes down in the fulness of expectation; when the bough is smitten while green, and the flower cut down in its spring; when the young and lovely perish, while the eyes, full of light, were fixed on the future,—then, indeed, is the visitation heavy to bear. Alas for the home which they leave desolate—or the hearth beside which is their vacant place! We ask of destiny, Wherefore has it dealt so harshly by us? Why should our beloved one be chosen for the victim, while length of days is given to so many to whom existence is a void or a burden? "It was too soon to die," is the vain repining of many a fond heart mourning over the early lost. Existence has its ordinary allotment—why should ours be the cruel exception?

Francesca listened to the Duc de Mercœur pacing for hours his solitary apartment, or she watched the sleep of the orphan, trusted utterly to menial hands, and struggled fruitlessly to repress the constant thought,—"Why was not I taken?—what matters my worthless, my neglected being? Husband, child, kindred, friends—I have none of these to regret me: and Guido, poor Guido! ah, we should not have parted for long!"

In the anguish of her loss, Francesca forgot all which that loss was to herself. Grief brings with it somewhat of stupor; and she lived on mechanically from day to day, taking, indeed, no thought of the future, as if her present existence were to last of itself for ever. She was seated in the Duchesse's dressing-room one morning in listless sadness, endeavouring to recall some last word or look of her friend, when a domestic announced that his Eminence the Cardinal Mazarin requested to see her. She started up in surprise; it seemed wonderful now that any one should wish to see her; however, she hastily obeyed the summons.

The apartment into which the Cardinal had been shewn was Madame de Mercœur's usual sitting-room; and the marks of recent habitation and present neglect were strangely blended. The curtains had been hurriedly withdrawn to receive the unexpected visitor; and the glad sunshine gave light, but no cheerfulness, to the desolate chamber. The dust destroyed the gloss of the silken draperies, the gilding was already discoloured, and the mirrors, dim and tarnished, threw a coarse shade over the fairest face. Yet, on one table lay the embroidery, hastily thrown aside; but the bright colours were faded, and the silks tangled: on another stood a vase, wherein

the Duchesse herself had placed the flowers; the water had long since dried up, and the black and withered stalks were all that remained. Francesca entered unperceived by the Cardinal, who stood gazing on the vacant chair which, the last time he was in this room, had been the seat of his beloved niece. Her shadow fell on the wall, and the Cardinal's attention was instantly aroused; he paused, as if unwilling to give way to any appearance of emotion, and approached his young countrywoman with a kind but calm demeanour; when, gazing upon her face, pale with tears and close confinement, — "My poor child," said he, taking her hand gently, "how ill you look!—we must not allow you to neglect yourself."

Unexpected kindness, though it be but a word or a glance, goes direct to the heart; it did to poor Francesca's,—so lonely, so uncared for, it was doubly sweet. Her lip trembled, she felt the tears gushing up, and dared not trust her voice.

"I am come to talk to you about yourself; sit down:" and he led her to the window.

"You are very good," whispered Francesca.

"I am grateful;" and then, as if unwilling to dwell even in allusion to the past, he continued, "I am commissioned by the Queen to offer you

the place of Italian reader; and I assure you the offer was made with many kind expressions of interest. You will enter upon the duties, which are almost nominal, immediately."

Francesca felt at first too much affected to utter the negative which suggested itself; for an instant she was silent, but the necessity of acknowledgment was imperative.

"I cannot thank you," exclaimed she, after a brief struggle with herself; "if you could know how unutterably grateful I am—— But as to the place you offer me, add to your kindness by forgiving my refusal."

Mazarin looked astonished.

"What do you then wish for—what do you expect?" asked he, more coldly.

"Nothing—indeed nothing," interrupted his companion, deeply pained by his altered manner.

"I think you are scarcely aware of the advantages of your post: it places you immediately about the Queen—it gives you every opportunity of pleasing, and I,"—with a slight stress on the words,—"need scarcely tell you the importance of the royal favour. Besides," added he, with a smile, "you cannot fail eventually in securing for yourself a brilliant settlement."

"As much beyond my merits as my wishes,"

answered Francesca, who had been gradually gaining courage. "Will your Eminence vouchsafe to hear me—the only favour I have to ask?"

"Why, that my curiosity alone would insure; for I cannot understand what can induce a young woman to refuse such honourable protection, or a beautiful one such a prospect."

"Ah, your Grace! I have never been happy in France. I dislike the life I must lead at your"—she hesitated—"gay court. My plan is fixed. When Guido arrives, we will at once return to our native country; we have sufficient independence for our few wishes, and we shall at least be content."

"I do not perceive," thought Mazarin, "one single motive the girl can have for dissimulation;—she must, therefore, be a fool. Still, there is something about her that interests me; and she was poor Henriette's dearest friend."

Then again addressing Francesca, he continued: "You are not well—depressed, too, in spirits; and I can readily believe the very thought of exertion is odious. I shall not, therefore, take an answer now. Give a few hours' calm reflection to my proposal, and send me your decision this evening."

Francesca could only utter her thanks—it had been ungracious to urge her refusal.

"Here you cannot remain," resumed the Cardinal; "but Madame de Soissons is coming to see you, in the hope that for the present you will consider her house your home."

"O no!" cried Francesca hastily.

The Cardinal looked surprised. "You can scarcely purpose a longer stay under the roof of so young a master? But perhaps"—and this rose from a sudden and secret suspicion—"the Duc de Mercœur may have proposed some more agreeable place?"

"I have not," answered Francesca, quite unconscious of the latent surmise, "seen the Duc since——" And she stopped with uncontrollable emotion.

The Cardinal paused too, for his better feelings reproved his momentary injustice. Moreover, he knew the Comtesse too well not to conjecture that many a slight and unkindness might have wounded both the pride and the affection of her former friend. Still, this was an evil beyond his remedy. The Signora de Carrara must bear it as well as she could, and her situation about the Queen would soon place her in perfect independence; while he had the satisfaction of having done all

his attachment to Madame de Mercœur suggested, in the shape of kindness to her young and friendless protégée.

"I will trespass on your time no longer," said he, rising; "do not, in a foolish fancy of youthful depression, throw away the fortunes of your future life. I shall expect your answer to-night."

Francesca followed him to the door, offering the thanks she could yet scarcely articulate. The moment the Cardinal was gone, she threw herself into a fauteuil, and wept bitterly. For the first time, the sense of her extreme isolation pressed heavily upon her; she listened to that constant and hollow sound in the air, which tells you at once that you are in the heart of a crowded city.

"Good God!" thought she, "amid the countless multitudes hurrying around, have not I a single friend?—no, not one! And yet what the Cardinal said is true—here I cannot remain—what right have I to intrude? But where am I to go—to the Comtesse de Soissons?—a cell in their terrible bastile! So false, so unkind, so designing—no, no! dependence on her sufferance—kindness I will not call it—were too bitter. Then this place about the Queen—ah! how little do I desire any such glittering bondage! Why should I lay up for myself so much of future discontent

and mortification? O no! this court is well for those who have rank, fortune, and friends; but I, poor, a foreigner, without kindred or connexion—what have I to do here? There was a time when I desired to mix in society, to catch, if possible, its grace and its ease—I deemed that so much worthier should I be of Evelyn's love; but now that is all over. Why should I desire improvement—what, now, is success to me?" And she hid her face in her hands, as if to shut out even from herself the bitter consciousness of despised and misplaced affection. "Yet, something," continued she, rousing herself, "I must do; this"—glancing round the desolate chamber—"is indeed no more my home. Guido will be here in a week's time. Why not for that brief period take up my residence in the Carmelite convent? M. Bournonville will, I am sure, make the arrangement for me."

She started from her seat, and sent a message to him. Fortunately the page found him able to obey the summons immediately, which he did with the more readiness as Francesca was a great favourite, and one who, during Madame de Mercœur's life-time, had seized many opportunities of conferring those slight obligations which are often more gratefully remembered than more important

and therefore oppressive favours. He was flattered by her consulting him—he was delighted to be employed on any body's business but his own; and in less than an hour he had been to the convent, seen the gouvernante, and settled every thing for Francesca's reception that very evening, when he also offered his services to conduct her thither,—an offer thankfully accepted.

Her preparations were soon completed; and after looking rather than taking an affectionate farewell of the sleeping child, she wrote a few lines of thanks to the Duc de Mercœur—to request a parting interview appeared to her an unnecessary recalling of remembrances too painful. The letter to the Cardinal took more time to write: it was so difficult to express her deep gratitude for the favour she nevertheless rejected! But the more she reflected on the offer, the more she revolted from its acceptance; and her refusal was at last committed to paper. She sealed the packets, gave directions for their delivery, and went to wait in the reception-room till Bournonville's arrival.

She felt a melancholy satisfaction in gazing for the last time on a scene so indelibly impressed with Madame de Mercœur's image. How many instances of her sweet and gentle temper rose so

touchingly to memory! A noise was heard in the antechamber; but before Francesca, who believed it was Bournonville, could rise, Madame de Soissons had entered. "Quite at home, I perceive," said she; "I should have called before, but that I never thought of finding you here still."

"Whither did you think I was gone?" exclaimed Francesca.

"Oh! no where. I know young widowers require consolation. Pray, how is the Duc de Mercœur?"

One woman instantly penetrates the drift of another; the allusion, which from the Cardinal was lost, was understood at once coming from his niece. Francesca coloured, but only from indignation. "I should think his sister must know best," was her cold reply.

"Oh! I really have no talents for soothing solitude, neither do I pretend to your powers of attraction. However, sorry as I am to interfere with so interesting and Christian a duty as consoling the afflicted, I am come to entreat that you will favour my poor house with your company."

"I deeply feel," answered Francesca, "the honour of Madame de Soissons' invitation, which it is, however, out of my power to accept."

"Nonsense! Are you aware that the Duc de

Mercœur joins his regiment the day after to-morrow?"

"I do not comprehend what the Duc de Mercœur's joining his regiment has to do with me."

"Why, you cannot stay here—you have no where else to go—so you must come to me."

"I thank you; but, for the short period of my residence in Paris, I have decided on staying at the Carmelite convent."

The Comtesse de Soissons stood silent with surprise. She had come to the Hôtel de Vendôme out of temper, from two reasons; first, because her conscience reproached her with her unkind neglect of her early friend; and, secondly, she was angry that her uncle should be the person to remind her of it. She had, moreover, a vague jealousy of the influence Francesca might obtain in the royal household. Any thing but temper would have been disarmed by the other's pale and languid appearance; but Marie could subdue, rule, and manage others, not her own mood. Still, the declaration of the intended sojourn and departure astonished her out of her full resolve of annoying, she cared not how. "Have you not seen my uncle?" was her first question.

"I have," replied Francesca; "and am most grateful for his kindness, but cannot accept it,

I wish for nothing but to leave France as soon as possible."

"But surely," exclaimed Marie, relenting in her secret soul, "you can stay with me till you do?"

"I prefer the quiet of the convent; and Guido will soon be here."

The conversation was interrupted by the entrance of Bournonville, looking half haste, half consternation. "Signora, what shall I do—what will you do? I cannot accompany you to the Carmelite convent. You know the beautiful Italian greyhound his Eminence gave Mademoiselle? It has been dangerously ill—it is now recovering, and her Highness cannot rest till she has its picture. I alone, she is graciously pleased to say, can give that immortality to the Cardinal's gift which his kindness deserves. Even if Fido perish, its image will live in her memory, and on canvass. She has sent for me three times."

"If, Francesca," said Madame de Soissons, in an altered tone, "you determine on going to the Carmelite convent, at least let me take you there."

Francesca saw at a glance the change in her companion's humour. "Why should we part unkindly?" crossed her mind, and she accepted

the offer. Bournonville hurried off, and the carriage was ordered to the convent.

By no uncommon transition, Marie was now sincerely desirous of Francesca's company. She laughed herself into amiability by her ludicrous description of the conventual discipline; and when she took leave of her companion, it was with the utmost kindness, and a promise to come soon and see her,—a promise she never fulfilled. Neither interest nor amusement drew her to the convent; the momentary impulse of feeling was past, and she as much forgot Francesca as if she had never existed.

By one individual, the sister Louise, Francesca was most affectionately welcomed; and how grateful did she feel for those few whispered words! We know not the worth of kindness till we have known its want. For days she had wearied with unuttered thoughts, pined with unshared feelings. Heavens! the relief, to say nothing of the gratification, of sympathy! The human heart was never made for solitude; thoughts were meant to be expressed, feelings meant to be partaken. Neglect and suppression are, indeed, the cold and lonely process which turns them into stone.

A few days after, Francesca was summoned to the parlour, where, to her surprise, she found the

Duc de Mercœur. He was altered more than she could have thought possible in so short an interval. "I could not," said he, "leave Paris without expressing my sense of all your kindness."

"My kindness!" exclaimed Francesca, "who owe so much to you"—and yours, she was going to add, but the words died upon her lips. A painful silence ensued—her presence recalled the sense of his loss so freshly to Mercœur's mind, that he could not command his voice. In the hope of rousing him by awakening some more grateful thought, she asked of his child.

"Do not name it!" answered he, passionately. "God forgive me! I cannot yet bear its name. But for its ill-starred birth, Henriette might now be living. What is there in that unconscious infant to replace its mother?"

"Many years, I trust, of consolation and affection. Cherish the poor child in your youth, that he may be a comfort to your old age. Think, too, how Henriette would have loved him, were it but for its likeness to yourself."

The Duc shuddered; and then, as if desirous of changing the conversation, asked her how long she intended remaining in the Carmelite convent.

"Till Guido's return; and then we shall go to Italy."

"I am too wretched to wish you well. I feel as if some cruel fatality were on all I love. I must, however, say, it would give even me pleasure to serve you; but this, I trust, need scarcely be said."

"Indeed not," replied Francesca; "and most cherished will be the remembrances I shall take with me from France."

Again the conversation sunk into silence, and the Duc de Mercœur seemed to have forgotten the presence of his companion. His loss was too recent to find comfort in those tender and sacred recollections with which time invests the dead. At last, rising abruptly from his seat, he turned to bid Francesca farewell; a few sad but kind words, and his step was on the threshold, when he drew forth a small packet, which he placed in her hand: "You will value this—keep it for her sake."

The heavy portals closed after him, and Francesca, hurrying to her cell, could not refrain from tears. "A little while," thought she, "and I shall have left Paris for ever! It is but a few months since we arrived here, full of eagerness and hope, expecting—we should have been puzzled to say what, but something of greater felicity than we had ever known. How little of time—

how much of life, has passed since then! How changed I am!—how much I have seen depart! My love for Evelyn—but I will not dwell upon that; even here my cheek burns to think I could have placed my heart's dearest trust in such an unworthy idol. I disdain not him, but myself, that I could ever have loved him. But that I am glad to be thus well aware of his perfidious meanness, how I should regret that we ever left Italy! —we were happier there. Poor Henriette! how little did I dream we came hither only to see you die! Ah! it is bitter to part with all that life held so precious. Methinks death were better than life, but for their sorrow whom we leave behind. None would have been left to sorrow for me—yes, Guido, but not long;"—and the ghastly apprehension which had of late so haunted her, made her pale with imaginary fear. But the presence of death surrounds all things for a while with its own terror, and the loss of one friend seems to forbode the loss of another.

It was some time before she opened the packet given her by the Duc de Mercœur. On breaking the seal, she found that it contained a small miniature of the Duchesse, surrounded with large pearls, and suspended to an exquisite Venetian chain, with links fragile as those of life.

It is a singular sensation the first time that we see the portrait of a friend after death. There is something of mockery in the very pleasure that it brings. The face, which we know to be mouldering in the dust, looks upon us, fresh with hues of health; there are the jewels, and the robe round the graceful form, now decaying in its shroud. Why should the work of man's hand outlast that of his Maker's?—why should we have the semblance of life, whose breathing reality is no more? We are not half thankful enough for the forgetfulness inherent even in our affections: did the first agony continue in all its keenness, who could endure to live?

But the emotion exhausts itself—the presence of our grief grows fainter; other thoughts force themselves upon the mind—other hopes involuntarily arise; and grief is forgotten rather than consoled. But the memory remains, though in a darkened cell of the heart; though no longer a perpetual shadow, the dead are fondly and mournfully recalled. Then how dear is any token of their former existence! The coloured ivory which bears their features is more precious than fine gold; and we take comfort in the calm and fixed smile which is now the semblance under which the beloved face rises upon the mind.

But Francesca was yet in the first bitterness of her loss; and she gazed upon the smiling and blooming countenance almost reproachfully. Days passed on, each in expectation of Guido, who yet did not arrive. How wearily they passed! Francesca found that she had indeed taken that first step across youth's threshold which tells that its first freshness has perished. She was no longer so easily amused as she had been—that certain sign of the weary change which experience is working within us. During her former stay in the convent, the unbroken and buoyant spirits of the girl threw their own charm over all; she was either entertained or interested by all she saw; even her very melancholy had its own peculiar enjoyment. Now there was so much that was tiresome—the folly, the ignorance, the monotony of the place, were so much more conspicuous; the solitude of the garden had lost its poetry. She could no longer surround herself with a thousand vague but delicious dreams; painful realities broke in upon imaginations whose spell was gone; for she had learnt to anticipate the future from the past.

The pleasure of seeing Mademoiselle Epernon over, she found there was indeed a gulf between them—they had not a thought in common. The Sœur Louise was growing every hour more mystic

and abstracted. The picturesque—for there was much in this early renunciation of the world, in the avowed sentiment, in the costume, in the situation, which that word only can express—once grown familiar, Francesca saw not a little to deprecate and regret in those vain fervours, and round of useless penances. One useful lesson then sowed its first seeds within her mind—that, even more than pleasure, or sentiment, or reflection, life requires to be filled with active duties. Time hung heavily on her hands; at last she began to wish that even Madame de Soissons would redeem her promise of coming to see her; but she never came.

It is a mortifying conviction to arrive at, that of being utterly forgotten even by those to whom we are indifferent. Francesca had of late been much flattered and caressed, and was somewhat unprepared for this complete oblivion. Once or twice she thought, would the Cardinal renew his offer? Could she have looked over the records of Mazarin's memory, she would have found herself almost completely obliterated from them. Under the impulse of strong and unusual feeling, he had been anxious to serve her: he marvelled at the extreme folly of a refusal—perhaps regretted afterwards that he had given himself any trouble; and there the matter and his recollection of it ended.

As for Madame de Soissons, immersed in a round of gaieties, and petty intrigues for still pettier objects, she knew she had behaved unkindly to her former friend, and therefore dismissed her image, as she would have done any other unpleasant thought. Louis had discovered that Mademoiselle la Motte had eyes almost as bright, and much kinder than those of the young Italian. And as for the common run of acquaintance, who ever expects to be remembered by them?

At last Francesca was summoned to the parlour. She waited to make no inquiry—she felt sure who it was; and in a minute found herself clasped in her brother's affectionate embrace.

Let those who have passed their childhood and youth together, and then separated for the first time—a long and weary separation,—let them imagine the happiness of meeting again.

"Francesca, dearest, you are pale!" exclaimed Guido, when the first confusion of joy was past.

Francesca started—she had forgotten almost to look on Guido's face. Slowly, as if she were collecting her courage, she gazed upon him, more in fear than in hope. Ah! her foreboding was right; he looked ill, very ill—but so beautiful! The eyes were larger and brighter than ever, but sunk deeper in the socket; the skin was clear with

unnatural whiteness; while on the cheek burnt a rich unvarying crimson. Only the lip was pale. The hand she clasped in hers was feverish, and she could feel the quick throbbing of the veins.

Hiding her face on his shoulder, that he might observe no change of countenance, she was silent for a few minutes—minutes of mental prayer and resolve. Then, though the tears glittered on her long black eyelashes, her voice was steady, and her look almost cheerful. She answered his anxious inquiry: "And yet I am very well in health; but, oh! I have so longed for your return!"

"Are you strong enough to take the place of nurse?"

She looked at him, pale with apprehension.

"My own sister, what have I said to make you lose the little colour you had? It is a stranger you must nurse. But I have a long, long story to tell you;" and they sat down together in the window.

We will shorten a narrative which with them was lengthened and interrupted by repeated exclamations of joy. Every thing else merged in the happiness of seeing each other again; it was impossible, however their pity might be excited, to fix attention wholly on the affairs of a stranger. Guido had joined company with this Englishman

at a lonely inn, where many suspicious appearances warned the traveller to be on his guard. They had afterwards, finding that their road was the same, travelled together.

"I cannot tell you," continued Guido, "the interest he took in my history, though, Heaven knows! I had little to tell him; and there was something in his habitually sad frame of mind, and a vein of eloquence, striking though gloomy, that harmonised with my own mood. When within scarce a day's journey of Paris, I observed he could scarcely sit his horse; his illness increased rapidly; and it was with the greatest difficulty that we reached the city. When we arrived at the inn, I saw at once that so noisy a place was ill fitting for an invalid. Late as it was, I went to Bournonville's, and with his aid took a lodging in a house near his own, and engaged a sister of Margaretta's to attend upon us. Thither was Richard Arden conveyed. For some time he was insensible; from that he awoke in a delirious state: the physician whom we summoned said he was in a high fever. All night Katerina and I watched alternately, though, I shame to say, I slept more than I watched; and, having first ascertained that there was no change, I came directly hither."

"I have few preparations to make, and but

little leave-taking," replied Francesca; "I shall be ready in half an hour."

"I will allow you rather a longer space," said Guido; "for I must wait on his Eminence, in executing whose commissions I have been completely successful."

Francesca said truly that a little time would suffice to make ready for her departure. The ceremony of leave-taking with the Abbess was a mere ceremony; and the nuns were like children —all engrossed in preparations for the fête of St. Geneviève. Their only regret was, that Mademoiselle Carrara would taste none of the conserves and the pastry they were so busily concocting.

The coolness of sister Louise's farewell wounded her the most. The heart of the young devotee had gradually weaned itself from all earthly affections; in her eyes their indulgence was a weakness, if not a crime, and their utter sacrifice the most acceptable that could be offered up in the sight of Heaven. Spiritual pride came in support of spiritual exaltation. Louise felt raised above her species; a voice had spoken within her inmost soul, whose revealings were vouchsafed but to the chosen few; and what had been indifference, was now disdain.

This species of mystical misanthropy is, of all

states of mind, the least accessible to the affections. It distrusts them as human, dreads them as perishable, and despises them as degrading; and their renouncement, at first so bitter, soon becomes a triumph. Francesca felt the indifference by which she was surrounded overpowering in its depression. If it be sad to go where there is no welcome, it is equally sad to part where there is no farewell. Hopes and regrets are the sweetest links of existence—we pine to attach and be attached; and Francesca felt both angry and ashamed that the tears should stand in her eyes, while parting from those who cared so little at parting with her.

CHAPTER X.

> "Alas! we make
> A ladder of our thoughts where angels step,
> But sleep ourselves at the foot!"
>
> L. E. L.

"And so you visited the old palazzo," said Francesca, as, leaving for a while the sick man to the sole care of Katerina, they sat down beside the hearth in the adjoining room, over which the embers of the wood-fire cast a fluctuating light; now the long shadows falling duskily around—now dispersing them with bursts of brilliant flame, as the lighter wood kindled into a short-lived blaze.

"So changed, so dreary!" replied Guido. "Do you remember our favourite windows?—yours the thick myrtle has completely filled—part of its branches creep mournfully along the discoloured wall. Mine has been broken in and shattered; and the floor is covered with earth driven in by the pelting rains, and with fragments of marble, strewed with dried leaves. The floor has its mosaic overgrown with moss and weeds; and

—but I cannot tell you—the lonely wailing of the wind through the deserted chambers—I have started as from a human voice in its last extremity of anguish; and even now, I ask, is there no omen and no sympathy in sounds so like our own moan of pain—our own cry of despair? Who may say that the invisible is also the inaudible—or if the dead and the spirit world wait not in upper air?"

"I fear," returned his sister, wishing to break in upon the thread of his gloomy imaginings, "that we should find our old dwelling uninhabitable."

"And even were it not so, there, at least, I could never dwell again," interrupted Guido. "As I sat beside our favourite springs, and wandered through our old accustomed walks, I was haunted with the perpetual presence of change—and the worst of all change, that in myself. I sat beside the fountain, over which the old chestnut flung its shade, itself golden with the sun; the blue violets looked out from their large leaves, and twined round the shattered marble of the wall, yet so graceful with the carved nymphs and gods from whom I had years ago cleared the moss; —there I sat, even as I had done but the very summer before—all, to the one sunbeam touching

the brink, but not the dark waters below—the hour, the place, the same—all but myself. Then I leant, dreaming of the future—now, I thought only of the present. Then I gazed on the Grecian relics at my feet, and said, even such forms are sleeping in my mind—such are the lovely creations destined to be the work of my hand. I looked forward to praise and achievement; now I feel listless and dispirited—nothing seems worth its toil."

"And I," exclaimed his sister, "shame to see you give way to this unseemly despondency!"

"Ah! it is not I that give way—my imagination is beyond me; I can control its depression as little as I could create its buoyancy. Is it my fault that the beautiful no longer haunts my solitude? And you, my sister—you, who lesson me on endurance, your cheek is pale, and your step languid; even with you, how much has life lost its interest!"

"Why, Guido, should we conceal that each has suffered from bitter disappointment? We have early learnt the cold and harsh truth, that it is hard to brook the passing away of love—passing away, too, as ours has done, because it has been unworthily bestowed? Yet, surely not for that are we to fancy that existence has been

given in vain. I should despise myself, could I believe that my whole future was to be coloured by the vain remembrance of one so mean, so false, as Robert Evelyn."

"Alas! my sweet sister, Robert Evelyn and Marie Mancini are but instruments in the hands of a remorseless destiny. The pain which they inflicted sinks into nothing before the knowledge which they brought. It is their work, that we are grown less kind, less trusting—that we look suspiciously on affection, knowing that it has once deceived us. It is their work, that we seek to repress the warm emotions of the beating heart, lest the encouragement lead to future agony. It is their work, that falsehood, ingratitude, and wrong, are things within our own experience; once we believed in their existence, but not as existing for us."

"But, dearest Guido, what injustice to allow these two to individualise the whole human race!"

"They are the symbols of the whole. The reflections which they first suggested have led to the inevitable conclusion, that evil is inherent in our nature. I no longer believe in happiness, because I see the fallacy of my first belief; and the examination which that induced, has shewn

me the fallacy of all. Shew me a heart without its hidden wound."

Francesca did not interrupt the mournful silence that ensued—all that was sorrowful in memory rose to the surface. The image of Evelyn brought before her the little reliance that could be placed in love. The faithlessness of early friendship, how was it shewn in the careless neglect of the Comtesse de Soissons!—and the mockery of worldly prosperity rose like a phantom from the yet-scarce-cold grave of Madame de Mercœur.

"Is it my fault," continued Guido, "that I can no longer deceive myself? I hold nothing in life worth desiring, because I feel that nothing in life can give happiness. Wealth brings indolence and satiety—power its own terrible responsibility, but never the enjoyment we expected; the struggle was feverish, but thereunto the possession answers not. And love!—what is it but the most subtle mockery!—with the light and vain, perishing of its own inconstancy; or, with the fond and true, betrayed by the deceit which has the gloom, but not the rest of death. As to what is called a life of pleasure and amusement, its own inanity is its own rebuke. I loathe its vapid weariness—its yawns are sweeter than its smiles. Once I had higher dreams and nobler aspirations. I looked

forward to the creation of grace and beauty, and believed in the immortality I was myself to create. Alas! I feel unequal to the struggle. Happy are those who to the hope add the power! I am but one of the many who see the distant goal, but who sink at the commencement of the race."

"The gloom of those failing embers," exclaimed Francesca, "has infected us both!" and, rising from the low settle, she lighted the lamp, and flung some smaller wood on the hearth, and a cheerful blaze kindled at once.

"How can we," said she, drawing her seat close to Guido, and laying her hand tenderly on his arm, "disbelieve in affection while we remain to each other? Once let us leave this dreary city behind, and find a home in some lonely and pleasant place, and we shall have our old content come back. I shall have enough to do in keeping—even our little household in order; and you—why, the first graceful peasant that passes, half hidden in the foliage, will conjure up in your mind a world of dryades and light-footed nymphs. Ah! of late we have been too idle."

CHAPTER XI.

"Whither, oh! whither hath the world a home—
The wide, cold world—for heart so lorn as mine?"

It was the third night after their arrival in their new abode, that Francesca was seated watching the slumbers of their sick guest. They were quiet and deep; and the physician had pronounced that he would, in all probability, awaken restored to sense. More than once she had approached the pillow, and bathed his temples with some aromatic essence, and moistened his lips with some refreshing liquid. At length he stirred, and drawing a deep breath, she could perceive that he was rousing, and, as she hoped, to consciousness. Placing the screen carefully before the lamp, lest its light should flash too suddenly on his weakened eyes, she took a cup in her hand, and advanced to give the medicine it had been especially enjoined he should take when he awoke.

She raised his hand on her arm, and, like a child, he implicitly followed the motion of her hand, and swallowed the reviving draught. He looked feebly round, and murmured a few inaudible words; but Francesca perceived that his hand was no longer feverish, and his temples, as she bathed them, were comparatively cool.

The lamp was shaded, and the fire was dim, when suddenly the log, which had burnt through, gave way; a shower of sparkles rose from the hearth, and a bright blaze illuminated the room, falling full on Francesca's face, as she bent over the patient. He gave one wild look upon her countenance; she startled back at the expression of terror in his eyes.

"Beatrice!" he shrieked, and attempted to rise, but fell back, and fainted in the effort.

She called loudly for assistance; and Guido hurried in, and aided in the recovery of the sick man, who lay pale as death before them. Gradually he revived: he gazed fearfully round, as if the impression of some awful sight were yet in his mind; when, seeing Guido by the bed-side, he whispered his name.

"Thank God! you know me again," exclaimed the youth, not observing Francesca's sign.

"I have been delirious, then?" exclaimed

Arden, with a singular appearance of satisfaction.

"You must not talk," said Francesca, closing the curtains at the foot of the bed. But the patient had seen her, and again a ghastly expression of horror convulsed his features. The name Beatrice again died on his pale and quivering lips, and he grasped Guido's hand convulsively. "Did you see her, too?" he whispered, at length.

"See who?" exclaimed Guido; and at that moment Francesca again drew near with a glass of water.

"Who is that?" cried Arden, speaking with a strong effort, and gazing with fixed eyes upon her.

"My sister Francesca;—do drink this."

The sick man allowed them to put the glass to his lips, and sipped a small quantity; his look became more composed; he lay down, as if exhausted, and in a little while slept again, leaving his youthful friends full of surprise at the strange terror which he had manifested. It proved, however, to be the crisis of his disease; for from that time he rapidly amended, and was soon able to sit up for a few hours.

In the mean time, Francesca had leisure to note the unrest, and unfixedness of purpose in

Guido's mind. He would listen to all the plans she suggested, but she could get him to decide on none; it was in vain to attempt to interest him in the future. He warmly entered into her wish of leaving Paris; but where they were to go, and what course of life they should pursue, still remained unsettled. A straw would have turned him any way; but orphans, so utterly unconnected as they were, where was that straw to be found? They were equally without motive or desire; only that Francesca saw the danger of allowing this apathy to increase, and would fain have laid down some determinate scheme, and sought some fixed home and employment, which must have brought its occupations, its habits, and, finally, its interests.

The attention required by the stranger was a relief to both. They watched his most careless look, and anticipated his slightest wish, not only with a kindness, but a pleasure, and a degree of attachment to the object, which alone would have proved how much affection they had still to spare —how much too young they were for indifference and inactivity. Richard Arden's singular deportment, too, stimulated their curiosity. Sometimes he received Francesca's attentions with a degree of affectionate fondness, as if he derived from

them the most heartfelt pleasure; then he would suddenly repulse them with an expression of absolute horror, and remain for hours together lost in gloomy reverie. At one time he would gaze upon her face with a look of such deep yet sorrowful tenderness; while at another, he would start and turn away, as if he could not bear to meet her eyes.

"Do you know," said she to Guido one morning, when, after asking her to sing, the Englishman had left the room in the very middle of her song, "that I have taken a fancy into my head, which quite accounts for Mr. Arden's singularities: it is, that I am like some one whom he loved and lost in early youth; and though the loss is dreadful, the love is yet pleasant to remember."

"I can imagine," replied her brother, "such a state of mind, acted upon by such a resemblance; but, ah! the pain must be greater than the pleasure. Our youth recalled, when we are no longer young—our hopes brought back again, but side by side with the knowledge that they were unfulfilled—our dreams, but attended by no accomplishment—feelings, the ghosts of themselves—and love risen, at it were, from the tomb, to meet us with a bitter and subtle mockery."

"You take too dark a view," answered Fran-

cesca; "the first fierce agony of grief gone by, it soothes us to dwell upon the memory of the departed. It sanctifies and purifies the heart, to know that it has one sad and sacred spot, unvisited by commoner cares and meaner sorrows. We repose in the deep sense of our own faithfulness, and learn gradually to pass in thought to the other side the tomb, and parting is forgotten in the diviner hope of a meeting where there is no farewell!"

"And that it is which makes my own thoughts so unendurable. Good God! to think in what vain sacrifice I have offered up the best hopes, the fervent and young affections of my heart! Ask yourself; would the tears shed over the grave be half as bitter as those which you have shed over the unworthy? The loss of mistress or lover is little, compared with that of love!"

This was a subject on which Francesca liked not to converse,—nor, in truth, did Guido, unless carried away for a moment into the expression of angry disappointment. It is a solace to confide our hopes, our feelings, and our thoughts; but none to impart our mortifications,—their shame is heightened, not subdued, by sympathy.

It was a few days after this conversation, that Richard Arden entered the room where his young

friends were seated, as had now become a favourite habit, by the glimmer of the twilight. Though Francesca urged it upon her brother, she had herself little inclination for exertion; and hours often passed away, before the lamp was lighted, in desultory conversation, only varied by long and thoughtful pauses. They were now, as usual, talking of their future plans, and, as usual, the dialogue had finished with the constant question of "Where shall we go?"

"To England," exclaimed their companion, seating himself in an old arm-chair in the darkest nook of the room. "I have long," continued he, without waiting for an answer, "intended to disclose to you all that has long made, all that still makes, existence a burden. God open your hearts to mercy as you hear! How little, my kind and beautiful child," added he, turning to Francesca, "could you think that you watched by the sick-bed of your greatest enemy! But for me," exclaimed he, rising and pacing the room in uncontrollable agitation, "you had not now been an orphan—severed from life's dearest and sweetest tie, the love of a mother! Can you forgive me? can you bear to hear my history?"

Francesca and Guido gazed with astonishment on the ghastly paleness of his haggard features, at

the cold damp glistening on his brow, and then looked to each other. Each thought that their guest was stricken with sudden insanity; and under this impression rose, and endeavoured to soothe him with the kindest words of solicitude and good-will.

"I cannot endure this," exclaimed he; "I have long wanted resolution to reveal the fatal past—a past so intimately connected with your fortunes; but now, though you start from me in horror, it shall be told."

At his instance they resumed their seats; and after a few minutes' pause, to nerve his mind to its task, he began the following narrative.

CHAPTER XII.

"Loved with that deep love which only the miserable can feel."

MAGINN.

IT is singular how forcibly this passage in my narrative brings to my mind a picture which used to be, some years ago, at a broker's—that charnel-house of the comforts and graces of life. It had been taken out of its frame, and leant in a dark and dusty corner against a perpendicular arm-chair, whose rigid uprightness seemed suited only to the parlour of a dentist, repose being the last idea it suggested. The painting, for aught I know, might be the work of some great master, condemned to that merit only appreciated in a moral essay—that of modest obscurity; or it might be a wretched daub,—be that as it may, the subject fixed my attention. The room was low, scantily furnished, and the gloomy wainscotings dimly

shewn by the red fire-light, which lit up but a small circle, and fell principally on a youth and a girl, seated on the same seat, with their arms round each other, as if they had drawn closer from some sudden impulse of fear and affection; while their faces were turned with an earnest expression of attention, wrought up even to pain, towards a figure scarcely visible at first; but which, once observed, riveted the gaze. It was that of a man, about forty or upwards; handsome, but care-worn and emaciated, with large wild blue eyes, whose light was almost preternatural. He was speaking; but whatever might be the import of his words, they were such as send the blood from the cheek, and the hope from the heart. Crime and sorrow were in that man's breath.

That painting, whose real story I know not, would give to very life the present scene. There was something in the sepulchral tone of Arden's voice that had made the young Italians unconsciously draw together. There was something beautiful in the impulse of reliance which induced the act. Let them hear what they might, they were strong in the confidence of their mutual love, and each clasped the other's hand with a feeling of affectionate security.

RICHARD ARDEN'S STORY.

"Myself and an only sister were left orphans at an early age. My father fell fighting by Lord Avonleigh's side, whose life he saved in the low countries. My mother was the nurse of his two children; and, as both were destined to perish in the service of that noble house, she died of a cold caught while watching the sickness of their infant heir. We were adopted into the family; and from that seeming prosperity may I date the evils of my after-life. Alas! we were in a place, not of it.

"There are whole races marked out as the victims of a blind and terrible fatality; and circumstances, over which they themselves have no control, work out, unshunned and unsought, the wrong whereof they perish. The annals of many an ancient race testify to this truth; and so, were they but known, would those of a humbler lot, for Fate, the dark and the cruel, presses alike on high and low.

"I remember once, when as children we were playing together in the castle *plaisaunce*, a gipsy told us of our future. She mistook us for those of equal station; but she shook her head when my sister and myself held out our childish hands.

'Sorrow and early death are in those lines; never good came of the star under which ye were born.' Our two comrades thought not of the prophecy; but Lucy and I kept it in our hearts. As we grew up, the difference between us and our companion became more marked. I could aspire to none of the honours which his mother was for ever pointing out to the young Lord Avonleigh as the reward of his exertions; my sister had no share in the homage of the many noble lovers who flocked around the Lady Emmeline. Lady Avonleigh, who had by her lord been left sole guardian, seemed to consider it quite natural that we should sink back into our original station:—she forgot that we were now unfitted for it.

"It surprised many, none more than Lady Emmeline, when my sister married Lawrence Aylmer. They looked not into the secret recesses of a heart embittered by discontent, harassed by the petty jealousies of the Countess, and pained by the fancied neglect of Emmeline, who was just then in the early ingrossment of her love for Sir Robert Evelyn, whom she soon afterwards married. In youth we deem any evil preferable to the one under which we are immediately suffering—any alteration seems for the better. Lucy said, 'I will return to the rank in which I was born; I will

surround myself with household duties and cares; surely I shall find happiness in their fulfilment. The lowliest roof is better than my precarious and dependent situation.' Alas, she had been too delicately nurtured for the reverse; and the very day twelvemonth of being a bride saw her carried along the same green grass-path to the same churchyard. She left a daughter, who was adopted by Lady Evelyn, to share a like fate with her mother; for when I saw Lucy Aylmer, her protectress was dead, and she had returned to her father's house, with a pale cheek and languid step, which shewed how little her heart was there.

"Of a surety it is folly to say that our lots in life are cast, each even with its neighbour; there are some to whom sorrow is an heritage. Lord Avonleigh loved not his sister better than I did mine; but to him it was given to see her pass from her first happy home to another, and but the lovelier and more beloved for the change. I saw mine condemned to one most unworthy of her grace and beauty, where she pined away,—a fair flower taken from its native soil, and taken to perish. And say not that we fancied and dwelt overmuch on the evils of our condition; that we were in reality more fortunate than our rebellious hearts would allow. Was it nothing that from

earliest infancy we never knew the indulgent affection of a parent—that affection which makes so little of faults, which so exaggerates the germ of promise, which so delights even in the bright eye and cheek of the child? Our place was beside the hearth of a stranger, and its very warmth was cold. It matters little to recall this pristine bitterness; but methinks I would fain enlist your pity ere you know my fault.

"The death of Lady Avonleigh followed soon upon my sister's. Lucy died in the spring, when the first violets were putting forth, and the first roses drooped from the briar. There were flowers enough to strew over her lowly grave; but the Countess was laid in the damp stone vault, when not a leaf was on the bough, and the bleak wind of autumn swept the heath. Earth looked her loveliest to receive my sweet sister's gentle dust; but all was harsh and sullen as her own nature when Lady Avonleigh's haughty ashes returned to their original element. Immediately after her demise, her son went abroad, and I accompanied him. He travelled for pleasure, I for knowledge; and utterly vain was the pursuit of each—both ended in vanity and vexation of spirit.

"It was a bright morning when we reined up our horses to catch the first view of fair Padua.

We had been quoting quaint conceits and pleasant passages from a comedy of a countryman of our own; merry jests, as to how Catherine was tamed and Bianca won, made the way short; and it was in the most mirthful spirit that we entered the town. Oh, cold and insensible hearts, that took no thought of the future, that mistrusted not their own gaiety,—more limited in our wisdom than the bird and brute are in their instinct! The mule knows the hidden pitfalls of the morass; the swallow feels the storm ere it comes upon the air, and wings to the quiet shelter of its nest—they foresee their dangers, and avoid them; while we blindly rush forward into the depths of the pit and the fury of the tempest; for we know not what evils await us. No kind foreknowledge gives us even the choice of avoidance.

"We liked Padua. Lord Avonleigh found himself the centre of a knot of gay companions, who, rich, young, and noble, desired nothing better than present enjoyment. I saw but little of him—my temper was graver, my pursuits different. I had began to form hopes born of my own exertions, that talent and industry would do more for me than birth and wealth had done for him. Ah, it is no good sign when we refer to others, not to its own precious possession, in our

pursuits after knowledge. I found the small legacy of the late Lord Avonleigh amply sufficient for my support; and my mornings in the classes, my nights in solitary studies, passed as the happiest—the only happy part of my existence.

"This course of life led to my acquaintance with your grandfather, then among the most celebrated of Padua's learned doctors. I soon found that he was given to abstruser science than he taught in the schools. The belief that there are subtle mysteries in nature as yet unravelled, but accessible to patient hope and toil, suited well with my temper. Hitherto all that I had acquired had been unsatisfactory—the reward was too distant; but Carrara's mystic eloquence brought the result of our midnight vigils visibly before me; and when I left him, it was to dream of the glorious secrets which, once penetrated, would lay all nature open to our eyes, and leave all its ministering spirits bowed to our rule by spell and sign. But these dreams were haunted by a sweeter and a lovelier vision. Carrara had a daughter; and how would my look wander from the scrolls spread out before us to the fair face, half hidden by the long hair that reached the embroidering frame over which she was wont to bend!

"Francesca, you are beautiful; but, oh! not

beautiful like your mother; the shadow is on your brow, and the sadness in your smile, which tells of sorrow; and in your loveliness is the association of pain. But hers was joyous and fresh as the morning. No care had ever furrowed that smooth white brow; no tears, save those of gentle pity, had ever fallen from those clear and glad eyes. You are pale; but her cheek was the brilliant rose, untouched by the noontide sun—unstained by the heavy shower. Her light step was so buoyant; and, when alone, you ever heard her sweet voice breaking out into snatches of song. Her young heart was full of love; and a world of kindly feelings were wasted on her delicate greyhound, her bright winged birds, and her favourite flowers. I have seen her weep when a sudden storm swept the early blossoms from the orange-plants. Somewhat self-willed she was,—a pretty resoluteness that had grown out of pure indulgence; but it was so graceful, so caressing, that her very caprice became your pleasure. I loved her, perhaps, the more for her contrast to myself. She looked to the bright side—it was the only one she knew. She believed the best of all, for she found it in herself. Her happiness was half ignorance; but I loved it in her.

"The prosperous and the contented may take

a tender pleasure in the mournful—to them tears are a luxurious melancholy; but I enjoyed the escape from my own dark thoughts,—my sullen nature found relief in her joyous temper; it was not afflicted by gloomy likenesses of my own moods. Nothing in her reminded me of myself.

"Weeks passed away, and every evening was spent in Carrara's studio. We spoke but little; but the silence was charmed. I scarcely desired a greater delight than to know that her sweet breath was on the air, and that I needed only to raise my eyes from the volume and they rested on her face. I did dream of a delicious future, and I was encouraged by her father's obvious predilection. My career seemed promising; for I had had the office of secretary offered me by the Bishop of Padua, who needed one well versed in the modern tongues.

"But though this future haunted me till it became delicious certainty in my absence; yet, when by her side, the moment grew all-sufficient. I feared to disturb, even by increase, the perfect happiness of her presence. I accepted the place of secretary; its duties left the evenings still my own, and the thought of those few hours lightened the labours of the day. Every time I went to Carrara's house, I believed that some blessed

chance would lead to the confession of my hoarded love. I invented dialogues, I imagined situations. They grew distinct to me like reality; still the opportunity did not arrive; but its hope was daily renewed, and daily more perfect in its confidence and content.

"I saw little of Lord Avonleigh. I believe he entertained for me the affection of early habit, and would have served me if he could. Our estrangement was my seeking; but I loved him not. I never could forgive his many advantages. Sometimes I wondered at his long residence in Padua; but I cared not enough about it to ask the cause. All society was irksome to me; the commonest exchange of courtesy took me away from the one engrossing thought in which I delighted to indulge. I could keep my attention to the duties of my post,—they were the means of her future possession; but to be distracted by the questions of ordinary discourse was insupportable.

"Forgive me for thus dwelling on this bright and brief period. I need to tell you of the great passion of my love, that in pity for my wretchedness you may somewhat soften my guilt.

"One evening, a discussion with Carrara had detained me unusually late, and Beatrice had

left the chamber. At last I bade her father good night; but when in the garden which surrounded their dwelling, a sudden impulse made me long to gaze on her window. More than once had I seen her shadow fall upon the lattice with a darkness lovelier than light. How well I remember the quiet beauty of the hour, the gentle rustle of the leaves, the changing perfume, as first one and then another scented plant imbued its fragrant atmosphere, now redolent of the rich carnation, now of the voluptuous spirit of the drooping rose! There was neither star nor cloud upon the sky, neither sign nor omen, but the deep blue air filled with moonlight—that clear flood of radiance known but to southern climates. The myrtle-boughs hung in long wreaths over her casement, every leaf shining with the dew that rested glittering at the edge. I leant against the trunk of an ilex near. I heard my heart beat in the silent night, but it was with happiness; a thousand voiceless blessings died on my lips, and all of them invoked on one beloved name. I marvelled how hate had ever found place within me. I looked not towards the dark blue heaven, but its ethereal beauty was mirrored on my soul,—all that was lovely, all that was loveable in nature, exercised their delicious influence on that charmed moment.

That little window, half-hidden by the odoriferous branches, was the vista through which the future broke, bright, tender, and certain. Years to come rose visibly before me. The happy home, that dearest face for ever beside my hearth, the successful pursuit, the honours, the wealth, which were to be gained and lavished for her alone, gathered round me in perfect certainty. I believed in the destiny I created.

"Well may the human heart tremble in the presence of its happiness; the angelic visitant is revealed but in departing. Ay, children who sit there, gazing upon me with the earnest eyes of youth, dread a moment of enjoyment—it will be dearly purchased; it is the bright sunshine which presages and is merged in the heaviest showers. I stood gazing upward at that room. I fancied its sweet inmate sleeping; the black hair sweeping in masses over the pillow indented with the warm crimson cheek, which found a yet softer pillow on the fairy hand. I fancied the low and regular breathings of those fragrant lips over whose quiet rest I would have given worlds to watch. Suddenly a shadow darkened the lattice—it moved—she was not sleeping, then; perhaps, as with me, slumber was banished by a delicious unrest; perhaps she might look forth, and ask for sympathy

from the summer sky—from the dewy flowers. She might see me! My heart stood still, and then beat with redoubled violence! A world of fiery eloquence rushed to my lips; I felt I could speak my love,—that I could tell her for whose dear sake I stood a raptured watcher in the lonely night. I sprang a step forward, when two shadows were distinctly traced on the moonlit myrtle! Then two figures stood upon the balcony. A young cavalier jumped from the balustrade, and hurried down the path that led to the garden, where I well remember a gate opened on an unfrequented lane. Beatrice watched his departure: I could see her tearful eyes strain in the moonlight, to catch the last glimpse. 'He never looked back!' I heard her say, in the low whisper whose unutterable anguish haunts me yet. She remained for a few moments, pale, fixed like a statue, then, starting, she wrung her hands bitterly, and darted into her room. I heard the voice of smothered weeping; but its agony was too great for suppression.

"I believe that night the fiend stood by my side; I acted on an impulse over which I had no control. I took no thought of what I did; yet every action seemed the result of planned deliberation. My soul was given over to the evil one; I

did but what that power suggested. One suspicion had taken hold upon me; I resolved to know its truth, and followed the cavalier, whom I soon overtook, keeping at first at cautious distance, till my belief became certainty. Well I knew his light and careless step, pausing beneath the weight of no deep thought, heavy with no deep sorrow; its very grace seemed to me unfeeling. The white plumes waved on his cap, his cloak reflected back the moonbeams from its rich embroidery, and the gems, too, glittered on his light rapier. 'Now, mark the folly of the vain!' I inwardly muttered; 'he is bound to concealment by every tie of love and honour; he should glide along his hidden path like a shadow, and yet he scruples not to draw every eye with his shining gauds!' Still, I wished to see his face; against my full conviction I tried to doubt;—he turned suddenly round—it was Lord Avonleigh!

"We stood within two yards of each other in the full moonlight; I felt cold, pale—a shudder ran through every vein. Almost unconsciously my hand sought my rapier; a voice whispered me, One or other must die upon the place! A strange longing for blood arose within me, mingled, too, with a painful shame lest he should reproach me as a spy. I could not have spoken—

no, though that one word would have obliterated the past.

"Avonleigh immediately recognised me; he advanced with unusual cordiality, and, passing his arm through mine, exclaimed, 'Arden! how fortunate! You must come home and sup with me—breakfast rather. But no—I hate the dull, undecided morning; night should always last till noon. Come quick; I tell you fairly I want your advice—it will not be the first scrape out of which you have helped me.'

"I gasped for breath; the ground reeled beneath my feet; my eyes closed, to shut out the fiery sparkles that filled the air. I loathed his touch, and yet I grasped his arm, as drowning wretches do a straw, from the strong instinct of nature.

"'You are ill,' said he, supporting me kindly. 'Those weary folios over which you pore are enough to wear out the very soul. I'll try you with the rosy medicine of the flask. To tell you the truth, we both need it.'

"I have said that the devil stood at my side that night—he aided me now. The first agony was past, and I burned with a fierce desire to know the whole. Something I muttered about fatigue, and followed Avonleigh. He suspected

not my feelings towards him. Young, prosperous, he had known of life little but its pleasures; he dreamed not of its bitterness: floating lightly over the surface, the depths below were to him as nothing. Accustomed to be liked, as the rich, the noble, and the gay always are, it never occurred to him but that he must please; moreover, he was attached to me by the two influences most prevalent in a nature such as his. Early association—it was as a duty to like those to whom he had been accustomed; and a stronger understanding, where talent does not excite envy, is sure to exercise sway. Thus, strong in all adventitious advantages, it never entered his head to envy me—me, his dependant and his inferior. But he was often glad to have recourse to my ingenuity, or to be decided by my judgment. I saved him the trouble of thinking for himself.

"We soon arrived, and his small but luxurious apartment shewed how precious the master was in his own sight. He flung himself on a couch, and, pouring out wine into his own cup, signed to me to follow his example. 'Pretty well for one of your sober students!' said he, pointing to the rapidly emptied flask. 'There, you may leave them in readiness, and go,' added he to the page,

who had just brought in a fresh supply. 'And now, Arden, why the devil don't you ask why I brought you here?'

"Ay, it was with a smile that I assured him that I waited his good pleasure. He was too anxious to share the weight of his secret to have much delicacy in its disclosure. But let me hurry over the accursed truth.

"He had been some months privately married to Beatrice—how he could have been such a fool he did not know—he was sure he repented it enough now; 'and this very morning,' he continued, 'I have had a letter from my uncle, entreating my return; he has lost his eldest son, and Madeline is sole heiress of his splendid fortune. He offers me her hand, and this union would still keep the property in our family; our estates touch, and he says she is grown up the prettiest blue-eyed fairy in the world. And to think that I have, like an idiot as I am, thrown myself away on the daughter of an old Italian doctor, who torments me out of my life to acknowledge our marriage! Arden, do contrive something—what shall I do?'

"The devil found me both words and utterance. 'I really cannot see the affair in the serious light

that you do. I thought all you gay cavaliers had a thousand of these pleasant adventures, each dismissed more easily than the other.'

"'But I tell you I have been crazy enough to marry her.'

"'For the time. Why, a farewell letter, and a confession that your marriage is not legal in your own country, settles the business.'

"'Arden, you are my better angel. But suppose they follow me to England?'

"'The most unlikely thing in the world; England to them is at the other end of the earth. Women never doubt what a lover says; so Beatrice will take you at your word. And Carrara, except in his own peculiar studies, is as ignorant as a child. Besides, I will confirm the assertion, hint that you might hang him up with the crows in England, and will enforce my words with proper exclamations of horror, sorrow, and sympathy.'

"'Arden, you are my best friend. But poor Beatrice—so beautiful, so confiding, so loving!'

"'Very true. But are you quite sure these very estimable qualities are only called into existence by yourself? I am much mistaken if the pretty Beatrice will be left quite destitute of consolation. You flatter yourself.'

"By heaven! Avonleigh seemed absolutely relieved by the idea of his mistress's, nay, his wife's inconstancy. He was really good-natured, and glad to remove from his mind the idea of inflicting pain. But the next moment his vanity was piqued. 'I will reproach her to-morrow, and then leave her for ever.'

"'Reproach her with what? I hope you do not expect that I should surrender up a strict account of all I may have observed in Carrara's house? Or will you run through the town, collecting evidence of what gay cavaliers have been noted at its door? A wise method, to be sure, of preserving your secret!'

"'I do not know what to do. Think for me—whatever you advise, I shall do.'

"'Write to her briefly—confess that you are married—implore pardon for the deceit—talk of the force of your passion, of inevitable circumstances—wish her well—assure her that you will ever retain a tender recollection of her—and end by being her devoted and miserable. There is a model of a letter for breaking off a love affair of which you are weary.'

"Avonleigh drew writing materials towards him—he could make nothing of it; and I dictated, word by word, that most cruel letter. It was

sealed, and despatched by his page to her nurse, who had been their confidante. Once or twice some misgivings passed across his mind, but they were lost in the idea of his rivals, and the image of the blue-eyed heiress who awaited his coming in England. Besides, the hurry of preparations for departure were enough to distract any one's attention. Some of the young nobles of Padua came in to breakfast, and two declared they should see him on his journey—they wanted an excursion of a few days. No fear, therefore, that, suddenly deprived of companionship, he should feel dull, and that dulness might take the shape of remorse; so repent, return, and be forgiven. Yet his brow darkened as he whispered, 'You will write to me, Arden?' But five minutes more, and he and his friends were riding full gallop down the sunny road that led from Padua; and the sound of their loud laughter came on the air.

"And was it for the brief enjoyment of one like Avonleigh that my whole life was sacrificed? Why should fate in all things give him the mastery over me? I know not at that moment whether I most loved or hated Beatrice. I thought of her wretchedness, and pitied not; but I wished to see it. Would she yield to her despair? and, so child-like, would she weep as a child? Or would

woman's sorrow teach her woman's strength, and could she lock her grief deep in her inmost heart?

"I had accompanied Avonleigh beyond the gates, and I now hurried back impatiently, for I had resolved on seeing Beatrice. On my way to their house I met one of the students, who told me that sudden illness had prevented Carrara's attendance on his class. Was his illness of the mind? Had his daughter told him every thing? I had now sufficient excuse for calling, and that was all the sympathy I felt for the grief of my kind old friend. I entered the garden, and for the first time paused; its stillness smote upon my heart. Every thing I saw was associated with Beatrice's care, with Beatrice's happiness. There was the little fountain where I had so often seen her nymph-like shape reflected; the waters glittered in the morning sun—what a mockery it would be were they to be her mirror now! I remarked that she had been watering a bed of carnations; half were left unwatered, and the water-vessel stood in the walk, as if her labour had been suddenly suspended, and not renewed again. Had she been interrupted by Avonleigh's letter?

"I had not courage to look my thoughts in the face, and hastened towards Carrara's study.

Both were there, but neither at first perceived my entrance. The poor old man was leaning over the unhappy girl, who knelt at his feet, her face hidden on his arm, her hands clasped convulsively, and the slender frame trembling with emotion; her strength was exhausted in endurance—none was left to resist. An ancient folio lay open beside them; I saw that it was marked by his tears, as if mechanically he had turned to its familiar pages for consolation, and found none. God of heaven! how could his sorrow not rebuke my inmost soul! But all humanity, all natural pity and affection, had left me. I gazed on Beatrice's beautiful form, writhing in its agony, and felt as if it were but fitting penance for having loved another.

"At this instant Carrara looked round and saw me. I started back as if my heart was visible in my countenance. Misinterpreting my action, which he naturally supposed resulted from fear of intrusion, he beckoned me forward, and said in a broken voice, 'Do not go—I know you are very kind, and will help us if you can. Perhaps you may advise us.'

"As he spoke, Beatrice slowly raised her head, and turned her face towards me. No spectre from the grave could have sent such ice through

my veins as that ghastly and bewildered countenance: the large eyes were so glazed, so wild; and the red circle left by weeping was the only vestige of colour, for lip and cheek were both deadly white; the features, too, were shrunken and older—it was as if years had passed by since I saw her last. I took a vacant seat in silence, when I felt a little hand put into mine, and a childish voice whisper, 'Nobody speaks to Guido to-day; are you angry, too?' I raised the frightened child in my arms, and hid my face in his hair,—it was to nerve myself for the coming scene; now or never must the parting between Avonleigh and his Italian bride be made final as death!

"Scarcely could Carrara command himself to tell me a history I already knew so well; yet I controlled myself. I listened, I pitied, and at the close he bade God bless me for my kind heart! 'And now,' said he, 'tell us, you who have known this cruel Englishman from his birth, is there no pity in his heart? will he not return? is there no hope?'

"Beatrice raised her head: she looked at me as if on my words hung the fiat of life or death, fear and earnestness dilating her dark eyes—for an unconfessed hope had arisen within her. I met

those imploring eyes, yet I answered, 'None!' Again she sunk back on her father's arm, and I saw the shudder that ran through her, by the tremulous motion of her long black tresses.

"'But,' continued her father, 'if there be no mercy, there may yet be justice. He has married my daughter both by the forms of our church and of his own; cannot he be forced to acknowledge her?' 'Oh, never!' exclaimed Beatrice, springing from the ground, her cheek flushing with momentary scarlet, and her lip curved with a scorn which I had dreamed not it could possess. 'What! ask from the cold laws what his love refused! force my way into his stately home—that which he once delighted to say I should share—and dwell there to witness his angry brow and averted eye—to know that he loathed me as a heavy and hated chain! What would his name or rank avail me? I to cause him trouble or vexation! I, who even now would lay down my life but for his slightest pleasure! And yet he can leave me—can take pride in that which I share not! I, who have grudged that the very flowers should spend their sweetness on the air, not on him! Oh, my father! have pity upon me, for God has none!' and again she sunk at his feet.

"'Hush, my poor child!' said the old man.

'Alas! for another, if not for thyself, must thy claims be enforced: shame is a bitter heritage!' And even this moved me not from my cruel steadfastness; I felt nothing but a sudden fear of Avonleigh's remorse. 'Does he know it?' I asked. Beatrice shook her head; but the words were inaudible. 'Perhaps,' I continued, 'the truth is best told at once: Lord Avonleigh, before he came hither, was wedded to his cousin; and I do believe, despite of a temporary inconstancy, tenderly attached!' 'Then he deceived me from the first!' shrieked Beatrice, and sunk insensible on the floor. She was carried to her chamber, which she never left till after your birth, Francesca.

"Once I wrote to Lord Avonleigh, but it was to let him know of Beatrice's approaching marriage. His answer told me he had embarked for England; and it was a glad, hopeful letter, full of his English anticipations, and ending with a sneer against woman's inconstancy.

"In the meantime, I exerted every effort to obtain an influence over Carrara. I spent every evening with him; and the weakness ever attendant on great sorrow made him cling to my support, while I lulled my own conscience with the thought of this vain kindness.

"It was long before I saw Beatrice; the very

thought of meeting any one threw her into such a state, that her father had not resolution to urge it; though, night after night, he would leave the unread scroll, and ask me what he should do to dissuade her from this obstinate yielding to grief, which was gradually wasting life away; and I listened—but the damned only could understand such torture!

"At length I saw her. I had bidden Carrara not expect me, as business would engage my whole evening. It so happened, that I found myself at leisure earlier than I anticipated, and, almost mechanically, my steps turned to his house. I entered unperceived; and there they were, seated, as if time had gone back on the last few months, and not a change had passed since the first evening I spent in that quiet chamber! The lamp stood on the table, and Carrara leant by the huge tome spread out before him; and opposite sat Beatrice, bending over her broidery—the small head, with its rich knot of gathered hair, so exquisitely placed—the slender figure, so graceful in its attitude. But, as I came in, she raised her face, and there was traced what seemed the work of years! Could this be the bright creature whose beauty was so joyous—so redolent of bloom and hope? The chiselled features were still left; but

thin—so thin that, but for its delicacy, the outline would have been harsh;—the transparent temples, from which the hair was put back, as if its weight oppressed them—the wild and sunken eyes—the white lip—the colourless cheek—the sad, shrinking expression of look and manner!—Oh, Beatrice! that moment terribly avenged you!

"It was some time after this that I saw you, Francesca, for the first time. Poor child! yours was a mournful infancy! Though unwilling to let the feeling appear, your grandfather shrunk from your very sight!—you brought all that was so painful immediately to mind. With you for a perpetual memorial, nothing could be forgotten; and even your mother's shame and fear lay with a constant weight on her love,—not a caress but had its pang! The present gave no pleasure, the future no hope; you were linked indelibly with the black and bitter past. There was but one exception, and that was Guido's affection. Some kindly instinct seemed to teach the one child that the other was neglected. He would carry you in his little arms, grow quiet in his noisiest play if you were sleeping; would kiss and soothe you when you cried, and devise, with pretty ingenuity, a thousand methods to amuse you; while Beatrice, as if in secret gratitude, would lavish on

him a tenderness she could not bestow on her own child! But this state was too intolerable to endure: I loved her even more desperately than ever, —was it still to be without recompense?

"It will readily be supposed, that Carrara and myself could scarcely spend night after night together, and not speak of our mutual circumstances. 'I have been most unfortunate,' said he, one winter evening, when we had drawn close to the pine-boughs, whose flickering light illuminated his worn and pallid face at intervals: 'I have ever limited my desires, yet, even into that narrow limit, disappointment has entered,—I have lived in humble and quiet loneliness, and still misfortune has come from afar to seek me! My son—so gifted, so heroic, such were the creations of our old chivalric poets—dies in his first battle, and leaves me encumbered with his orphan boy, whose only heritage is his father's resemblance. And now, Beatrice —my bright, beautiful Beatrice—haunts the house like a ghost—pale, spiritless, and dejected; with eyes that turn only to the past! And you, even you—so kind in your endurance—will go too: your fortunes will lead you away, and I shall be left alone in my old age, or left with those two children,—too old for their love, yet bound to them by ties I cannot break. I see it before me,

distinct as if the time were come;—I shall be left desolate!'

"I know not what were the words in which I spoke; but beside that hearth my passionate love for Beatrice first found words. I told Carrara how long, how dearly, I had cherished her image—how I had accustomed my lips to silence, and loved her the more deeply for such restraint. I spoke of the future hopefully—cheerfully. I dwelt on the results our united studies were calculated to effect. I painted Beatrice roused from her dejection, and the past half forgotten, or recalled but as a painful dream! Carrara entered into my plans with even more earnestness than I had expected. The poor old man shed tears of joy and thankfulness! Will not those tears rise up in judgment against me?—they have darkened earth,—will they not shut me out from heaven? I left him almost before he had finished accepting my offer. His gratitude was terrible!

"I took that night the path through the garden which led by Beatrice's window. I had never retraced it since that fatal evening. Then, the air was warm and languid, freighted with the odours of many flowers; there were gay colours spread over the ground, and the full rich foliage bounded the view with its depth of soft shadow;—now,

the eye could see far around; for the branches were bare, and the distant roofs, no longer concealed by the green leaves in summer, were visible. The cold moonlight gave no cheerfulness; and even that was often obscured by heavy masses of cloud which swept over the pale chill disk. All was dreary —all was emblematic of that change and barrenness which passes away from nature, but never from the heart;—and yet Beatrice was at her window! I saw her head drooped upon her hand; her whole attitude expressing that profound depression, whose lonely vigil wastes the midnight in a gloomy watch, which yet hopes for nothing at its close.

"I hurried past; I could not bear to see her! I endeavoured to think of the future—to imagine the colour returning to that white cheek at my caress, that sunken eye lighting up at my approach! How did my inmost soul vow to watch her slightest look, to win her from her memory by the gentlest cares—to soothe, to cherish her, till gratitude forced from her affection for me! But a voice still asked, 'How dared I buy my happiness at the price of hers?' Conscience forbade me to rely on the future.

"As I entered my lodging, I caught sight of myself in a mirror that hung near. I started at

my own haggard appearance!—it was not the face of youth, but that of a wan, hollow-eyed conspirator, haunted by constant dangers, and worn with secrecy and watchfulness. The last few months had been long and heavy years! But it was too late now for repentance—there was room only for remorse; and that the God who implanted it in the soul—man's worst scourge for man's worst deeds—knows, has been as a vulture whose beak was for ever preying on my heart!

"The next day I marked, before he spoke, that Carrara's brow was gloomy. Alas! he had only words of reproach and refusal to tell me. But he bade me plead my cause for myself.

A delicious sensation overpowered every other when I first told Beatrice I loved her—my own words sounded so musically sweet;—ah, they bore the magic of her name! But she was cold—even unkind. Her temper, irritated by long indulgence in regret, could not brook being disturbed from the mournful solace of remembrance;—to awaken her to the present seemed cruel—to lead her on to the future impossible! The only feeling I could excite was anger.

"Still I hoped, and Carrara believed. For the first time in her life, Beatrice heard him speak in harshness; but he had set his heart upon our

union, and her refusal seemed both stubborn and ungrateful. He urged our marriage upon her by every argument; he entreated, and, at last, threatened. 'Marry the only friend we have left,' exclaimed he, 'or leave my roof, disobedient and thankless as you are!'

With even a paler cheek than usual, she quitted the apartment; and Carrara, whose anger had evaporated in utterance, reproached himself for his impatient words. 'Poor thing! the very name of love must be so sad to her!' continued he; 'it is no easy task to soothe the stricken heart. This is an ill requital, Arden, of your generous affection; but I fear me Beatrice has chosen a lover constant, at least,—Death! We may bind her a bridal wreath, but its flowers will be scattered over her grave!' 'Urge her no more,' I exclaimed; 'I will not again vex her ear with words of love, however true, however deep: ours is an evil destiny, and we may not control it!'

"The old man pressed my hand in silent kindness, and I left the house. An aged domestic, their sole attendant, followed me out. 'My young mistress,' said she, 'bade me give you this note when you had quitted the signor's room.' Here is the scroll!" cried Arden, rising from his seat and taking it from his bosom; "for years these

few words have made existence a curse, and death a terror! I dare not face her beyond the grave!

"I hurried on, frantic, when I saw a group approaching, with loud exclamations of grief and dismay!—I foreboded the cause. Four persons in the midst were carrying a bier, and on it was extended a female figure! I marked the garments saturated with moisture—the long black hair dripping with water! I forced myself to look on the pale, but still lovely face—it was Beatrice!"

Arden sank back on his seat, and hid his face in his hands; while his youthful hearers sat mute with horror, and looked on each other, and tried to speak; but their words failed, and Arden himself was the first who broke silence; but his hollow and altered voice sounded strangely in their ears.

"And, now, what have I to tell you? For five years from that period I was a maniac—the sole habitant of a dreadful cell, where light and air were measured. The mark of the iron is still on my wrist; for I was chained, starved, and beaten, like some fierce and wild animal! But I have no memory save of a pale figure that sat at my side day and night, wringing the water drops from the heavy black hair, and with a sad bright eye, which never moved from my face. Oh, the

horror of that fixed and motionless gaze! It was Beatrice's countenance; but I felt it was a fiend, to whom power was given over my soul!

"At length bodily sickness mastered that of the mind. I awoke from a severe attack of fever, weak as a child, but conscious—conscious of the terrible past! An old monk watched beside me; his own sin, and his own sorrow, taught him sympathy. He prayed by me; I could not pray myself, —I never have, since that fair corpse was carried along the streets of Padua. In that convent I remained for some months; the energy of my mind was gone. I desired no employment; I entertained no wishes; my existence was purely mechanical—dragged on, like a weary chain, from which I lacked resolution to free myself. Yet my health amended; and, no longer an object for charity to the convent, it behoved me to choose some future path. The monk I have named easily induced me to follow in his steps; and he, as a last offering to offended Heaven, was about to make a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. I accompanied him: even to me might come the healing influence of that sacred soil where a Saviour's tears had fallen: there might I weep, too; and, humbled on the earth which he had trod, wash out mine offence with his blood!

"I will not detain you with our toils and our dangers. Worn and weary were we when we stood beneath the purple heights of Jerusalem—so fallen from her beauty and her power, and yet so mighty in her desolation! My companion joined in the hymns raised by the pilgrims; but that very night he sickened, and, ere morning, my arms sustained a corpse! I laid him to his last rest, in a cave among the mountains; the stone was rolled to its mouth, and I sat down to keep that midnight sacred with watch and prayer.

"Bare and bleak, the adjacent hills were yet turned to marble by the moonshine—black and white alternate, as the rays or the shadow predominated. The blue of the overspreading sky was rendered yet deeper by the masses of vapour which the heat of noon had collected on the atmosphere; a lurid brightness kindled on their edges, as if the lightning slept within them. A few stars shone afar off; but with a faint decaying beauty, fading gradually, as the moon climbed higher in the heavens. Not a breath disturbed the still and silent air; but it was cool with the rising dews, and sweet with the breathings of leaf, grass, and flower, in the plains below. My spirit drank in the calm; the rest which was on

all things reached even to me. Methought in that quiet hour I might lift up my voice in supplication, and ask of that serene and pitying heaven a sign of pardon.

"I knelt upon the earth; when, lo! there rose before me that frail and drooping form, that pale and reproachful face; while moonbeams glittered on the water that yet dripped from the long black hair. There she stood, wan and motionless, till I sprung from my knee; and I saw the shape melt gradually away—the large dull eyes fixed upon me to the last! I had asked for a sign, and one was sent me from the grave: she came to tell me that my guilt was still remembered against me.

"Yet I continued to wander amid those gloomy rocks, till one hot noon I was resting beside a well, where a party of robbers sought refreshment also. They made me prisoner, and sold me as a slave. I could move your pity, were I to tell you of half the hardships I endured; but I ask no sympathy but for my love and for my sorrow. The last master into whose hands I fell was a follower of the occult sciences; and now my previous studies availed me much. Together we watched the stars, together pondered over their movements and their influences; and when the

Mahomedan died, he left me both liberty and wealth.

"A yearning desire came over me to see my own country. Fifteen years had elapsed since I left its soil. I was now about to revisit it, not as those who sought with toil and care wherewithal to realise some dream of their youth, and return happy in some favourite project, in whose execution they are at last to find content. No; I went back broken in health and spirits, and vainly seeking relief in change of place. Alas! I was myself my own world; nothing without availed to alter that within.

"I arrived in England after a long and weary voyage, and went at once to the New Forest. I found that Lawrence Aylmer had never married again—his whole soul was absorbed in the desire of wealth; and yet his voice grew gentle when he spoke to his child—she was so like her mother; but, ah! so pale, so languid, that you asked unconsciously, Can she be so young? They told me of Lord Avonleigh. His had been a life of constant prosperity. In the fierce struggle between the Royalists and the Puritans he had temporised and yielded; and while others lost life and land, he dwelt at peace in his ancestral halls. He had married Lady Madeline, and was now a widower

with one only boy; and report more than hinted that he was about to marry again.

"I saw him in his own domains; and lightly, indeed, had years passed over his head; the step of the noble youth at his side was scarce more elastic than his own. His bright hair had lost none of its luxuriance, and the fair broad forehead bore no trace of time or care. Yet, there she was at his side, the lost Beatrice! I saw her shadowless form glide along the sunny grass,—that pale and mournful countenance turned as ever upon me. I rushed away, but the image was still before me; I closed my eyes, but it rose upon the darkness, till, at last, I sank faint and exhausted. When I recovered, it was strange how distinct past events were pictured in my mind,—and, stranger still, that, for the first time, I thought of you, Francesca!

"I started from my seat. God of heaven! what had been your destiny? were you still living? —perhaps in sickness, in neglect, and poverty! Somewhat now of expiation seemed in my power: I would seek you out, restore you to your father, and deem the agony of my confession fitting penance.

"My search was long and vain. On my recovery in the convent I had been told that Carrara

had left the place, and had departed none knew whither. The lapse of so many years made it impossible for me to find the slight traces of those I sought; when, as if some good angel had suddenly taken pity on me, I met Guido. The likeness struck me; I asked the name—"Carrara!" and from that time I have been nerving myself to tell my wretched history. Even the deliverance of my late sickness was haunted by the thought! Now I almost dare to hope, not for myself, but for you. My plan for the future—"

"Shall be discussed to-morrow," said Francesca, soothingly; "you have exerted yourself beyond your strength: your cheek burns, your lip is parched. I pray you now retire to rest, and God pity and forgive you!"

She poured out his medicine, and gave it to him. He drank from the cup, and tried to speak; but his voice failed, and he left the room in silence.

CHAPTER XIII.

——"And are we English born?"

"Art thou the England famed in song?"

S. C. Hall.

"Your father a rich and powerful noble, dear Francesca! your future station will be worthy of you!" exclaimed Guido, as they drew their seats closer to the hearth, too much excited to retire to their usual rest.

"I cannot rejoice," replied she; "I feel strangely oppressed, and am for once tempted to indulge those mournful presentiments which I reprove in you. What have I done that fate should deal more gently with me than with my mother? I seem to believe with Arden, that there may be houses with whom ill fortune abides as an heir-loom. I tremble in thinking what humanity may be called upon to endure. Amid this vast and common misery, how dare we hope to escape!"

"There are exceptions, dearest, and such I hope is for thee. You have known early care, and soon-coming sorrow. As a very child you were the stay of our little household; and how, in our late worldly experience, your own kind and true heart has led you aright! You look meekly forward—you indulge in no vain repinings—you exert yourself for others—your affections are hard to be chilled—and your belief in good, paramount. Fate forms its predestined wretches of other materials."

"I now understand," continued Francesca, "the reason of our grandfather's dislike to Englishmen. How I ought to rejoice that some, I will venture to say, providence enabled me to overrule the weak tenderness which urged me to be Robert Evelyn's companion! His real nature would soon have shewn its baseness; and, holy Madonna! to have made such discovery as his wife!"

"Had your mother so refused to participate in Lord Avonleigh's concealment, how much misery would have been spared! Do you remember that line in the English poet—whom we now keep for his own sake, no longer for that of his donor—where that loving and sweet Viola says,—

'Deceit, I see thou art a wickedness!'

Oh! how rash, thus to give fate an additional arm against us!"

"How little," exclaimed Francesca, "can I comprehend such a love as Arden's—so cruel, so unrelenting! Methinks the happiness of the beloved one is dearer, a thousand times dearer, than our own. How could he help confirming Lord Avonleigh's wavering faith?—how could he endure to purchase Beatrice's self with Beatrice's sorrow?"

"I know not that," replied Guido; "there is something so bitter in a rival. I could sooner bear my mistress's hate than her indifference."

"What fearful penalty," continued Francesca, "has his exaggerating spirit exacted!—his love and his remorse are alike terrible."

"What a change will this disclosure make in our plans! Oh! the vain folly of deciding on the morrow! Who," asked Guido, "would have thought of our going to England?—for thither will I accompany you. What a weight from my inmost heart will it take to see you loved and acknowledged in your father's house! Let what will happen there, I care not."

"My beloved Guido, unless it be for you also, there is no home for me. What new tie of duty or affection can be so near and dear as that which

has been cherished from the first? Whatever be our future lots, they are cast together."

The next morning — the excitement of the foregoing midnight being past—they talked the strange history more calmly over. "I should like to know," remarked Francesca, "whether Mr. Arden has aught of proof to support his story."

"Oh! the truth is marked in every word. I would stake my life on Arden's veracity."

"Lord Avonleigh will require something more than the assertion of one whose reason is obviously disordered."

"I wish to Heaven that my grandfather had been more communicative. Beyond a vague idea of the gone-by glories of the house of Carrara, we know nothing about ourselves."

This conversation was interrupted by Arden's entrance, who, worn and dejected, seemed scarcely to know how to address his young companions, as if he feared some sudden change in their manner. Both greeted him kindly; for his suffering was more present to them than his faults. They hesitated to renew the subject, but his mind was too full to allow of his speaking on indifferent topics; and, after a few words alluding to the disclosure, he asked, "Was there any obstacle to their immediate departure for England?"

"None. But," said Francesca, hesitatingly, "will not Lord Avonleigh need some warrant for the truth of this history?"

"You have all necessary proofs in your possession, though you may not be aware of their existence," replied Arden; "will you allow me to open yonder box?"

"There is nothing in that," said Guido, "but a genealogy of the Carraras, drawn up by my grandfather. We have kept this little ebony coffer for the sake of its curious carving. The marriage of Cana is beautifully wrought on its lid."

"I know the box well—it was once mine. I gave it Beatrice on the day of her fête. How little then did I dream to what purpose it would be applied! You are not aware that here are hidden drawers."

He raised the cover, and, pressing one of the figures, a lid flew up, and discovered a secret place, whose existence they had never suspected. There lay a picture, a small packet of letters, and a little roll of papers.

"These," continued Arden, "are the certificate of the marriage, and the register of your birth. Though deeming them useless, Beatrice, poor Beatrice, always carefully treasured them; and this is the likeness of your father."

It was one of those faces which win their way through the eye to the heart all the world over—so frank, so glad, and so full of youth. The rich auburn hair hung down in the long curls then worn, as if natural beauty were indeed a sign of gentle blood, and fully displayed the white and broad Saxon brow; the complexion was fair, with a high colour; and the clear hazel eyes were full of eagerness, hope, and mirth. It was a style of face, with its light yet rich colours, to which the young Italians were not accustomed. Both were equally charmed, but the same feeling made them hesitate. Neither wondered in their hearts that the gay and brilliant noble had obtained the preference over the wan and gloomy student; for they only pictured Arden as he stood before them—they forgot that he had ever been young.

He read their thoughts, and, taking the picture, gazed upon it mournfully; then added, "He is almost as handsome still!"

Guido, by way of diverting the embarrassment which seemed to infect them all, began to unfasten the packet of letters. A faint yet sweet perfume exhaled from the folds, and some withered rose and violet leaves fell upon the table; shape and colour had long passed away, but a mournful

fragrance remained—mournful as the memory of departed happiness.

He was about to open one of the scrolls, when Francesca took them from his hand. "Nay, Guido, we will not read them: there are some letters never meant but for one eye, and such are these. This packet shall be given untouched into Lord Avonleigh's"—she corrected her words—"into my father's own hands."

CHAPTER XIV.

"Within the mirror of the past,
How sadly fair arise
The long-lost hues of early life,
The stars of Memory's skies."

CHARLES SWAIN.

THERE needed but little preparation for their departure; it is your leave-takings that lengthen out the time—and they had scarcely a living creature to whom they needed say farewell. Guido obtained an audience of Mazarin, who seemed surprised, and even vexed, when he heard that they were about to cross the channel.

"What will you do among those puritanical islanders, who hold pictures to be an abomination, and statues idolatry? The very sight of their white-washed churches will put your genius to flight, which, in the attempt to escape, will be lost in their fogs.

Guido half smiled, half sighed, as he urged the important family business which enforced their absence. The Cardinal then asked for Francesca, and the sudden gloom of his countenance shewed

that Madame de Mercœur's loss was still keenly remembered. He then added a few general offers of service, but offered as if he would be glad that they were accepted; and when Guido knelt for his parting benediction, it was given with a warmth and sincerity not often used by the apathetic and haughty minister.

But they were of his own country—were associated with the image of the dearest of his own family—dearer, because lost for ever. He was interested in their genuine, yet refined simplicity; and, moreover, the most worn and worldly natures vindicate their humanity by occasional preferences and motiveless likings. True, they are transitory, and soon both controlled and forgotten; but their very existence is evidence that the kindly feeling which clings to its race never wholly abandons even the most seemingly hardened and indifferent.

To Bournonville the whole history was revealed. They owed confidence to his friendship; but Francesca was at once chilled, mortified, and amused, by the warmth of his congratulations. It is a penance inflicted on all sensitive tempers by their more common-toned acquaintance. Her imagination had only dwelt on the renewal of affection—on the happiness of having a parent to look up to, and to love; but Bournonville saw the subject in

another point of view, and was never weary of congratulating her on having found out a rich and noble father. Ah! who has not suffered from a similar annoyance, so easily felt, but so difficult to be described! How often have I had my ideal destroyed, my pleasant imaginings checked and debased, by the ill-timed remark that changed their whole bearing! Heaven knows, the observation was true enough; still there are two ways of putting a fact, and one prefers that which lends a little enchantment to the view.

Now that Francesca was about to leave France, she felt a softening of the heart towards Madame de Soissons. Hitherto she had chiefly dwelt on her unkindness and neglect; but absence, like charity, covers a multitude of sins; and the thought now paramount was, that she should see her no more.

She made a thousand excuses for her conduct—she even exaggerated the temptations by which she was surrounded. Her memory went back to the pleasant intercourse of their early days—and memory is a most affectionate faculty; somewhat of tenderness is inseparable from the past, and she earnestly desired to bid her former friend farewell. In this spirit was the following letter written:—

"DEAREST MARIE,—For at this moment, when my heart is full of our former affection, I can use no other epithet than the one which belongs to that time,—I cannot resist the temptation of writing to bid you farewell. Circumstances, which are too long for detail—perhaps they might not interest you—and which have made a great change in my prospects, induce me to leave France; and Guido and myself are on the point of embarking for England. In all human probability we shall meet no more. It would make me very happy to see you before my departure, to tell you of my future hopes, to offer you my best wishes, to believe that we shall preserve a kindly recollection of each other, and to talk a little of the past. Farewell! That the holy Madonna may have you in her keeping, is the affectionate prayer of FRANCESCA DA CARRARA."

This letter obtained no answer. Did we not daily observe them, we could not believe the instances of hard-heartedness evinced in social life—the neglect, the forgetfulness, and the ingratitude. The Comtesse de Soissons read and was touched by Francesca's letter, and resolved to go that very day and see her; but the same morning the Duc d'Anjou gave a collation—so it was impossible.

The next day she was to wait on Madame de Savoie; on the third she was languid, and visitor after visitor came in; and on the fourth, Francesca was gone. Madame de Soissons felt a momentary pang of shame and remorse; but she was to attend the Queen to a ballet that evening. She had not yet decided on her dress; and in half an hour's time Francesca's image was merged in the contemplation involving a decision, whether pale-yellow or lilac ribands would best suit her green dress.

Nothing is so soon lost in a crowd as affection; we are in too great a hurry to attach ourselves to any thing or any body. What bitter knowledge is brought us by experience!—what change is wrought in a few passing years! How do we grow cold, indifferent, and unbelieving—we, who were so affectionate, so eager, so confiding! Perhaps we expect too much from others. Because an individual likes you, from some sudden impulse, from the effect of circumstances which drew both out agreeably, you have no right to rely on the continuance of that feeling; a fresher impulse may counteract it—a newer situation lead it to some one else; and you ought rather to be thankful for even the temporary warmth, than feel disappointed at its cessation.

But though this is what it would be wise to do,

it is not what we can do. Mutable as is our nature, it delights in the immutable; and we expect as much constancy as if all time, to say nothing of our own changeableness, had not shewn that ever "the fashion of this world passeth away."

And this alone would be to me the convincing proof of the immortality of the soul, or mind, or whatever is the animating principle of life. Whether it be the shadow cast from a previous existence, or an intuition of one to come, the love of that which lasts is an inherent impulse in our nature. Hence that constancy which is the ideal of love and friendship—that desire of fame which has originated every great effort of genius. Hence, too, that readiness of belief in the rewards and punishments of a future state held out by religion. From the commonest flower treasured, because its perfume outlives its beauty, to our noblest achievements where the mind puts forth all its power, we are prompted by that future which absorbs the present. The more we feel that we are finite, the more do we cling to the infinite.

CHAPTER XV.

"Most happy state, that never tak'st revenge
For injuries received, nor dost fear
The court's great earthquake, the grieved truth of change,
Nor none of falsehood's savoury lies dost hear;
Nor know'st hope's sweet disease, that charms our sense,
Nor its sad cure—dear bought experience."

SIR ROBERT KER *to* DRUMMOND, *anno* 1624.

IT was the day previous to that fixed for their departure, that Guido and Francesca were seated in their chamber for the last time. Both were silent and somewhat sad—for no place was ever yet left without regret. We grow attached unconsciously to the objects we see every day. We may not think so at the time—we may be discontented, and used to talk of their faults; but let us be on the eve of quitting them for ever, and we find that they are dearer than we dreamed.

The love of the inanimate is a general feeling. True, it makes no return of affection, neither does it dissappoint it; its associations are from our thoughts and our emotions. We connect the hearth with the confidence which has poured forth the full soul in its dim twilight; on the wall we have

watched the shadows, less fantastic than the creations in which we have indulged; beside the table, we have read, worked, and written. Over each and all is flung the strong link of habit—it is not to be broken without a pang.

"What numbers are passing by!" exclaimed Guido, who had been leaning in the window. "Good Heavens! to think that of all this multitude, not one will regret or even remember us! How hard it is to draw the ties of humanity together!—how strange the indifference with which we regard beings whose hopes, feelings, joys, and sorrows, are the same as our own! Perhaps there may be individuals who have never inspired or experienced affection;—should we pity or envy them?"

"Pity them—only that such a lot is impossible. Even the very robbers, of whose ferocity we were wont to hear such tales in our own land, have usually possessed some redeeming trait which arose out of a yearning towards their kind. Do you recollect a story my nurse told us of a Sicilian bandit, the terror of the country?—how he saved a young child from a cottage on fire, brought it up delicately, and far removed from his own pursuits; while, at his execution, his chief regret was the future provision for that boy?"

"I can believe such an instance—can believe love taking strong root amid cruelty, poverty, suffering, and danger, rather than in the withering atmosphere of this crowded city—this miscalled social, but really heartless, life; where petty interests distract the mind, and mean desires absorb the heart. From the beginning of the show to the end, vanity is the sole stimulus and reward of action—vanity, that never looks beyond the present."

"Nay," replied Francesca, "you exaggerate. The truth is, we begin life with too exalted ideas. —our wishes and our expectations go together. We are soon forced to lower our standard; and this depreciation brings at first coldness, distress, and distrust, but also wisdom. We learn not to anticipate so much, and to cling with firmer faith to those whose truth has been proved. Courtesy from the many, kindness from the few, and affection from the individual, become the limit of our hopes; and even that moderate limit must prepare for exceptions."

They were interrupted by the entrance of an unlooked-for visitor, the Chevalier de Joinville.

"I have just heard," said he, "from Bournonville, of your intended departure, and thought I might venture to come and offer my good wishes

for your safe arrival, to say nothing of the pleasure I promise myself in seeing you again, and more beautiful than ever."

He said the truth; for her noble and regular beauty, so rarely seen in such classical perfection, always struck the eye most forcibly when accustomed only to the more ordinary run of the merely pretty. Francesca was really glad to see him; her original dislike had passed away, and there was a kindness in his visit and manner doubly grateful when contrasted with the neglect of so many others. After a few inquiries, soon made and soon answered among those who have no interests in common, the conversation turned on general topics. And here they had much to ask and hear. The Chevalier was, as usual, *au fait* at all the anecdotes of the court, which had been exceedingly gay, owing to the visit of Madame de Savoie and her daughter, the Princess Marguerite.

"Will she," asked Francesca, "be our future Queen? Remember, I know as little of what has been going on in Paris as if I had already crossed the sea."

"The whole visit," replied the Chevalier, "has been a failure. Peace and the Infanta have carried the day; and the bride is to come from beyond the Pyrenees, not the Alps."

"Is the Princess Marguerite pretty?"

"Royally so—not more; but an excellent actress. She shewed her disappointment as little as she did her expectations. Truly, it was a severe task, for she had to appear amused and indifferent for the whole party. Madame de Royale did nothing but weep, till the Cardinal consoled her by a pair of diamond ear-rings set in jet,—"the most becoming things," as she asserted. I am afraid their effect was not very visible on her."

"Was there not some talk," asked Guido, "of a marriage between the Duc de Savoie and Mademoiselle?"

"Yes; and it served him as a pretext to turn his share of the visit into a mere expedition of gallantry. He has the portraits of all the unmarried princesses of Europe in his cabinet; among others, that of Mademoiselle was hung in the most conspicuous place. Now he says, 'I have seen her, and am cured.' It has reached the ears of the lady, who is furious."

"Next to her birth," said Francesca, "Mademoiselle piques herself on her beauty, I believe?"

"She said the other morning, with the utmost calmness," replied the Chevalier, "when Monsieur was rallying her on her *déshabillé de voyage*, 'I am handsome enough to do without dress—I like it

to be seen, now and then, that I can trust my face by itself."

"A pleasant state of mind," cried Francesca; "that entire repose in the conviction of your own perfection! But to return to your noble visitors. Surely Madame de Savoie must have felt the position in which she had placed her daughter?"

"Yes, but she talked it away. She uses a whole language to herself. Her discourse is an avalanche of words, beneath which the hearers are overwhelmed. And then her confidence! it goes to the extent of a romance—she confides every thing. I'll tell you an anecdote, out of many, that she relates of herself. Monsieur de Savoie is most *dévoué* to your charming sex, and one of his favourites had given him a greyhound. During a short journey from the court, he left this greyhound to his mother's care, with many injunctions to watch over its safety. That night, when she was alone in her chamber, she flung herself on her knees before the dog, addressing it with the most tender epithets. 'How dearly do I love thee! how happy am I to have thee, reminding me of thy master! If he were here I should be satisfied. I have not seen him since the morning, and the moments appear to me hours in his ab-

sence; at least, when he again caresses thee, paint to him the sensations of my heart.' "

"I do not," exclaimed Guido, "marvel so much at these extravagances of affection as at their being publicly repeated. To express any emotion seems to me the most difficult thing in the world."

"She got out of the ridicule very well," replied De Joinville, "by throwing over it a little tinge of sentiment. 'I do not mind,' said she, observing a general smile, 'your laughing at the excess of my love to my son. I own I feel capable of doing all sorts of foolish things for his sake.' "

"I could not have believed," remarked Francesca, "had I not witnessed it since my residence in your country, how the reality and the affectation of feeling can exist together. Before I left our solitary home, the very exhibition of emotion would have tempted me to doubt its truth. Now, I observe that some affect, as others shun, display; yet the feeling is equally true in both."

"Talking of display, half the court is in ecstasies about the romantic devotion of la Marquise de la Beaume to the memory of the Duc de Candale. He was a great admirer of hers, and, on his journey to and from Catalonia, invariably paused to pay his homage at Lyons, where she

resided. She has cut off all her long fair hair—absolutely her principal ornament. There are always two sides to a story; and the other version of this is, that the beautiful hair was severed out of pique to the husband, not out of tenderness to the lover's manes. The Marquis had, in a most husbandly and hard-hearted manner, refused his consent to a fête which Madame's heart was set upon giving. The next morning, desirous of making his peace, and yet keeping his resolution, he entered while her toilette was going on, and began to admire the luxuriant and bright hair that fell over her shoulders. Without speaking a word, she snatched up the scissors, and, cutting off her curls with relentless rapidity—'Voilà, Monsieur!' said she, throwing them towards him, and turning her back."

"It puts me in mind," exclaimed Guido, "of one of our Italian harlequins, who, greatly enraged with some one beyond his reach, says, 'As I can't kill my enemy, I will kill myself—I must be revenged on some one.'"

"Alas!" said De Joinville, "I must take my leave, for the Cardinal holds a levee to-day, and let those fail in attendance who want nothing. Now, I want a benefice which is just vacant. You have no idea how poor the court is; nobody

is rich, except Mazarin and l'Abbé Fouquet. I am half tempted to cry with Madame Thurine, 'How happy are our servants! they, at least, get Christmas boxes.'"

He then rose, and wished them farewell—"Only a temporary farewell," added he, as he reached the door. "I have too good an opinion of your taste not to expect you back again. Absence teaches appreciation by the force of contrast—you will regret us, and return."

Without waiting for their answer, he left the room.

Both Guido and Francesca were surprised, even hurt, at the ease of his farewell. They felt so much more than he did, and were ashamed of the feeling. The truth is, that they had still a world of kindliness and affection in their young and unused hearts, which had long passed away from De Joinville. He dreaded the trouble much more than the pain of emotion; he could not altogether escape the many chains of life, but he wore them as lightly as possible. His love was gallantry, his friendship liking, and his business amusement. His philosophy was to *s'égayer* on the route from the cradle to the coffin; and sometimes I have thought his system the right one. When I have marked, as all must do, the dis-

appointment that rewards the noblest efforts, the agony that attends the most generous affections, I have asked, Is it not better to waste life than to use it? The vain question of a mood of profitless dejection—the most unprofitable state in which we can indulge!

CHAPTER XVI.

"The morrow
That o'erlooks thy twilight, Earth,
Is one of shade and sorrow!"

LAMAN BLANCHARD.

IT was with sad hearts and weary spirits that the Carraras found themselves tossing on the rough waves of the English channel. It was a dull, chill morning, and the gray, leaden atmosphere closed round the vessel as something whose oppression was palpable; while heavy ridges of thick black clouds rested on the waters in the distance. The shore was soon lost in the mist, and nothing caught the eye but the gloomy sky and the gloomy sea, which seemed to reflect back each other. The wind blew with that shrill and complaining sound, which forced from the flapping sails and creaking planks a thousand strange and dismal murmurs; while the steps and voices of the sailors vexed with perpetual stir ears accustomed to the quiet of a lonely chamber. Mono-

tonous, yet confined, the sea view offered nothing to distract the attention of the voyagers. There is something, too, especially fatiguing in seeing every one around you busy but yourself, while the novelty, the bustle, and the noise, prevents your attention from being riveted by conversation or lost in reverie: you soon become equally restless and weary.

This was their second voyage, too, and that forced a comparison with their first. The scene was as much changed as themselves. Then the sky, in whose clear, unbroken blue their future seemed mirrored, was bright as their own hopes; the waves danced glittering in the sunshine; the dark eyes that looked kindly on them were the familiar and flashing glances of their own countrymen; the language they heard was that which they had known from their infancy. Now, all was strange and cold; there was no sympathy in the light eyes and fair faces which turned upon them with no deeper feeling than curiosity. Then the land, with its battlemented town, and stately church rising high in middle air, and the groves and orchards of its environs, green to the very ocean, lingered long on the transparent element, as if loath to lose sight of them. The wind was so soft, so warm, and laden with the early fragrance

of the orange-trees, then in their first and sweetest blossoming!

But if the world without was changed, still more changed was the world within. Then, youth had been taught nothing by time; their spring was in its early luxuriance of breath and bloom; not a bud had fallen from the bough, not a leaf had withered. Now, many a hope had perished, and many a belief gone from them for ever. They had learnt to think as well as to feel; and thought is mournful. They remembered too keenly their pleasant credulity as to what to-morrow would bring forth, to dare indulge expectation of its pleasure; they had been disappointed once — so might they be again — for disappointment ever leaves fear behind.

There was something, too, in Arden's gloom which increased that of his companions. To that man pain was ever present; his brow never relaxed, his eye never brightened, and cheerfulness or anticipation seemed almost insults to him — they jarred with such utter mockery on his tone of mind. He felt that it was a duty, and had accelerated to the utmost this voyage to England; but the humiliation of the necessary confession to Lord Avonleigh was wormwood to his soul. It occupied him by day, it haunted him by night;

he framed it in a thousand shapes, but the thought that he must humble himself before the man he hated was as the presence of a demon for ever beside him.

Towards the afternoon, Francesca, who observed how worn out and cold Guido appeared, prevailed upon him to go down into the cabin, and rest upon one of the benches. She covered him carefully with a cloak, and at last he dropped off to sleep, her arm supporting his head, as she knelt beside, breathing fearfully lest she might disturb his unquiet slumber. While she thus watched him, she could not but mark the insidious progress of disease; it startled her, as it had done when she first saw him on his return, in the convent.

The most anxious eye grows familiar with the face which is seen every day, till some chance circumstance awakens the alarmed observation. This was the case with Francesca, whose now terrified imagination exaggerated every symptom. She saw the one red spot on the cheek, contrasting with the transparent whiteness elsewhere, so delicate that the face seemed almost feminine. She wiped with a light yet trembling hand the dews that gathered heavily on the forehead; she laid her head close to his heart, to catch its quick

and irregular beating, and could scarcely restrain a start of dread at the peculiar murmur in the chest. Every breath was difficult even to pain.

He was roused from his brief rest by a violent fit of coughing, which seemed to shake the whole system. It was one which in England is so simply, yet so emphatically, denominated a churchyard cough. It was hollow, like the echo of the grave. Francesca could not trust her voice with an inquiry.

At this moment a sailor entered to summon them on deck. "We are in the middle of the Southampton waters, and shall land in half an hour. I thought you would like to see the coast, and it will soon be dark."

Guido rose eagerly, and followed the man, when Francesca had translated the words, for she understood the language much more readily than he did. The sailor, when they reached the deck, good-naturedly offered a great-coat to Guido, for, though fine, the air was chill, and he observed that the young foreigner shivered as he came up.

"How beautiful!" exclaimed they, as they leant over the side of the vessel; and beautiful, indeed, it was.

On one side was Hampshire, whose dark outline was in shadow; on the other, the green and

undulating shores of the Isle of Wight, whose verdant meadows came down almost to the strand. The trees were leafless, but the sunshine played upon their branches; behind them the sea was clear and dark, but before them it was like fire, for the winding of the creek brought the bay directly below the setting sun, with whose glory the whole west was kindled; it was too bright to look upon, —a glory like the track of passing angels. The vapours of the morning had melted away into a soft and golden haze, which bathed all things in its genial hue.

"Can this be winter?" asked Guido.

"I hope so," said Francesca, answering to her own thoughts; for, unaware of our uncertain clime, she relied on its benefit to Guido.

The radiance now began to mellow; a large cloud, which had been slowly floating up, crossed the burning centre; it melted, but into a rich crimson; the reddening tints spread rapidly, softening as they receded from the round orb that now seemed to rest on the waters; the light became coloured; many small white clouds rose flitting from afar, and each as they approached caught a tinge of pink. The sun sunk below the waters, which glowed with his descent; but, almost unperceived, a purple shadow fell on the

atmosphere—Nature's royal mourning over her king. Far as the eye could reach, the waves had a faint lilac dye, reflected from deeper-dyed heavens above, whose magnificence at last faded into a broad and clear amber line, with an eddy of pale crimson on its extremest verge. Then upsprung a single star, lonely and lovely over the far sea. The long shadows now heralded the coming darkness; and there was something very cheerful in the numerous fires that were visible from the different windows. The old castle alone looked gloomy, as it stood, gray and rugged, close upon the water-side; they passed it rapidly, and anchored by the quay.

Arden, who had stood by them unperceived, now approached, and, taking Francesca's hand, said, in a low and solemn voice,—

"I dare not bless you! but, at least, I may welcome the Lady Francesca Stukeley to her father's country and her father's home."

CHAPTER XVII.

"What are you in such a bustle about? inquired her husband."
MRS. S. C. HALL.

THE reputation of an inn for cheerfulness must, like "merrie England's" reputation for gaiety, have been acquired long ago. The traveller—shewn into his solitary apartment, with the Sporting Magazine, some two years old, the sole volume—a small narrow street for his observation—his time upon his hands, "no nothing to do," and the evening before him,—will surely not find the prospect very animated. So much for the occupant of the *britscha*, who waits, as all the horses are out at a ball or a scrutiny. Neither is the wanderer of lower degree placed in a more enlivening position: true, in the common room he has companions; but to every man is allotted his own table, his own candle, and his own thoughts. Silence and suspicion are the order of the day; and civility is the surest sign of a swindler. But in the good old

times (though perhaps their great goodness may be debatable ground) the inn kitchen was a cheerful place; and guests of every rank took a contented seat on the oaken settles by its blazing hearth, and did not relish the savoury mess, on which mine hostess piqued herself, at all the less because they had witnessed somewhat of its preparation. The degrees of society were more strongly marked; but then there was less fear of confusion. After all, the English hostel owes much of its charms to Chaucer; our associations are of his haunting pictures—his delicate Lady Prioress, his comely young squire, with their pleasant interchange of tale and legend, rise upon the mind's eye in all the fascination of his vivid delineations.

But these days were past at the time of which we write; a severe and staid, if not sober, spirit was abroad. And though the annals of the period do not shew us that there was less ale drawn, or less canary called for; men got dry with the heat of polemical discussion, and drunk with a text, not the fag end of a ballad, in their mouths; and people made a sort of morality of straight hair, long faces, and sad-coloured garments. Yet, as the Carraras approached the inn where Arden had decided that

they should pass the night, it seemed very cheerful. The windows were ruddy with the light within; and when the door opened, it discovered a large warm chamber, and an immense wood fire was reflected from walls lined with pewter plates and dishes, polished with a degree of brightness, and ranged with a degree of display, which shewed that the preacher's asseveration of "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity," had not sank very deeply into the landlady's heart.

Mine hostess herself was a pretty-looking woman, who, whether her age approximated most to thirty or forty, would have puzzled even the curious in these matters. She was dressed, according to the universal fashion, in a dark coloured boddice and skirt, and a white linen cap, whose closely plaited border covered her hair, except a narrow braid. It may be doubted whether this scrupulously plain attire at all suited the taste of the wearer; or whether she did not turn with a longing eye to the days when she rejoiced in a scarlet petticoat, and a cap gay with knots of pink riband.

The host himself was one of those very quiet men whom we usually see linked to the most active helpmates. Whether Nature, in the first instance, pointed out the necessity of a supply from another

of that quality in which each was most deficient, and thus the match originated—or whether the state of quietude comes on after marriage, exertion on both sides being discovered to be a superfluity, —is really too profound an investigation; but the fact is certain, that the keen-tongued, quick-witted, bustling wife, is always united to the slow, silent, and quiet husband.

This proper order of things was duly observed at the Sun—the Crown it had been, but this was too loyal an emblem now that England was under a Protector, instead of a King; and the sign had accordingly been taken down. The host proposed divers puritanical fancies—nay, once hinted at a head of Cromwell himself; but the hostess overruled all these proposals, and stood firm by the Sun.

"Nobody," as she justly observed, "has any particular right to the sun, and it can therefore offend nobody; and though your cavaliers now-a-days don't wear their loyalty like a feather in their cap, seeing that few wear feathers; still there are many of our customers, and good ones too, who would scruple even at canary, if Cromwell stood at the door to bid them welcome."

These reasons convinced the landlord, and, indeed, he would have been convinced without

them; but reasons are proofs given as much for our own satisfaction as for that of others. And, in truth, the worthy host had every cause to be satisfied with his wife's management. Their bacon was a credit even in Hampshire; their ale worthy of washing it down; their accounts well kept, and most promising at the year's end. The worst faults that could be alleged against her were, that she sometimes continued her admonitions and explanations in an ear too drowsy to receive them, and that she would smile too readily when a young cavalier chanced to praise her white teeth; but that, as she observed, was in the way of business.

There were already many other guests when the Italians entered; but there was that in their appearance which attracted immediate attention. The hostess's quick eye glanced from one to the other, and, pronouncing them to be brother and sister, she felt inclined to favour one for the other's sake, namely, the sake of a singularly handsome youth. Be as philosophical as we can on the subject, fortify the mind with as many old proverbs as we will,—how that beauty is a flower of the field that perisheth, and that "handsome is that handsome does,"—yet there will always be something in beauty that attracts and interests us

—we know not how. Such homage is a sort of natural religion of the heart, or rather superstition, that the good must be inherent in the lovely. But Guido had a claim far beyond his classical and perfect features, illumined, as they were, by his large dark eyes,—a claim, too, scarcely ever without avail on feminine compassion; he looked so evidently an invalid. The day's fatigue had been too much; and with ready thankfulness he took the proffered seat by the hearth; while Francesca, seeing that Arden remained in his usually moody silence, ventured, though with some trepidation, on a few English words.

"My brother is not well, and the cold night affects him; but he will enjoy such a fire."

Her accent was foreign, but her smile was a universal language all the world over; and though one supper had just been despatched, active preparations were commenced for another.

"Those foreigners," thought the female potentate of the Sun, "won't know what to order; but I'll shew them what a good supper is." And with a rapidity quite new to the strangers, satisfactory even to their hunger, a little table was placed in the warmest nook of the chimney-corner, spread with the cleanest of cloths, and soon covered with a dish of fried ham, eggs with the purest of curdlike

white and the clearest of yellow; facing was one of venison steaks, from whose brown crispness exhaled a little cloud of most fragrant smoke; in the middle was a square cut from a pasty; and the intermediate spaces were filled up with condiments and a large newly baked loaf.

Francesca marked with delight the eager manner in which Guido began his meal, and almost forgot her own hunger in the amusement of watching him eat so ravenously; he, however, soon recalled her attention to herself, by inquiries of—"Why she did not join them?" and her supper did as much credit to the cookery as Guido's. All on "hospitable cares intent," especially when those cares are also profitable ones, know how pleasant the appearance of enjoyment is; and the strangers increased their first favourable impression by the appetite and the relish with which they despatched the dishes set before them. The request afterwards for a flask of her best wine completed it;—in spite of her husband's advice, who interrupted her even at the very moment when the steaks were taking their last shade of brown, to remark that the new arrivals were obviously foreigners—perhaps papists, and it might be spies; and he got what he deserved, an angry "Hold your tongue!" for his pains.

Neither Francesca nor Guido were sufficiently familiar with the English tongue to understand the conversation that was going on around them; but one name rivetted Arden's attention, as soon did the dialogue in which that name was mentioned. Francesca, too, observed his change of countenance, which led her to mark the group on which his eye rested; and if not able to comprehend the whole, she yet understood a considerable part—enough to guess the rest. The speakers were three men, rather beyond middle life. One was pale and cadaverous, as if every feature gave testimony to the length of his vigils and the rigour of his fasts, while straight black hair hanging down on each side his face added to his wild and neglected appearance. His sombre dress was threadbare, and more than one rent was visible in his cloak; and yet any who noted proceedings might have observed that he had taken care to help himself to the best and the hottest, while the nearly empty stoup beside exhaled the odour of some spirit more potent than merely that of grace—it was the best French brandy. Hezekiah Pray Unceasingly-to-the-Lord was a fit specimen of the times, half hypocrite, half fanatic; so far just in his deception, that sometimes he deceived others, and sometimes himself. Near

him was seated his very opposite; a man whose warm, comfortable dress, good-humoured but inexpressive face, though not wanting in a certain sort of good sense, together with an inactivity of body, bespoke the city burgher, well to do in the world. One always prepared to conform, having had long practice that way in the whims of his customers; whose whole terror of the late commotions was centered in the fact, that one day, in consequence of a riot, he had to shut his shop at noon; and who carried his idea of their results no farther than that the present grave fashion led to a great demand for sober colours. At his side was a thin, restless-looking man, whose embrowned skin bore testimony to foreign travel—one of those adventurers who deem their fortune never lies at home, and encounter great risks for the sake, not so much of their gains, as for themselves,—human birds of passage, who make life one perpetual journey in search of wealth, but who never die rich.

"But are you sure Lord Avonleigh has been arrested and sent to London?"

"Am I sure," said the other, looking with a smile at the hostess, "that the ale which we are drinking is good?"

"I saw the ungodly flourishing like a bay-

tree; I passed, and lo! his place knew him no more," muttered he of the rent cloak.

"I know it to my cost," pursued the former speaker, disregarding the interruption. "Who now will buy the gallant falcon I have brought with so much cost and care from Norway for Lord Stukeley?"

"Why," ejaculated the mercer, "they cannot lay treason to the charge of such a youth!"

"Yes, he is sent off to the Tower with his father."

"And did you hear from the servants if any hope was entertained for them?"

"Hope?—why there is very little fear. It is the talk of the place, that he has been arrested to keep him out of mischief. There have been rumours of a conspiracy on foot in the neighbourhood; and Sir Robert Evelyn's death"—Francesca could not repress a start—"has left him too powerful. So Cromwell has very wisely taken him out of the way of temptation."

"I wish I had sent in my bill for those embroidered gloves which the young Lord Albert ordered; he told me so to do, but I thought them such safe customers; and it seemed more handsome to wait," said the burgher, with a face of dismay.

"Pshaw!" exclaimed the owner of the falcon;

"if it was handsome to wait then, it is handsome to wait now. A brief imprisonment and a fine is the worst that Lord Avonleigh has to expect. You will be paid when he comes back; and a trifle added to the next fancy of Lord Albert's will make up the interest on your money. I am the only person to be pitied—What am I to do with my falcon?"

Guido and Francesca exchanged looks; for the attention with which both had listened enabled them to comprehend with tolerable accuracy the preceding dialogue.

"I have scarce enough English to make a bargain," said Guido; "but we must buy this falcon."

Francesca thanked him with a smile; and thought within herself, whether her new relatives would have such ready sympathy with her wishes. Guido beckoned to the hostess, and by an ingenious mixture of words, looks, and signs, made her fully understand his desire of purchasing the bird. In the meantime, their pallid companion was overwhelming the sellers of the embroidered gloves and the falcon with denunciations of the vain follies to which they ministered, mixed with prophesyings of the vengeance awaiting them. The mercer, who knew such men had

often mischief in their power, composed his features, and listened with apparent attention; not so the other, who leant back on the bench, and began whistling some air he had picked up on his travels. The volunteer homilist was stopping for lack of breath, when the hostess stepped forward, and, addressing the owner of the falcon, observed,—

"You will find your bird a sore cumbrance; for the noble sport is little kept up in our parts."

"I know that," said the man, as he looked with a sorrowful sigh at the cage, which he had covered with his cloak.

"Well, now, what would you say if I could help you to a purchaser? There are many bird-fanciers in the town of Southampton—"

"I have a starling myself that can ask what time o' the day it is, just like a Christian," interrupted the mercer; who could never hear a question of buying and selling raised without putting in a word.

"Pshaw, man!" exclaimed the other; "do you think my noble falcon is a fitting companion for your blackbirds and linnets, to be put in a wicker cage, and fed on chickweed?"

"I think," added the hostess, "you had better listen to me. I tell you I know of a purchaser."

"Let me know who he is," asked the man; "my falcon shall perch on no hand whose veins run not with gentle blood."

"Of that you may judge yourself," answered she, indicating the intended purchaser by a slight turn of her head.

The stranger looked at Guido from head to foot; apparently his survey was quite satisfactory, for he crossed the room, and said,—

"I am right loathe to part with the brave bird that has been my companion these two months; but poverty has no choice. Few words drive a bargain with Peter Eskett. I never abate one farthing of my price; but then that price never asks more than a fair profit. The bird sleeps now; but to-morrow, so please you, it shall take a fair flight, and it is then yours at the price for which it was promised to Lord Stukeley."

Guido agreed at once to the sum; but added, "I doubt our being much the wiser for the trial, as, I tell you frankly, I know nothing of the sport. My desire to possess the bird has another origin."

The man looked his discontent, when Francesca, who began to fear a refusal from his expression, said, "But we shall take your directions as to the management of our prize; and I can

assure you, not one word of the instructions will be neglected."

A sweet smile and a soft word have usually their desired effect; and so they had on the owner of the falcon, and, fixing the following morning to conclude their bargain, he withdrew.

Arden, who had for the last few minutes been sitting in a gloomy reverie, now approached them, and said,—

"This sudden arrest has completely altered my plan; selfish that I am, to feel it a relief, this delay in meeting with your father! But to-morrow I will ride over, learn more accurate tidings, and see if there be accommodation for you at my brother's. There best may you await Lord Avonleigh's release."

No possible objection could be raised to this scheme; and the party retired to rest. Wearied out, Francesca at once fell asleep—a slumber which would have been broken by anxiety, could she have known the feverish restlessness which kept Guido wakeful on his unquiet pillow, listening—and dreary it was to listen through the night—to the distant dash of the waves, as they rose beneath the loud and sweeping wind.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"I did not wish to see that face again."

ARDEN easily ascertained the truth of the report about Lord Avonleigh's imprisonment, which seemed rather meant as a curb to the bold and spirited youth his son, than to spring out of any act on his own part; and there was not a doubt but that temporary restraint was the worst that could ensue. To wait patiently was all that could now be done; and his brother's house would be a most comfortable abode for the young Italians; while his sweet and gentle niece would be a charming companion for Francesca; and he thought, with a glow of affection long unfelt, that Lucy Aylmer must inevitably make a friend whose future kindness might add much to her happiness. Both were at present placed out of their sphere; but the one would in all probability have it greatly in her power to cherish and aid the other.

The weather had changed suddenly, and instead of a dull, but warm atmosphere, there had been a severe and sudden cold; and for the first time the travellers saw nature under the influence of a rime frost. It was well that wonder and delight forced them from dwelling on their own thoughts, for both were sad. The delay was matter of great regret to Guido; he felt his own increasing weakness—he looked forward with a gloomy foreboding, and thought what a relief it would have been, could he have seen his sister—for he could accustom himself to nothing but the tenderness of that long-familiar name—could he have seen his sister acknowledged, beloved, and secured from all further reverses.

Francesca, deceived by the colour which the keen air brought into his cheek—deceived, too, by his exertions to appear well before her, was less solicitous about his health; but, now that she was actually in England, grew more so about their future. Like Arden, though from a different motive, she was glad that the meeting with her father was postponed. Hitherto, she had been so little accountable for her actions, save to herself alone; now, she was about to submit to the authority of another, and that one a perfect stranger to her. Bound by no affections that had grown up

unconsciously—swayed by no early remembrances—by, in short, none of those ties which bind parent and child together far more than the fancied force of blood; although I do believe there is much even in that—still Francesca could dwell only on the thought, that she was unknown, nay, it might be, unwelcome. She must come before Lord Avonleigh connected with a very unjustifiable passage in his life; perhaps—and that idea strengthened her—his heart might be softened by the memory of her mother's sufferings—former love must awaken into tenderness for the orphan she had left.

Guido, too, was among her anxious questionings of the future. The home which was not a home for him could be none for her; but surely Lord Avonleigh would feel what was due to one who had indeed been the most kind, the most tender brother to his own, would he add deserted, child. On this subject, perhaps the first one in their lives that had not been talked over together, they had been silent,—Francesca from delicacy, Guido from presentiment.

An exclamation from Guido of "How beautiful!" broke their meditations, and all reined up their ponies to look round. They had just entered one of the forest-roads; both had been so preoccupied by their thoughts, that beyond their first

shivering glance, when they mounted, at the white world around, neither had noticed that peculiar and brilliant landscape, a wooded country covered with a rime frost. But now, the first fog of the morning had cleared away; the shelter of the dense boughs made it much warmer; and the round red sun looked cheerfully as it shed its crimson hues amid the topmost branches. The light snow lay on the narrow and winding path before them, pure as if just fresh winnowed by the wind. The outline of every tree was marked with the utmost distinctness by the frost which covered it; but every spray drooped beneath the weight of the fairy and fragile tracery that gemmed them; while the gossamer threads, like strung and worked pearls, only still more transparent, seemed to catch every stray sunbeam, and glitter with the bright and passing hues of crystal. Every tree was as distinguishable as in summer. The oak might be known by the weight of snow supported in its huge arms; the ash, by the long and graceful wreaths that clothed its pensile branches; and the holly wore a long icicle, clear, and radiant with many colours, at the end of every pointed leaf; while the noiseless manner in which they moved along, from the light fall on the paths, added to the enchantment of the scene.

"'Tis a world of sculpture!" exclaimed Guido, catching hold, as he passed, of a long garland covered with the most delicate frost-work, something like those which you see carved on the ancient marble of some old sepulchral urn. As he touched it, the snow fell off, and, cleared from its mimic alabaster of rime, the green ivy, with its long bright leaves, remained in his hand.

"You would like," said Francesca, smiling, "to have your marble creations somewhat more lasting."

"And yet," replied he, "it is emblematic; behold it shelters the evergreen!"

"Just a lucky chance that there was not hidden beneath a dry and withered bough."

"It would have been a truer omen," answered he, mournfully. At this moment Arden came to their side.

"Yonder road," said he, "leads direct to Avonleigh. After a little while we shall have to branch off, as Lawrence Aylmer's house lies to the left; it is midway between Avonleigh and Evelyn Hall."

"So near!" thought Francesca;—and her thoughts turned more to the last road than the first. A woman never can wholly shake off the influence of him whom she first loved. The love

itself may be past,—gone like a sweet vain dream which it is useless to remember, or dismissed as an unworthy delusion; still its memory remains. A thousand slight things recall some of its many emotions—it has become a standard of comparison; and the "once we felt otherwise," occurs oftener than many would allow, but all must confess.

Again they rode along in silence, though less abstractedly than before; for every now and then some far vista, like the aisle of a mighty temple upreared in giant marble, caught the eye, to rest with delight on the clear blue sky to which it opened; or, perhaps, most beautiful in the rapidly approaching dissolution, they marked some singularly slight and graceful tree, covered with its white wreaths and icicles, every one a rainbow in the colouring sunshine.

Suddenly a distant sound of music came upon the air—a far and melancholy sound, like the wailing poured forth for defeat or death,—when even the trumpet, so glorious in its rejoicing, shews how mournful can be the voice of its lament. Francesca turned to Arden, who could only express his surprise. She then questioned the boy who led the horse with the baggage, with some difficulty—for to hear and to comprehend were two very different things; but from him she could obtain

no information; he evidently knew nothing about it; and fear was all it excited. Still the sounds came nearer and nearer; and as they turned off into the road before mentioned, a long and evidently funeral procession was winding slowly along.

They drew up in a small open space, beneath the shelter of a huge beech, to allow it to pass by, for the foremost horsemen were already beside them. A band of troopers, two and two, in the buff jackets, large boots, and slouched hats, which marked soldiers in the Parliamentary service, rode first; their arms were reversed, and every eye bent gloomily on the ground—sorrow was obviously no mere form, to be observed and forgotten. The trumpeters came next, and their wild lament filled the air; then two pages, dressed in black, led a gallant steed; but there was no need of a rein, for the head of the noble creature drooped, and it seemed to have an almost human consciousness that it was now paying its last duty to its master. An open bier, drawn by four horses, whose tossing heads covered with plumes tangled the white boughs, and shook down the glittering icicles at every step, followed; and on it was the coffin, covered with a velvet pall, on which lay the sword and gloves of the dead who slept below.

Behind came a concourse of vassals and spectators; but Francesca only saw the young cavalier who rode bareheaded behind. His long fair hair hung to his shoulders, but the wind blew it aside, and, pale and careworn, she instantly recognised the face of Robert Evelyn.

CHAPTER XIX.

> "O, youth, thou hast a wealth beyond
> What careful men do spend their souls to gain."
>
> MARY HOWITT.

"WHOSE funeral has just passed?" asked Arden, who little suspected that his companions were already informed.

"Sir Robert Evelyn's," answered the lingering follower whom he questioned. "It is a sore loss to the whole country; for a kinder master never existed. But his son is like him, God bless him!"

"That," continued Arden, "was the pale fair young man who rode after the coffin?"

"Yes; that was Mr. Evelyn. And, sad though the task be, he may lay his father in peace in the grave; for he never hastened him into it by care or sorrow of his causing; and he watched him like a girl during Sir Robert's last illness."

Arden turned to the Carraras, when Guido, who guessed that Francesca would little wish to

hear all this repeated, began to tell him that they had slightly known Mr. Evelyn; and proposed, as they were chilled with their pause beneath the beech, to ride on a little briskly.

Francesca's eyes were too full of tears even to look her thanks for his watchfulness; but she rode on, glad to be distracted by the rapid pace, which demanded all her attention; for, little accustomed to ride, she was a timid horsewoman. But the moment they slackened their pace, she reverted to the scene which had just passed. Only to have seen him again was enough for agitation; but to see him engaged in an office so holy and so touching, and to hear his praises, made every pulse in her heart beat even to pain. His pale, mournful countenance rose before her; and, as it had ever happened when aught occurred to soften her feelings towards him, she went back to those first and happy days in Italy, when she loved him so entirely, so confidingly, and he seemed so worthy of her utmost devotion! But again that last scene at Compiegne rose vividly before her; not only his falsehood to her, but his slander of her, came to mind. It seemed as if she had never felt their full heinousness till now—now that with shame she owned that for a moment she had relented in his favour. With shame—for resentment was a

justice she owed to herself. There are some offences which it is an unworthy weakness to forget.

She put back her hood, and allowed the fresh air to blow upon her face. She forced herself to mark the beautiful and radiant hues that the noon-rays flung over every melting icicle; and in a short while was able to speak to her brother, and turned the conversation on what sort of a home they should find in the English farm-house to which they were going.

They had not much time for fancying or guessing. They left the forest; and, after passing through a narrow lane, from whose warm and southern aspect the frost had almost disappeared, they arrived at a large low dwelling, to which Arden welcomed them as to that of his brother-in-law. A rosy child opened the gate which looked upon the yard, at whose entrance was a pond, where a flock of ducks were catching the sunshine upon their brown-and-white wings, while their throats took a still richer shade of green. The buildings formed a square. Opposite the house was a roomy barn, whose open doors shewed a thresher hard at work, and the sound of his flail resounded on every side. Then came a range of stables, with a shed filled with carts; and the right was occupied by a cow-house, whose tenants

were being milked, and whose fragrant breath was sweet even in the distance. In the middle was a large dunghill covered with poultry; while one very fine hen, with a brood of half-grown speckled chickens, started off with her fluttering company beneath the very horses' feet, who apparently were too used to the confusion to mind it.

Lawrence Aylmer came to the door and helped Francesca to dismount. A spacious porch opened into what was at once kitchen and sitting-room. An immense hearth filled up one end of the apartment; two small square windows were on each side the chimney-place, too high to serve any purpose of observation, but their light shewed the curious carving of the mantle-shelf; a matchlock, and a cross-bow suspended above. The floor was of red brick; the walls were whitewashed, though but little of them could be seen, from the delf and pewter which crowded the shelves; and here it was obvious, that, unlike those of the Sun, no mistress's eye rejoiced in their splendour, for though perfectly clean, there was little attempt at display. At the other extremity was a large window, which, from the white sprays that hung before the glass, seemed to look into a garden. The table, which was spread for dinner, was drawn

towards its recess, thus leaving an ample space for the culinary preparations, which were now proceeding in full vigour.

As we have but little to say of the master of the house, that little may as well be said here, where he has at least the importance of being host. Lawrence Aylmer had but one pursuit; for that he rose early, and late lay down to rest—for that he toiled and speculated—for that grudged even the common expenses of his living. We need scarcely add, that this pursuit was gain; and this passion—for such it was, with all the strength, the endurance, the hope, the imagination of passion—this craving for wealth, rose from some of the tenderest, the purest, the saddest feelings in our nature; so strangely do the emotions of the human mind originate their opposites!

Lawrence Aylmer loved his wife with the poetry born of her own sweet face—of the green meadow with its early wildflowers—of the long starry walk through the dim shadows of the old forest, wherewith that image was associated. He felt, while he loved, her superiority; his eye might grow gentle beneath hers, and his voice low when meant for her ear. Yet these were not his habits; he was rude in comparison with Lucy. Every hour passed beneath his roof made him

more deeply conscious that his was not the home for his drooping and delicate flower; and when she died—died of that insidious disease which so mocks with the semblance of hope when hope there is none—he forgot that the breath of consumption also fades the cheek that sleeps beneath the purple, and that the highest and noblest have to deplore over their loveliest and best. With that proneness to accuse our own peculiar lot of whatever may be its sorrow, he blamed the circumstances in which he was placed, and said, "If I had been wealthy, Lucy had not died." And when—the very image of her over the headstone of whose grave the moss was growing grey—another Lucy grew up to dwell within his home, how did he delight in lavishing on her every luxury! and said within himself, "Shew me a lady in the land that has her heart's wish more than my child; and her dower—there are few amid the ruined gentry around but would be thankful for a tithe of the broad pieces, or a few roods of the broad lands, that will be hers."

And yet Lucy thought her father neglected her—at least, that he took no pleasure in her society; and, naturally shy, she often shrunk from offering those thousand little acts of affection which make the enjoyment of daily life, and which, indeed, would have made the happiness of theirs.

The truth is, they had lived too much apart—apart at the time when tastes, more than opinions, are formed, and when the memory treasures up pleasures and sorrows, hopes and disappointments, which, whether good or bad, are such perpetual and grateful subjects of familiar discourse afterwards. They had nothing in common, and this led to constant restraint; their conversation was always brief and confined, because neither ever spoke of the things which really interested them—and confidence is the soul of domestic affection.

Years passed by, and Lawrence Aylmer was surprised at the riches which he had accumulated; yet he could not deceive himself into the belief that they added to his enjoyment. His thoughts went continually back to her who was cold in the unconscious grave. Ah! his wealth might have added to her happiness; but, like most good things in this world, it came too late.

CHAPTER XX.

> "Ah! life has many dreams, but yet has none
> Like its first dream of love."

With hospitable eagerness Lucy Aylmer hastened to conduct her guests to her own room. Francesca was soon disencumbered of her riding-hood and cloak; and the three young people, left together, became rapidly acquainted. The very blunders made by the two Italians in the English tongue, —the necessity of explanations, and of mutual assistance in comprehending each other, soon put the conversation on a familiar footing.

The dinner was very cheerful; for all were inclined to please and be pleased. Francesca was not only attracted towards her sweet and gentle hostess, but wished, by exertion, to banish the image of Evelyn, brought too readily before her by the frequent recurrence to mind of the morning's scene.

Lucy was delighted with the strangers. She had too little society not to enjoy the prospect of such an addition to their household circle during the dull and dreary winter; besides, there is a readiness of attachment in youth—the fresh and unused heart is so alive to the kindlier impressions. Pass but a few, a very few years, and we shall marvel how we ever could have found love enough for the many objects which were once so dear!

When Lucy left the room, both were warm in her praise. Ah! that exaggeration of liking—that readiness to like—that taking for granted all imaginable good qualities—to what a joyous time, to what a buoyant and happy state of feeling, does it belong! Their young hostess was so fair—so delicate, with her golden hair only visible beneath the snow-white cap, just where it parted on the forehead. There would have been something childlike in the pure skin and small features, but for the deep and melancholy blue eyes; and in them was a thoughtful sadness, never yet seen in the clear orbs of childhood. There was a tone, too, of pastoral poetry shed over the new scenes to which they were just introduced, that had a greater effect from the contrast to those, artificial and crowded, which they had

just left. The simplicity of the pretty chamber where they sat was different from any thing they had seen before. The cheerful white wainscoting was ornamented with carving; and on the high mantle-shelf were ranged some curious shells and pieces of glittering spar, and a nest filled with various eggs. Around were many of the little graceful signs of feminine taste and presence. There were some light book-shelves, an embroidery-frame, a lute, and in the large bow-window, so placed as to catch whatever sunshine could be found in December, a number of plants—mostly common flowers, but improved into another nature by sedulous cultivation.

The aspect was southern and sheltered, the rime had long since melted from the evergreens, and a few late roses looked in at the casement. Somewhat pale were they, and drooping; but lovely, for they were the last. Beyond the garden was a field, and that skirted a vast arm of the forest—dense and impenetrable, though now the thickness of the foliage added nothing to the matting of the branches.

A drizzling rain kept them close prisoners for the three succeeding days, which, nevertheless, passed easily away. Of Lawrence Aylmer they saw but little; enough, however, to mark and pity

the restraint that existed between him and his daughter; though convinced, at the same time, it was one of those evils for which, at all events, no stranger could bring a remedy. More familiarity of intercourse might have taught both parent and child the affection hidden in each other's heart; but this would have been to reverse the long-established custom. They never took their meals together; there was no hour in the day to which they looked as a rallying point, where each is prepared with the little narrative of daily occurrence, only interesting from daily listening. As to Arden, he was more gloomy and unsocial than ever. Of what could the scenes of his boyhood remind him, but of talents wasted, of time departed, and of hopes gone by for ever!

The first day they were able to walk out, the young people hastened to explore the neighbourhood.

"That is Avonleigh," said Lucy, as they paused upon an eminence, which commanded a fine sweep of country, "though you can scarcely see it for the trees; and that old hall, on whose gray walls the sunbeams are glistening, is Evelyn House,—perhaps you might like to go over it? there are some beautiful pictures."

"Oh, no!" exclaimed Francesca, interrupting

her; "we should very much dislike coming in contact with strangers just now."

"None of the family are there," replied Lucy; "as Mr. Evelyn went to Ireland the very day after Sir Robert's burial."

At this moment Guido, who knew how disagreeable the subject must be to his sister, drew their attention to those golden slants of sunshine which seem to come so direct from heaven to earth,—bright and vapoury ladders,—fitting steps for our vain wishes to mount above; and just then so distinct from the dark mass of shadow flung from the deep forest in the distance. This turned the conversation, and the topic was never again renewed; for Francesca carefully avoided aught that could bring on any mention of the Evelyns; and Lucy had her own secret consciousness, which, by keeping a subject constantly in the mind, often prevents all allusion to it.

Lucy was still in the early and golden time of affection—vague, visionary, and believing. She never dreamed that in her lover was the greatest obstacle to their happiness. No remembrance of falsehood was treasured bitterly in her memory—a warning for the future which we are better without; for what avails distrust? It only deprives us of life's greatest enjoyment—being deceived.

Made up of illusions, as our existence is, alas for the time when we come to know those illusions beforehand!

Lucy's cheek was pale with the sickness of hope long deferred; and her imagination, wearied with exertion, sometimes sunk down, languid in its utter solitude. Still she hoped and trusted, and, in so doing, was far happier than she deemed. Gentle fancies waited around her; the poetry of her youth was over all the associations of her attachment—the days to come rose beautiful before her, for they were of her own creation; and absence was sweetened by expectation.

In all things there is one period more lovely than aught that has gone before—than aught that can ever come again. That delicate green, touched with faint primrose, of the young leaves, when the boughs are putting forth the promise of a shadowy summer—the tender crimson of the opening bud, whose fragrant depths are unconscious of the sun,—these are the fittest emblems for that transitory epoch in the history of a girl's heart, when her love, felt for the first time, is as simple, as guileless, as unworldly as herself. It is the purest, the most ideal poetry in nature. It does not, and it cannot last. It is only too likely that the innocent and trusting heart will be ground

down to the very dust. Falsehood, disappointment, and neglect, form the majority of chances; and even if fortunate—fortunate in requited faithfulness and a sheltered home—still the visionary hour of youth is gone by. There are duties instead of dreams—romance exhausts itself—and the imaginative is merged in the common-place. The pale green returns not to the leaf, the delicate red to the flower, and, still less, its early poetry to the heart.

CHAPTER XXI.

"I feel the awful presence of my fate."

THEY had been settled about a fortnight at Holmhurst, the name of Lawrence Aylmer's farm; when, one evening, finding Francesca and Guido alone, Arden gave the former a closely-written packet. "This," said he, "is for Lord Avonleigh. It has been, for the last three nights, my wretched task. Its contents are already known to you; for it contains my history, and will explain every thing. Give it to him yourself, Francesca—let him see your mother in your face; and for your sake he may forgive me. I leave this to-morrow."

An exclamation of surprise broke from both his hearers.

"Why should you go?" cried Francesca; "you have not a connexion or a friend in the wide world, save among ourselves. Have we given

you unconscious offence?—unconscious, indeed, it must have been."

"None, dear child!" said he, taking her hand; "but misery makes me restless. I feel, too, as if the very sight of me must cast a gloom over you! I often hear your voices, and that of my gentle Lucy, mingled together in cheerful converse; and I shrink from the pleasure it gives me—I dread lest it should be punished on you!"

"Nay," interrupted Guido, "this is being too fanciful. We will run the risk," added he, smiling, "of any judgment you may bring down upon us."

"You speak like a boy," replied Arden, almost angrily, "who imagines that doubt is wisdom. My whole past has taught me the mysterious influences which unite our destinies together. Blessings wait on the steps of one, while curses follow in the path of another. To whom have I ever brought good? My sister pined away in the home which I urged her to enter; my first friend, through my act, became a broken-down exile in his old age; the only woman I ever loved I forced to a violent and dreadful death; my eastern master perished as soon as he befriended his fatal slave. I seek to repair my former crimes, and

now Lord Avonleigh, who has known but one uninterrupted course of prosperity, is carried away into captivity. If I wish your good I must leave you. Why should my shadow be flung upon your path?"

There is something in a deep conviction that forces, for the time, its own belief on others. As the youthful Italians gazed on Arden's pale and haggard face, with its wild and gleaming eyes, seen by the fitful light of the decaying hearth, while the only sound that echoed his slow and hollow accents was the winter wind that went howling drearily past,—they felt as if the evil influence were indeed upon them, and shrunk before that nameless dread of the future, which for the moment subdues the energies, and in whose presence reason trembles. Surely all the more imaginative know this sensation; it is not omen — sound, light, even a cheerful word, have power to destroy its dark dominion; and, unlike most other human emotions, it has no consequence. But who has not shuddered before the indefinite and unknown?

In the ordinary course of daily life, it is wonderful how little we think of the morrow. That sufficient for the day is the evil thereof, is a truth unconsciously, but universally, acknowledged. In-

stinct clings to the immediate; but when we do think of the future, uninfluenced by any present hope—by any strong tide of anticipation carrying us along its darkening depths—how terrible does that future ever appear!—what may it not have in store for us! Sickness, sorrow, poverty, age, and even crime—all that we should now indignantly disclaim, but that to which we may yield under some strong and subtle temptation. The guiltiest have had their guileless and innocent hour. Who knows what may await them of degradation and despair? Death, too!—that awful spectre, which stalks over the morrow as his own domain, opens before us his many graves—our own the last!—no rest till we are worn with weeping for the loved and lost! At such times, how we marvel at our usual recklessness, and pause, as it were, shrinking from the busy and inevitable current which is hurrying us on to eternity!

Each, however, felt that their silence was unkind to Arden: both urged him to stay, by every motive that could persuade, and every reason that could induce. But entreaty and argument were alike in vain. Arden had arrived at the last consolation of misfortune—fatality. Strange the unconscious comfort which it is to exaggerate our self-importance, and that crime and sorrow are

redeemed from the common-place by stamping them with the character of fate!

Arden departed early the next morning. He took no farewell, and left no words of blessing behind him. Some slight noise had awakened Francesca, and opening her casement, she looked through the thick and misty air, and saw him riding slowly over the heath. It was a bleak and desolate scene. In summer, it was a wide and beautiful panorama; but now the dreariest hours of the year were paramount, and nature looked rather lifeless than sleeping. The common was brown, and the trees leafless; while a dull and leaden sky oppressed, rather than surrounded, the landscape.

Never tell me of the sterner beauties of winter. Winter may have a mighty beauty of its own, where the mountain rises, white with the snow of a thousand years, hemmed in by black pine forests, eternal in their gloom; where the overhanging avalanche makes terrible even the slightest sound of the human voice; where the pinnacles of ice catch the sunbeams but to mock their power, and wear the genial and rosy tints of that warmth which they know not; and where waters that never flowed spread the glittering valleys with the frost-work of the measureless past.

But the characteristic of English scenery is loveliness. We look for the verdant green of her fields, for the rich foliage of her luxuriant trees, for the colours of her wild and garden flowers, for daisies universal as hope, and for the cheerful hedges, so various in leaf and bud. Winter comes to us with gray mists and drizzling rains: now and then, for a day, the frost creates its own fragile and fairy world of gossamer; but not often. We see the desolate trees, bleak and bare; the dreary meadows, the withered gardens, and close door and window, to exclude the fog and the east wind.

Such a morning was it when Arden wound his way along the cheerless road. Twice or thrice he looked back; but suddenly he clapped spurs to his horse and rode on, as if in the determination of fixed resolve. A turn of the path shewed him once more; but immediately a group of trees intervened, and shut him for ever from Francesca's sight.

None in his native country ever saw Richard Arden again. He left his niece richly dowered; and months afterwards, they had a brief scroll, which told his fate—it was his last communication with his kind,—he had entered the abbey of La Trappe. Penance and vigil soon did the

work of time on his worn-out frame! Scarcely had he fulfilled his gloomy task, and dug his future grave, ere in that grave he was laid—the fevered brain calm, the beating heart at rest for ever!

CHAPTER XXII.

"The mighty conqueror of conquerors—Death!"

But while the common run of ordinary circumstances were going their little round of influence, —small pebbles flung in the great stream of time, whose motion extends not beyond their own narrow eddy,—one of those mighty events was on the wheel of fate which shake the nations with the sound thereof.

The generality of individuals perish and are forgotten before the wild flowers have sprung up in the grass sods that cover them. Their home is desolate for a time, and, perchance, missing their care may force their children to grieve for their loss; perhaps, too, some faithful heart may feel that its life of life has gone from it for ever. But, take the majority of deaths—how little are they felt—how little do they matter! Strange mystery of human existence, that its most awful occurrence

is often its least important! Death is ever around us, and yet we think not of it; its terrible presence is made manifest, and then forgotten. The most passing interests of life occupy more of our thoughts than its end.

But the Destroyer had now struck down the mightiest in England — one of the great ones, whose destiny is that of many — one of those daring spirits whose history includes that of thousands:—Cromwell was dead! The hand that held the bond of so many jarring interests lay powerless beneath the pall. The perils of war had been about him, and the midnight assassin had watched his path; yet he died quietly in his bed. No part of his fate seemed to fulfil the prophecy of what went before. Who could have believed it? was the motto of his whole life.

There was not a hearth in England where the death of Cromwell was not the sole discourse; and, resembling all other events, each drew that inference from its consequences that best pleased them. Royalist and Republican were equally fervent in their hope, and strong in their belief. Our part, however, lies only with those of our own narrative; and to express their feelings on the occasion, we must claim our privilege of changing the scene.

One red gleam of a winter sunset broke the heavy vapours that had collected on the air—a single bright spot, but rapidly disappearing, for the thick atmosphere rolled like the turbid waves of some dark sea. That crimson light passed through the murky gratings of a high and narrow window in the Tower, and, falling direct on the hearth, almost extinguished the decaying brands, whose fire was lost in the white and smouldering ashes. There was something peculiarly dreary in the aspect of the room; the lofty walls and ceiling were discoloured with smoke and time, and the smooth wainscot had no other ornament than initial letters and names, rudely carved by some unpractised hands: each was a record of the weary hour and of the hope deferred—the languid task set by imprisonment to itself, glad to waste the time which has no employment save melancholy thought, and finding even in this trivial labour a resource.

Two chairs, a deal table, and a worn footstool, were the sole furniture of the comfortless chamber; and yet there were indulgences which told that the prisoners had command of that universal talisman, gold. Glasses, whose slender stems seemed endangered by the touch, and carved with the delicate tracery of Venice—flowers just breathed

on the clear crystal—stood upon the table; and the half-finished flask exhaled the delicious odour of Burgundy.

The elder cavalier was seated beside the hearth, half asleep; and sleep, which so shews the face in its truth, unbrightened by expression—which so often conceals the ravages of years—marked how little time had wrought upon Lord Avonleigh. The brow was smooth and fair; no deep thought, born of deep feeling, had grown there—those indelible lines which stamp even youth with age. True, the fiery eagerness of former days was past, and in its place was the quiet, self-concentrated look of habitual indulgence. His dress was rich; the finest lace formed his ruff, and his curious gold chain was rather elegant than massive; while an attention to the disposition of the whole, together with the intentional grace of the attitude, bespoke the still remaining consciousness of personal attraction.

His son, the companion of his imprisonment, was very like him; but, strange that the young face possessed already stronger lines than its prototype! Scorn seemed habitual to the curved lip; and the starting veins in the middle of the forehead were the unerring indication of a violent temper.

Lord Stukeley had been for some time watching the small portion of the Thames which could be caught from the barred casement. There was but little to interest in the carpenter's yard opposite, or the few boats that were floating slowly down the river. He turned away listlessly, and at first, with the sole idea of its own enjoyment ever uppermost with a spoiled child, was about to rouse his father, when his natural kindliness of temper prevailed, and he desisted, though obviously not knowing what to do with himself. He then opened a drawer in the table, and took from it a pack of cards. "I can't play by myself," exclaimed he, discontentedly. Suddenly his face brightened, he drew his seat forwards, and began building houses. One after another the particoloured fragments of each fragile fabric were strewed over the table, till gradually his hand became accustomed and steady—walls and roofs were properly balanced, and the mimic Babels mounted high in air,—fittest symbols of all the graver plans and trials that agitate human existence. Scarcely is one scheme overthrown ere another is raised out of its ruins, but destined, like its predecessor, to destruction; and yet, it would seem, the more we know the chances against our efforts—how a breath may demolish,

nay, what our own weariness will soon destroy,—the more earnestly do we pursue them to the end.

Albert was too young to moralise thus, and he pursued his employment. At length he raised a tower whose merits really deserved to be appreciated, and Lord Avonleigh was awakened by a loud and sudden demand on his admiration. "It reaches above my head!" exclaimed Albert eagerly. But eagerness in this case, as in most others, annihilated its own delight; down came the tottering height, while the disappointed builder found relief for his sorrow in anger—sorrow's best remedy, after all. "It is your fault," exclaimed he, turning pettishly to his father—"shaking the table so!"

"Why, you see, Albert, the consequences of awakening me," replied the indulgent parent; "but if you will build it up again, I will promise to admire as much as you please, and at the most respectful distance."

Lord Stukeley was not to be easily soothed; his father's commiseration only made him think that he had been really aggrieved; so he leant over the cards sullenly enough, but without attempting to renew his former occupation.

"We shall soon be in the dark," said Lord Avonleigh, who, like most indolent people, pre-

ferred not to remark the mood which he lacked energy to reprimand. And so he began to nurse the small remains of fire yet lurking in the smouldering wood-ashes, which revived as the red sunbeams were lost in the masses of black clouds now gathered in piles upon the west. A pale clear flame had just coloured the thick white smoke, when Lord Avonleigh started up into a listening attitude of intense attention, exclaiming, "St. Paul's bell is tolling!"

He was right. Heavily and gloomily the mighty sound swept along the Thames, and was answered, as one church after another repeated the melancholy peal. Dull, loud, and monotonous, stroke after stroke fell like a weight upon the ear; the whole atmosphere seemed oppressed with the invisible but conscious presence of Death. "They are tolling," ejaculated Lord Avonleigh in a subdued voice, "for the death of Cromwell."

"For Cromwell's death?" cried Albert, his eyes flashing, and his cheek colouring, like a young gladiator in the first flush of his ferocious triumph — "for Cromwell's death? Why, it is the bravest peal that ever rang from the steeples of London. Out upon their dastardly tolling! Why don't they ring the bells merrily, and cry, 'Long live King Charles the Second!'"

"Hush! hush!" said his cautious companion. But the injunction was not needed, for a burst of thunder directly above their heads completely overpowered both their voices. An instant after, a vivid sheet of lightning filled the chamber. They involuntarily approached the window; the opposite side of the river was hidden in a dense black vapour, and the huge dark clouds were piled upon the sky like the waves of some vast and stormy sea, just marked by thin meteor-like lines of faint crimson, illuminated almost every minute by the white glare of the forked flash, while the old and massive walls of the Tower seemed to rock as each tremendous clap of thunder followed fast upon another.

"Hurrah!" cried Albert, as one roll, more violent than the rest, made the solid floor vibrate under their feet. "Hurrah! the devil is taking his own in fine style."

This storm, which devastated all England, was felt in Hampshire before news arrived of the death which it was supposed to attend. The depths of its old forest reverberated to the echoing thunder, and many a stately tree stood scorched and blackening, to whose withered boughs spring would now return in vain.

The ensuing noon, Francesca and Guido were

watching from the window the destruction that had been wrought in the garden, whose paths were like running brooks, on which floated the smaller branches torn off by yesterday's fury, while the larger ones crushed the slighter shrubs on which they lay. Several trees had been blown down, one of which was a fine old laurel just opposite the casement.

"It was not for nothing," said Lawrence Aylmer, entering the room, "that the storm came—it arose round the death-bed of Cromwell."

"Is Cromwell dead?" was the exclamation from all.

There was no party spirit, no political hopes or fears, in that little chamber; so that the news was received in the silence of awe and dread. But the general rarely triumphs long over the individual feeling; and the young Italians naturally reverted to the probability of Lord Avonleigh's immediate release. Such anticipation was, however, to be disappointed, as the council of Richard exacted pledges which his lordship was unwilling to give; for, already calculating on the return of the royal family, he determined to take no step that might then be recorded against him.

No such change in affairs as was expected,

however, took place. The truth is, that people in general are stupified by any great event. The awe of Cromwell rested like a dead weight on men's minds, and the shock and pause were mistaken for security.

CHAPTER XXIII.

"I look into the mist of future years,
And gather comfort from the eternal law."

WILSON.

HAVING claimed our privilege of carrying our readers to scenes, however far apart, which bear upon our narrative, we must now shew the effect of Cromwell's death on our other actors; and cross the Irish channel, to where Henry, the younger son of the Protector, resided, the government of Ireland having been intrusted to his charge.

It was an evening of much festivity and some mirth—things often more opposed than their near neighbourhood would indicate; but Henry, who desired to conciliate, had collected round the board a numerous assemblage, who, whatever heart-burning might be hidden by the embroidered vest, or what less kindly feeling might lurk beneath

the apparent smile, at any rate came to the feast, and talked loud and drank freely. Enough was done to pass the meeting off as one marked by extreme cordiality and unbounded hilarity,—common phrases, which imply so little, and are used so much.

Among the guests was one, a young and handsome man, of that appearance which his own sex would pronounce gentlemanlike, and the other, interesting. He was dressed in deep mourning, and looked pale and sad, as if the sense of a recent loss was still strong within him; while his fair though somewhat wan complexion was made more striking by the contrast with the bright profusion of hair that parted on his brow, and, hanging in long curls down his shoulders, might have vied with those of any native chieftain who held his freedom and the golden length of his locks synonymous. He was seated next an elderly officer, to whom he paid a degree of attention which was refused to the gayer sallies of a younger companion on the other side. Still it was obvious that his attention was the result of that good feeling which is the best politeness; for when the old man became at last engaged in a warm discussion with his neighbour, touching the merits and demerits of chain armour, Robert Evelyn (for it was

he) looked relieved by being again able to sit in silence and in thought.

It is curious to mark the many shapes taken by mental suffering. With some it at once assumes the mask and the manner, puts on smiles, and forces the gay and brilliant word. These are they who are sensitively alive to the opinions of others, who, having once been called animated, deem that they have a character to sustain. Such shrink with morbid susceptibility from its being supposed how much they really feel; and vanity—vanity, by the by, in its most graceful and engaging form, usually native to such characters—aids them to support the seeming. They cannot endure being thought less agreeable; and only in solitude give way to the regret which oppresses them—then exaggerated to the utmost. Ah! none know the misery of such solitude but those who have felt it. The reaction of forced excitement is terrible; pale, spiritless, and exhausted, we are left suddenly alone with our memory, which on the instant acquires an almost magical power of creation; every sorrowful passage in existence is retraced anew, every mortification rises up in double bitterness; slights are magnified, and even invented,—they almost seem deserved; for we are ashamed of ourselves for having acted a part. We

feel lonely, neglected, miserable, aggrieved; and all that but one half-hour before we had been exerting ourselves to attain, appears to be utterly worthless.

It is easy to say that such a state of mind is morbid and mistaken; but before we can change our feelings, we must change our nature; and a temperament of this sensitive and excitable kind is of all others the most difficult, nay, impossible, to alter and to subdue.

Evelyn's character was completely the opposite to this; he was naturally grave and reserved, and too little interested by the generality of mankind to be solicitous about their suffrage. More vanity would have made him more amiable, but it would have been at his own expense. He did not, could not, lightly attach himself; but when he did, it was with all the energy and depth of a passionate and melancholy nature—one of those attachments which are the destiny of a life. He was more given to reflection than to imagination—hence he dwelt more on the past than on the future; and with such tempers, impressions once admitted are deep and lasting.

With Evelyn, all the poetry of his mind was bestowed on the days which had been; those to come were mere matter of calculation. Placed in

such and such circumstance, which were but rational to suppose, such and such results would ensue. He was prepared to meet them, but he delighted in no fanciful creations concerning them: he looked back when he indulged in the tender romance of the heart. His father's death was but recent; and no loss can be so severe as our first,—till then, scarcely had we believed in death; now its presence darkens the world; we are haunted by a perpetual fear, for ever whispering of the instability of humanity.

Evelyn took the earliest opportunity of withdrawing from the hall, and, while waiting for the interview which he wished with Henry Cromwell, paced slowly up and down one of the terraces that looked towards the sea. During the preceding days the weather had been unusually stormy; and though the wind had sunk down from its terrific violence, and the giant waves subsided to their wonted level, yet, both on sky and ocean, there were the many slight signs of the late turmoil. The waves heaved with an unquiet motion, while flakes of froth floated upon them, and gleams of phosphoric light scintillated in the distance.

All things in nature are types of humanity; and Evelyn pleased himself with tracing a likeness in the tremulous sea to man's own agitated

bosom, shaken with the conflict of contending passion, and trembling with exhaustion rather than repose; while a thousand vain cares and feverish hopes are rocked to and fro on the restless surface. The heavens were equally unsettled; the dense purple, lighted by the large bright moon, was broken by huge masses of clouds—some dark, as if the thunder still lingered in their gloomy recesses, while others, fragile and snowy, seemed to harbour nothing rougher than a summer shower, enough to bathe but not to spoil the rose.

The general aspect of midnight is calm and solemn; the lulled spirits unconsciously are subdued by the deep repose. Not so this night. The keen air from the water made exercise necessary to circulate the blood; and somewhat of cheerful exertion is connected with a fresh gale and a quick walk. The light, too, was wavering and uncertain, as the heavy vapours sailed by and obscured the moon; and her mirror, the ocean, at one moment glittered with her silvery beam, and the next was left in total darkness.

The scene greatly harmonised with the young Englishman's mood; from its wearing a likeness to the human lot in general, he, by a common process, began to associate it with the fate peculiarly

his own. Even so had his past mingled gloom and brightness, and so unquiet and troubled was his actual life. Still present to his mind rose one beloved face—beloved in spite of all. In vain he said to himself, "How lightly did she give me up!" He felt aggrieved, but not the less did he feel that for him there existed no other. Never again could he love woman as he had loved Francesca Carrara. Vainly he strove to banish that sweet face, which rose too vividly to his memory; he could not fix his thoughts on the many important points which needed consideration in his present position. Highly trusted, and for his father's sake, by the Protector, he knew all the need there was to prove himself worthy of such confidence; still, to-night one vain and fond regret reigned paramount.

But his reverie was interrupted by hurried steps; he turned, and saw Henry Cromwell, white with some strong agitation, and so absorbed in his own thoughts that at first he did not observe Evelyn. He caught sight of him suddenly, and anxiously grasping his arm, exclaimed, "Have you heard the intelligence? The Lord Protector is no more!"

Evelyn stood speechless. The awe of a great man's death struck upon his heart; and even the

mighty consequences were forgotten in the single idea of Cromwell being dead. One by one the important results rose up within his mind, and he felt that the present was the epoch in his companion's life,—was he prepared to meet it? Henry Cromwell's first words proved that he was not. "I am half inclined," said he, in a hesitating voice, "to proclaim Charles Stuart." Half inclined!—that little phrase contains the secrets of all failures: it is the strong will, which knows nothing of hesitation, that masters the world. His father had no half-inclinings.

"Proclaim Charles Stuart!" exclaimed Evelyn. "Impossible!—it were the basest outrage upon your father's memory. Do you dare, before his body is cold in the grave, thus to declare his life to have been a crime, and his authority a tyranny —to which you submitted from fear, and now seize the first moment of denying? Will you act in such instant and direct opposition to all that he held necessary and right? Will you brand him as a usurper?"

Henry stood silent, but unconvinced; for a weak mind is not easily dislodged from its first impulse—retaining from cowardice what it caught from surprise.

"I am sure," resumed he, "we might make our own terms with Charles."

"Do you remember," asked Evelyn, "what the late Protector said, when urged to descend from the station which he worthily filled?—'Charles Stuart cannot forgive his father's death; and if he could, he were unworthy of the throne.' I believe he could and would easily forgive, or rather forget his father's fate; but the same selfish indifference would equally pervade all his actions—and England needs a sovereign of far other metal."

"My brother Richard, perhaps?" replied Henry, with a sneer.

"Good God!" exclaimed his companion. 'Why cannot genius transmit itself?—a worthier heritage than king ever left. How many great designs are unfinished—how many noble projects untried—because death smites down the mind capable of conceiving and executing them! Alas! such a mind passes away, and leaves no successor. Henry Cromwell, what a debt does your father's memory claim at your hands!—it demands from you its justification. The high and prosperous state of our country has been the best answer to all cavillers at his power; for when has

power been more nobly exercised? It remains for you to shew that his influence extends for good even beyond the grave."

His enthusiasm carried his companion along with it.

"My sway here," he said, after a pause, "seems firmly enough established. Men have now seen too much of change to desire it more; and their security and mine are combined. I can detain the principal persons assembled in the lodge to-night as hostages."

"Yes," answered Evelyn; "and such a breach of faith will inevitably destroy the very confidence which it must be your object to create. Suspicion never obtains more than the mockery of security."

"At all events, there is no necessity of announcing the Protector's demise to-night."

"Out upon any temporising policy!" returned Evelyn; "concealment always implies fear; and dread is God's blessing to our enemies. Go at once to the hall, and dismiss your guests with the intelligence of your father's death, and your brother's accession."

The companions separated; the younger Cromwell to execute his most unwelcome mission, while Evelyn remained for a time pacing up and down,

lost in meditation on the events which a few months would probably unfold. Like most young men whose imagination exercises itself in politics, he was a republican. Every age has its own enthusiasm; and it was only of late years that enthusiasm had taken the direction of liberty. The ideal of liberty—now the excitement of the day—had arisen from three sources. First, from the religious discussions, which led to an extent and to conclusions of which the original agitators of such discussions little dreamed. To claim a right of thinking for yourself in one instance, ends by claiming that right in many; and when the habit of examination is once introduced, the folly of any exclusive privilege is soon manifest; for most privileges have commenced in some necessity of the time, and a positive benefit has accrued from their exercise to the many as well as to the individual. But, unfortunately, the privilege often remains after its necessity has passed away; and for a space holds on by the vain yet strong tenure of habit. Some unusual abuse awakens unusual attention; the right is questioned, while the power to enforce it is weakened, and then alteration becomes inevitable. The despotic power vested in the church during the darker ages was the only check upon that lawless era, and was far more

useful than its assailants now admit. The ecclesiastical republic afforded the only opening for intellectual talent — the mental, that counterbalanced the feudal, aristocracy; but for its decrees, the very name of peace would have been unknown in Europe; and mighty was the protection afforded to the weak, while charity and support to the poor was exercised on a scale far beyond the poor-rates and subscriptions of the present day. We are well prepared to allow that this vast authority was often directed to evil; but what human authority has not been abused?—and the Roman church was a human institution, growing out of human circumstances and human exigences. The moment its empire was no longer needed, that moment it was impugned. In vain persecution strove to keep down the fast-growing intelligence of the age. The authority was not required, and it fell before the more liberal faith which suited the period; while the habits of investigation and inquiry which men had acquired soon extended from religious to all other subjects.

There was also a second class among whom notions of freedom had sprung up in their most tangible and useful form—we allude to the mercantile ranks. For a long and stormy period after the downfal of the Roman empire, war

was the business of the world; the sword alone obtained and secured property. This state of things could not last; one species of barter led to another; and finally arose a set of men solely devoted to trade. Wealth acquired by commerce must always bring with it its portion of intelligence, and a desire of security. We would not lightly lose what we have hardly earned. Security can be obtained but by defined rights, and these can be ensured only by equitable laws. Out of these principles arose the various struggles which convulsed Europe during the middle ages. The feudal potentates still strove to retain their military despotism after its necessity had passed away; and the people of cities and ports, daily more conscious of their wants and powers, resisted that authority which had become so intolerable. Abuses are never remedied till actually unbearable. Liberty has been called the daughter of the mountains—she ought rather to be styled the daughter of commerce; for her best and most useful rights have been founded and defended by states embarked in trade.

There was a third class, small indeed when compared to those vast multitudes actuated by fanaticism or interest, but destined to exercise the most beneficial and lasting influence—the reflecting

and theoretic few, who saw in universal freedom the only tie between man and his kind—the only rational hope whereon to ground the dissemination of equitable principles among the human race.

At the time of which we are writing, the classics, so lately thrown open for study and delight, were the universal source whence the young student drew his faith and inspiration. The glorious republics of Greece and Rome, seen through the halo which genius has flung round them, seemed the very models of that perfection whose belief ever haunts the mind capable of exertion.

History, it is said, is the past teaching by example. Alas, that example has perpetuated many dazzling errors! How many false principles have been laid down, how much delusion supported, by reference to the glories of Athens and of Rome! It remained for a later time to observe that those so-called republics were but aristocracy in its most oppressive form; and what are now the people were then positive slaves; to say nothing of how utterly unsuitable their form of government would be to our differing creed, climate, and manners. But it was to them that the wisest philosophers of that day turned for examples of legislation, and instances of patriotism; and it may well be excused in one young and ardent as Evelyn, if he

dreamt that his native country might emulate the graceful refinement of the Athenian, and the sterner virtue of the Roman.

Evelyn expected nothing from Richard Cromwell; but he believed that good might grow out of evil; and the very weakness which would throw the power into the people's hands, might by them be so used as to lay the foundations of a more secure and free government than had yet been known. Moreover, he held any ill lighter than the return of the Stuarts to that throne for which long experience had shewn their house to be so unfitted.

"The parliament," thought Evelyn, "will feel their strength, and the past has surely taught them how to use it."

Perhaps the great charm of a republic to the young mind is, the career which it seems to lay open to all, and whose success depends upon personal gifts; while their exercise seems more independent when devoted to the people rather than to the monarch. They forget that tyranny and caprice are the attributes of the many as well as of the one,—that the ingratitude of the mob is as proverbial as that of the court; and that an equal subserviency is required by either. But the poetry of the afar off is around the patriotism of the classic ages, and its record is left on the most glorious

pages wherein human intellect ever shed its halo over human action. Evelyn dwelt upon the noble page with that feverish enthusiasm, that fiery element, whence all that is great originates; but which so often consumes where it kindles, or, thwarted by small and unworthy circumstances, exhausts itself in the vain endeavour.

He continued to pace the terrace, till a page brought him a summons from Henry Cromwell, whom he found in a small closet, busied in writing despatches.

"I want your aid," he exclaimed, in an animated tone. "All has gone right. The terror of my father's name is still about us; there was not even a murmur of dissent when I announced Richard Lord Protector of England; and yet, do you know, the name of Charles Stuart almost rose to my lips!"

"There was a time," said Evelyn, "when I felt a deep sympathy for the exiled prince — I pitied him as one deprived of his just heritage; but a crown cannot, and ought not to be transmitted like an estate. The prodigal heir can only waste his own substance, and the punishment falls, as it should, upon himself; but the prince has an awful responsibility, — the welfare of others is required at his hands; his faults and his follies take

a wide range, and not with him does their suffering end. I saw too much of Charles Stuart at Paris ever to wish him on the throne of his ancestors. His undignified and profligate exile — needy suitor to-day to the only heiress of the royal French blood, and to-morrow to one of the nieces of the Italian adventurer, Mazarin. Utterly neglectful of what he owes to the kingdom which he hopes to regain, Charles has learned but adversity's worst lesson — expediency. He inherits his nature from his mother — worthy descendant of the subtle Medici, — selfish, indolent, ungrateful, and false. He will look on our fair country but as the treasury of an idle and dissipated court. I, for one, will forsake land, heritage, and home, rather than swear fealty to Charles Stuart."

"What do you do, lingering there?" demanded Henry Cromwell of the page who had loitered in the room. "Leave us, and wait in the antechamber."

The page obeyed in silence, and left the closet; and the friends pursued their discourse, one of them little aware how carefully his words had been recorded. It was far advanced in the night before they separated; but almost every arrangement had been made for their future proceedings. It is curious to note, that amid the schemings of

policy, and the pressure of business, no time had been found for the pouring forth of that natural grief which would seem the inevitable tribute to be paid to a parent's loss: no; all the feelings had been stern, active, and on-looking. Ambition and affection rarely go together; the great must pay their penalty, and be content with fear instead of love. The ordinary death-bed is surrounded with sorrow and with tears; but upon the decease of a man like Cromwell, the future—busy, anxious, plotting, and dangerous—engrosses every thought.

CHAPTER XXIV.

——— "Death 's
A fearful thing, when we must count its steps.
* * * * *
And was this, then, the end of those sweet dreams
Of home, and happiness, and quiet years?"

L. E. L.

It was an early and a warm spring; but, for the first time in their lives, the Carraras watched it with a divided heart. Guido dwelt on its beauty with a deeper love than he had ever before known. We turn from no object, even the most common and the most trivial, for the last time, knowing it to be the last, without a touch of sad thoughtfulness. What then must be the feeling with which we look on this glorious and beautiful world, and know that such looks are our last?—when we know that, in a few fleeting weeks, of the green leaves we now see putting forth, such as are doomed to perish early, like ourselves, will fall upon the earth, in whose dark bosom we are laid in our long rest?—that the flowers, colouring branches which droop beneath their luxury of

bloom, will only expand in time to form our funeral garland? It is even more solemn than mournful to gaze upon the far blue sky, and feel, in the dimness of the soon-wearied sight, how, pass but a little while, and the whole will have faded from our view—its beauty never more to be heightened by the tender associations of earth, and its rain and shine shedding vain fertility on our grave.

The mysteries of this wonderful universe rise more palpable upon the departing spirit, so soon to mingle with their marvels. A voice is on the air, and a music on the wind, inaudible to other ears, but full of strange prophecies to the ear of the dying:—he stands on the threshold of existence, and already looks beyond it; his thoughts are on things not of this life; his affections are now the only links that bind him to the earth, but never was their power so infinite,—all other feelings have passed away. Ambition has gone down to the dust, from which it so vainly rose; wealth is known to be the veriest dross of which chains were ever formed to glitter and to gall; hope has resigned the thousand rainbows which once gave beauty and promise to the gloomiest hour;—all desires, expectations, and emotions, are vanished—excepting love, which grows the stronger as it ap-

proaches the source whence it came, and becomes more heavenly as it draws nigh to its birth-place —heaven.

With an earnest and fearful fondness Guido thought of his sister. Ah! Death had still his sting and his victory, when such a parting would be his work. Guido, which is not usual in his most insidious disease, was aware of his danger; perhaps the wish gave rise to the belief, for he wished to die—but not when he thought of Francesca. How often in the silence of the midnight hour, when he turned upon the feverish bed of his unrest, and watched the stars shine through the lattice, while he longed to mingle with their rays, and casting away the wearied and painful body, be free and spiritual as the pure element which they lighted—how often, even then, would Francesca's pale and sorrowful face rise before him, and create the vain desire to live a little longer for her sake! Could he have only seen her safe in her father's home, and have known her prized and loved as she deserved to be, he could have died content, ay, thankful; but to leave her so desolate, so lonely, was a thought that cast its darkness on the very face of heaven.

But the buds now putting forth on every branch would not more surely open into flower

and leaf, than he would perish. Day by day he grew weaker. The luxuriant hair relaxed with the damps that rose on the white forehead, as if the moisture of the grave were already there. The blue veins shone on the temples with unnatural clearness; and often, when Francesca's lips were pressed to them in affectionate but vain endeavour to soothe their burning pain, she started at the loud and rapid beating of their feverish pulses. His hand was wan and slender as a woman's, with the same delicate pink inside; and the like feminine fairness extended over his face, and rendered more striking the terrible yet lovely red that burnt its small circle on his cheek—the death-rose of consumption. Formerly his large black eyes were wild and restless; now, larger and clearer than ever, there was a calm and settled brightness, like the luminous aspect of some still summer star, whose light is poetry—poetry, which is the faint echo of the mysteries of the universe—the beautifier and the unraveller! All the stormier passions had died away, like the winds on the blue surface of some unruffled lake, which mirrors nothing but the lone and lovely sky. Their deep calm orbs had no anger, no envy, no discontent, to convey—no vain repinings, and yet vainer longings. The shadow of mortality

had disappeared before the awakenings of the spiritual life, which is dulled and distracted by the daily cares and fretfulness of ordinary existence. Sometimes a mist arose upon their placid brightness—while yet here, the soul must be troubled; and when he met Francesca's sad and anxious look, all the tenderness of our struggling life returned upon him—and with tenderness ever comes bitterness. He had no tears for himself—he had them only for her. Yet, as he approached the grave, he looked beyond it; there they met again, and to part no more. What were a few brief years to one whose hope was in eternity?

But Francesca, in whom life was too warm and active to feel that calm which is ever the herald of gradually coming death, could only dwell on their separation—the reunion was too far off for comfort—the great and present grief darkened the distant hope. The approach of the fragrant and verdant spring was torture to her. The whole atmosphere seemed instinct with life—the thickets, golden with furze, were all musical with the melodious plying of the bees' industrious wings; the forest was alive with birds, scattering the sunshine as they fluttered through the leaves; the grass swarmed with myriads of insects; shoals of bright-scaled fish rose like rainbows to the sur-

face of the river; — the slender shrub, the stately tree, the seed bursting from the ground — all renewed their vigorous animation. The bough that over-night had but the swelling germ, displayed a full-formed leaf, or an opened flower, to the noontide sun.

Amid all this luxuriance of life, was there none for Guido? — was he to be the only one to whom the spring brought no hope, no renewal of breath and bloom? She turned away sickening from the joyous face of nature; she could not see a rose unfold without envying its beautiful renovation.

Guido was still equal to occasional exercise; and he delighted to wander with Francesca and Lucy through the quiet glades of the forest. He revelled in the fragrance of the warm air, and was never weary of admiring the hawthorn, drooping beneath the transitory wealth of its most aromatic blossoms. There appeared to be a thousand harmonies in nature unnoticed till now; his soul had laid aside all meaner cares, and was in unison with them. A subtle and tender sympathy seemed to reveal to him secrets before unknown — secrets whose key was love, — love, which, though tried, thwarted, and turned aside from its perfectness in the wayfaring below, is still the animating spirit of the universe.

CHAPTER XXV.

"I feel thy tears—I feel thy breath,
I meet thy fond look still;
Keen is the strife of love and death!"

MRS. HEMANS.

IT was one of those bright mornings which unite the softness of spring with the warmth and glow of summer. The sunshine flung its own gladness over all; every rippling brook ran in light; and the deep blue of the sky was made yet deeper by a few white clouds floating along in snowy flakes. The greenwood glade was the only chamber for such a noon-tide, and the Carraras wandered forth. They soon reached the solitary dell where Rufus's stone marks how a random shaft quelled the pride of the haughty Norman.

Never place made such accident appear more probable. The trees grow thickly and irregularly round, and the silvery stems of the ash-trees glisten so as to dazzle the steadiest eye. A rude stone is carved with half-obliterated characters;

but the record of the fatal arrow is enough to make the place mournful with the presence of death, and to fill the mind with solemn fancies of life's strange accidents. The royal huntsman rode forth that morning to the baying of the hound and the ringing of the horn—his gallant charger bounding over the greensward, obedient to his slightest sign, and yet less docile than the vassals who followed, watching every turn of his fierce and flashing eye. How little did he deem that a few hours would see him carried a dishonoured corpse in a common cart, with less care than would have waited on its usual load of the meadow hay or the yellow corn. And little, too, did Sir Walter Tyrrell deem that the morning, which beheld him a favourite guest in the royal train, would also see him a murderer and an exile, flying from the scaffold—which in those days would have waited for no nice distinctions of intention in the guilt. Ay, these are the lessons by which history teaches its severe morality,—mocking human power with its own nothingness—changing the face of a nation's affairs by a chance—smiting the proud in his place of pride—and staining the wild flowers with blood, human and princely blood, poured out instead of that from the menaced deer.

It was firmly believed in the New Forest, that the judgment of Heaven had struck down the cruel and arbitrary monarch in the very place which he had made desolate. The levelled cottage and the wasted field—the peasant, driven forth homeless and despairing, in the selfishness of barbarous amusement—were now avenged; the offender's pleasure had been his punishment—the visible wrong followed by the visible penalty.

The dell itself was lovely and lonely, and a favourite haunt with the Carraras. Death leaves behind its own solemnity; and, even with the sunshine checkering the grass, the place had a peculiar gloom. Though they sat beneath the shade of the hawthorn, whose blossoms strewed the ground at their feet, and with the long branches drooping around them their sweet shelter, yet their talk was grave, and often broken by long intervals of silence.

"Do not let us stay here!" at last exclaimed Francesca; "I am not happy enough to bear its melancholy. True, that the fate of the Norman king was well deserved; but how often has inexorable fate struck down the innocent as suddenly! Alas! life is full of strange chances; and it is terrible to think that on them we must depend."

"Yes," said Guido, rising, "who shall deny that the shaft which sent the princely huntsman to the ground was a just judgment?"

"Ah! my brother," replied she, "judgment is an awful word for mortal life to utter! Who dares pronounce that a doom is deserved? If the sudden and early death be a judgment on one, must it not be so on all? What had Henriette, so gentle, so kind, so good, done, that she should perish? Yet she died, with all the hopes, joys, and affections of life warm around her." Francesca spoke of Madame de Mercœur, but her brother was in her hidden thought;—why was he to die so young?

Rufus's stone lies in the outskirts of the forest, and in a few minutes they emerged upon the broad heath which bounds it, then like a sea of gold; for the furze was in the first glory of its spendthrift wealth.

"Look there!" exclaimed Guido, both struck with the scene, and wishing to divert Francesca's thoughts, whose eyes, fixed on the ground, were filled with tears.

Placed beside a little copse on the edge of the road, whose branches, covered with the white May, were contrasted by the long dark garlands of ivy, like some fatal love redeeming and beautifying

the ruin itself has wrought, was a wood fire, whose red blaze cast a vivid reflection on the deep green herbage by which it was surrounded. Three children, with the rich brown and richer crimson colour, and the bright black eyes which mark a southern extraction, were rolling on the grass at a little distance; and close beside the fire were seated two men, with red kerchiefs knitted round their close-curled dark hair. There was something in the complexions and the out-of-doors life that at once carried the Italians back to their own country. Such a group was to them a familiar sight, linked with a thousand early recollections.

They had quickened their pace with an intention of accosting the party, when a few large drops of rain, and a huge cloud spreading rapidly on the sky, induced them to retreat towards the forest. They took refuge beneath a majestic beech, whose spreading foliage afforded ample shelter, while the now-fast-falling shower played like music in the upper branches.

There is nothing more delicious than one of these summer and sudden showers. There is something so inexpressibly lulling in the sound of the falling drops—like remembered poetry, inwardly murmured, rather than spoken. The leaves and flowers seem as if they were conscious of the

reviving moisture, and wear fresher verdure and livelier hues; the perfume which they exhale makes the very breathing a delight—so sweet is the cool and fragrant air; while the birds flutter to and fro, as if they, too, shared the general enjoyment.

The sun soon broke forth from that one dark cloud, gradually melting into light; and the sunbeams and the glittering rain went driving together through the forest glades—those long vistas, of which the slender deer seemed sole habitants. Yet the gaze of the young Italians rather turned to the white windings of the smoke, which marked the site of the gipsies' fire, and recalled so many associations of their childhood and their country. Light—transitory—winding its graceful circles, till finally lost in the blue air, born of the fiery element which smoulders below, smoke is the very type of that vapour of the human heart, hope. So does hope spring from the burning passions, which consume their home and themselves—so does it wander through the future, making its own charmed path—and so does it evanish away: lost in the horizon, it grows at last too faint for outline.

But Francesca, who perceived that the heavy drops were beginning to ooze through the thick

leaves, while the sun had already dried the rain that but a few minutes before had shone on crystallised grass, now proposed their proceeding onwards. They wound along a little path, edged on either side with that delicate moss, which is alone enough to make one believe in fairies; for what but their tiny fingers could ever have traced the minute colours of its starred embroidery?

Suddenly, where the luxuriant growth of a bog-myrtle, whose leaves are perfumed as flowers, shut out all view but of itself, they heard voices, and removing one of the boughs, caught a glimpse of Lucy, in deep converse with a female gipsy. Equally unwilling to overhear or to interrupt, they turned aside; but in a few minutes Lucy passed them by, too absorbed in her own reflections to see them. It was obvious that her meditations were very pleasant; for a slight blush yet rested on a cheek dimpled with unconscious smiles.

Francesca was about to speak to her, when she was prevented by Guido. "Nay," said he, "let her dream out her dream; she will waken soon enough. What would not we give again to indulge those once fondly believed illusions!"

"Believed!" exclaimed Francesca; "she cannot possibly believe, that to the ignorant vagrant

those secrets should be revealed which baffle the closest study and the deepest science!"

"Perhaps," replied he, "she does not exactly credit the fortune just foretold; but, at all events, it is pleasant to think about, and it enables her to dwell on the subject nearest her heart."

He was right: love delights in hearing its own name, and has a childish pleasure in making excuses for the enjoyment it takes in aught that links its future to that of the beloved. Moreover, Lucy had a pretty feminine credulity about her, which was fain to believe, especially a prophecy that echoed her hope. Wiser heads than her's have their superstitions; and so far from wondering that people should seek to dive into the future, and attach faith to the spell and to the omen, the real wonder is, that the future, the dark, the terrible, the fast-approaching, should excite so little fear and so little attention as it does.

Another winding in their path brought them to the gipsy, who immediately addressed them. She was a picturesque specimen of the race. Her complexion, of the deepest olive, was relieved by the peculiar and rich red which gives such light to the small bright eye—half arch, half cunning. Her long black hair hung in straight but thick masses over her forehead and round her throat.

Her mouth was small; but the very red lips, and the glitter of the very white teeth, conveyed something of the image of a wild animal. In broken English and a foreign accent, she offered to tell their fortunes; while her quick eye glanced from one to another, as if taking the most minute observation.

"We have not time," answered Francesca.

"Nay, lady," said the gipsy, in Italian; "yourself and your brother are too young not to look eagerly towards the future."

Her shrewd eye, accustomed to note the slightest indications, had already marked their likeness to each other, and that ease of affection which belongs to habit and relationship.

Only those who have dwelt in a foreign land, can tell the charm of hearing their native tongue spoken unexpectedly,—the tongue whose music was around their infancy, and in which were breathed their first words of love! Tears brightened the eyes of the young Italians; a passionate longing for their own land was at that moment the only feeling in their mind.

The gipsy, noticing their emotion, added, "And, beside the future, I can tell you of the past. Is there nothing,—are there none of whom you care to hear,—in your own and beautiful Italy?"

"Nothing, nothing!" exclaimed Guido; "we left nothing behind us but the grave!" Then, ashamed of this passion before a stranger, he said, taking out his purse, and pouring its contents into the woman's hand, "we will not tax your skill; but take this for the sake of the land we have alike left, and the tongue we have alike spoken."

The amount of the gift for the moment put to flight even the ready wit of the gipsy; and she let them pass on in silence; but they moved slowly, for the least excitation was too much for Guido, and he leant faintly on Francesca. With the tenderness of feminine tact, she only followed them for an instant with a whispered and earnest blessing, and then left them. "They might well say," murmured she, as they passed through the thicket, "that I could tell them nothing; for the death-damp is on his hand; and she—there is that in her face which never boded happiness!"

CHAPTER XXVI.

"What vanity in the empty bustle of common life!"

"I gaze upon the beautiful, and my mind responds to the inspiration; for my thoughts are lovely as my visions."

Contarini Fleming.

That stroll in the forest was Guido's last. The moistened ground, on which he had walked after the falling rain, had given him cold, and his illness increased rapidly and fearfully; but his sense of his danger only shewed itself in a gentler patience and a deeper tenderness.

Alas for poor Francesca! to watch the sole being on earth that loved her thus dying day by day! She would sit by him for hours, holding his hand in hers, and gazing, till she could no longer bear to meet those affectionate eyes which would so soon be closed for ever. She would leave him, to weep those tears of passionate regret with which she could not bear to harass him; and when she came back, he would mark the scarcely dried tears, and draw her tenderly to his side; but even he dared not attempt consolation.

Too feeble for exercise, his only enjoyment now was to sit in an arbour, reached with difficulty, that had been formed on a rising part of the ground. An old ash-tree extended its boughs overhead; and those which had been trained downwards, were latticed by a luxuriant honeysuckle, whose fairy trumpets hung in fragrant profusion. It was one of those thoroughly English gardens, still to be found in some of the old-fashioned parts of the country, where a mistaken taste has not severed *la belle alliance* between the useful and the agreeable.

I know nothing more pleasant than the half kitchen-, half flower-garden;—the few trees that extend a light shade—either the apple, with its spring shower of fair blossoms, tinted with the faintest crimson, and its summer show of fruit reddening every day; or the cherry, with its scarlet multitude—berries more numerous than leaves. Below, long rows of peas put forth their white-winged flowers, tempting the small butterflies to flutter round their inanimate likenesses; or else of beans, whose fresh, sweet odour, when in bloom, might challenge competition with the sea gales of the spice islands. Then the deep glossy green of the gooseberry is so well relieved by the paler shade of the currant-bush; and alongside,

spreading the verdant length of the strawberry-bed, so beautiful in its first wealth of white blossoms — pale omens of the blushing fruit, which so soon hides beneath its large and graceful leaves. The strawberry is among fruits what the violet is among flowers.

Then, I do so like the one or two principal walks, neatly edged with box, cut with most precise regularity, keeping guard over favourite plants: — columbines, pink and purple, bending on their slender stems; rose-bushes, covered with buds enow to furnish roses for months; pinks, with their dark eyes; and the orient glow of the marigold. And there are the neat plots planted with thyme, so sweet in its crushed fragrance; the sage, with that touch of hoar frost on its leaves, which, perhaps, has gained for it its popular name of wisdom; the sprig of lavender, with its dim and deep blue blossom, so lastingly sweet; and the emerald patches of the rapidly springing mustard and cress. I would not give a common garden like this, with the free air tossing its boughs, and the sun laughing upon its flowers, for all that glass and gardener ever brought from a hot-house.

Many a quiet hour did Guido pass in that honeysuckled arbour, lulled by the murmuring

bees, whose hives stood in the covert of a large old beech, the only tree not a fruit-tree in the chosen patch of ground. Every sun that set in long shadows and rosy light received from him a more solemn and tender farewell. Every evening wind that passed brought a deeper music:—already the presence of his future and spiritual existence was upon him, and the result was peace, perfect and unutterable.

One evening, he had leant against the entrance of his leafy tent, watching the ebbing crimson that gradually faded on the purple air,—the serenity of his soul was glassed in his clear bright eyes, while all the warm colours of life seemed to have vanished from that pure and marble countenance. Suddenly, he felt that Francesca withdrew her hand from his—it was to dash aside her tears before he remarked them; and then, for the first time, he spoke of that grave upon whose brink he stood.

"Weep not, sweetest sister mine!" said he, kissing away the warm and heavy tears; "if you knew the sorrow from which death spares me! There are some natures which seem sent into this world but for a brief and bitter trial; and such a nature is mine. I have not strength for the struggle. From my earliest youth, I felt despondency

steal over my highest moods and my gayest moments. I now believe it was the unconscious omen of my early death. The weight of an unfulfilled destiny has been for ever upon me, though then I knew it not. And yet, Francesca, when I look within my own heart, and feel how true and high have been its impulses,—when I think how my mind has revelled in its own beautiful imaginings, which asked but time for development, I cannot deem that such things were given in vain. I believe that they have been here tried and nourished for another sphere. I feel a strong and increasing consciousness that my world is beyond the tomb."

"And mine," exclaimed Francesca, in an agony of grief she could no more repress, "is still this lonely, this dreary life! Oh, my God! have mercy on me, and let me die too!"

"Francesca," said Guido, in a low, earnest voice, "there is something within me which tells me it will not be for long. Sorrow and early death have been busy in our line. My doom is fixed, —and your fragile life will be a frail barrier to an inexorable fate!"

CHAPTER XXVII.

"Farewell! but not for long."

Summer had come—bright and beautiful as her prophecy, spring, had foretold, in the sweet oracles of opening buds and expanding leaves; but Francesca wandered no more through the shadowy depths of the forest, nor loitered amid the pleasant paths of the garden. The green grass and the wild flowers of the meadow were being mown; but she only thought of the cheerful season when the air came laden with the scent of the fragrant hay, and Guido would ask what new and delicious odour came upon the morning air. Francesca's sole haunt was now the darkened chamber of the dying. There her light step suited its silent fall to the faint throbbing of the sick man's pulse; there her eye wore the tender guile of unshed tears, suppressed even when the sufferer slept, lest he should mark their traces when he

awoke, and be pained by grief, which he vainly deemed was turned into hope.

Day and night she hung over Guido's pillow —her sweet face, like a mirror, reflecting every change of his—pale as he beside whom she was watching. Only for the briefest period would she allow Lucy to take her place; and when, worn out, she slumbered, it was to dream she was still at his side. Ah! human nature is beautiful at such a time—beautiful amid its agony. There was something so touching in the patience with which Guido endured many a pang that tortured every nerve, lest an expression of pain should wring his sister's heart, who, alas! knew too well the kindly deceit, and almost wished him to complain, as she wiped away the dew upon his forehead.

Guido suffered much,—weakness made every movement pain; and yet he was haunted by that feverish restlessness, which is one of the worst features of the disease. The food he longed for one moment, he loathed when he came to taste it. The struggle between body and soul which takes place in this lingering illness is terrible to witness—it is as if two mysterious powers contended together. The soul, calm, prepared, or rather pining for its departure,—the body, still bound to earth, resists the coming sleep to the last; and these two op-

posites, never congenial, shew how little they have in common—the stronger as their final separation approaches.

"I can feel even here," said Guido, raising himself with some difficulty on his weary pillow, "how lovely the day is;" and he gazed on the lattices thrown open to the utmost, and only curtained by the honeysuckle. The casements were in shade themselves, and a cool breeze just waved the ruby tendrils and their veined clusters; but beyond, you could see that sunshine rested on the trees, and that the deep blue sky was without a cloud.

"You are very pale, my own dearest," he continued: "I wish you would go forth, and return with tidings of some of our old haunts. A little colour on those wan cheeks would do me a world of good."

Francesca looked towards the window, and turned sickening from its glad and golden light; while her eyes fixed more fondly upon Guido's face, as if every moment were now precious. Affection has its own true sympathy, and he never again asked her to leave him. He felt that the tender watch which she now kept was her only consolation.

Alas! in this our valley of the shadow of death,

how many such vigils have been kept, and are keeping!—it is a common scene:—the still and darkened room—darkened, for the eyes are too weak to bear that light which is departing from them for ever; where, if a sunbeam enters, it is like an unwelcome visitor; where one sweet and watchful nurse glides like a shadow;—so subdued is every movement, the loudest noise in that still chamber is the beating of the sufferer's heart, or the low music of a whispered question, fainter than even the failing voice which answers.

How many dreary nights are passed in feverish wakefulness on one side, and dreadful solicitude on the other! It seems worst to die at night; the blackness throws its own gloom, and the damp on the ever cold midnight hour is as if disembodied spirits brought with them the chill of the grave, which only then they are permitted to quit. How long the minutes seem when sleep is banished by pain and anxiety! The single pale and shaded light, flinging round its fantastic shapes—that "visible darkness," enough to try the strongest nerves; and how much more so, when the bodily strength is worn down, and the imagination, excited by one ever-present dread, is wound up to admit all forms of fearful fantasy!

Francesca would start from a moment's drow-

siness, during which the delusive power had transported her to scenes afar off—for sleep reverses all other rules, and its dominion is greatest where its influence is least. It is the lightest slumber that is most haunted with visionary creations. She awakened with sudden consciousness—the myrtle groves of her childhood yet around her, and the voices of her young companions still glad in her ear. Then came the wonder and confusion attendant on fancies disappearing before realities;—"Where am I?" is the first idea of the roused sleeper. Gradually the darkened room seems to emerge from its shadows; familiar objects strike upon the senses—and memory is never so terribly distinct as on its first reviving from such momentary lethargy.

In an instant Francesca would become perfectly collected—every past event would stand out singularly clear, and she would turn, take one look at Guido, and then breathe again. One idea was ever uppermost; she might gaze upon his face, and find that life had departed even during that short lull of forgetfulness! Alas! the weakness of the body is triumphant in a long struggle over both strong love and will; and yet, during the months that Francesca watched beside that bed of death, never, for five minutes together,

were those affectionate eyes closed in even that passing oblivion. When forced to leave him, which she could never be prevailed upon to do till utterly exhausted, she would sleep heavily for some hours; but the first moment of waking was fearful. She would start from her pillow and rush to his room, and, when Lucy's gentle smile reassured her, lean, faint and breathless, against the wall, till relieved by tears; while the meeting between her and Guido was like the tender welcome given after a long absence.

"You are very weak to-day, dearest," exclaimed Francesca, as her arm supported Guido's head.

"And yet I feel all my faculties so strong within me—my memory so clear, my imagination so powerful—that I cannot think that I shall die so soon as I had hoped."

"Hoped?" whispered his sister.

"Alas!" replied he, "we are selfish even on our death-bed; and I have desired relief even at the cost of rending asunder life's last and fondest link."

"It is I that am selfish," murmured she. "God knows, we ought to be thankful when those we love stand on the verge of another existence. It may be better, it cannot be worse, than our present

life. Weary, disappointed, and desolate as it is, why should I wish such a pilgrimage to be prolonged? Were we wise, we should weep when life begins, and only rejoice at the close."

Francesca spoke in the bitterness of a wounded spirit, whose burden is too heavy to bear. All patient hope, all cheerful submission, had for the time passed away; but oh! the victory of the grave is terrible.

"We shall not separate for long," continued Guido. "The heart has its own revelations; and the aspect of the invisible, so soon to be known, casts its shadows, which are omens, as we draw unto its presence. I feel the love which binds me to you stronger every hour;—would it not weaken with all my other hopes and earthly thoughts, were I about to part from you, as I have done with them, for ever? Francesca, beloved, we are alike; and neither are made of materials that ever yet lasted. Think of those who have gone down to an early grave—are they not the good, the beautiful, those of the passionate feeling and the dreaming hope? They have but a brief time in this world, for their nature belongs to another. Victims of an inexorable destiny, they suffer, they struggle, till at last the trial is ended, and the tomb is the dark and awful gate through which they pass into

another sphere; and that higher, purer, and better lot is our own."

The crimson burnt upon his cheek, and his eyes kindled with light—all that was beautiful and spiritual in his nature speaking in his face.

"You must not talk," said his sister; "it makes you feverish."

"It matters little," replied he, with a faint smile; but, nevertheless, resting his head on her shoulder to recover himself. "It is strange," he continued, "how vividly, now that I have no future on this earth, its past rises before me. I often lie for hours with the scenes of my earlier youth so present, that they seem actual. Francesca, I have been unhappy, very unhappy; and scarcely may I say that it is past even now. Perhaps, at our birth, we have a certain portion of enjoyment allotted to us, and this is to last us through our life; hence that fear which so often comes upon us, even in our most delighted moment—a dread of we know not what. It is a warning from within, that we are rashly revelling in that heart-wealth of which so small a pittance is ours. I was a very spendthrift with mine. I believe every one can look back to some particular period, and say, 'Dear and blessed time, how precious is your memory!' And yet we should

have trembled in the presence of our happiness—we were then draining the sweet waters of a fountain, whose silver cord is soon loosened, and whose golden bowl is soon broken. Ah, dearest! do you remember the summer—'tis nearly four years since—when the acacia blossomed twice? Methinks it was typical, for the tree exhausted itself and perished, even of its own too great luxuriance. But do you not look back to that summer?"

For a moment the colour came into Francesca's pale countenance, for that was the summer when she first knew Evelyn; but it faded, and left her paler than before.

"We have paid dearly for that happiness since. Guido, dearest Guido, what can we have done to be so deceived, so wretched? Think but for a moment how precious, how great a gift, is the deep, strong, and trusting affection of the young heart; and how cruel is the fate which decrees it should be given, and in vain!"

"I have not courage, even now, to think of that," interrupted Guido, the damps rising heavily upon his forehead. Tenderly Francesca bent over him; she parted the thick moist clusters of his rich curls, and, bathing his temples with an aromatic essence, kissed him, and bade him sleep. But he was too much excited for rest. "Marie!"

whispered he:—"It is months since I have breathed that name, but deem you that her image has not been present with me?—ay, present as when we wandered through the pine forest, her frank, sweet smile encouraging those dreams of the future at which she affected to laugh. But both then believed that the future was at their will. Ah, Francesca! who could have thought that the world would spoil a nature so kindly and yet so glad!"

Francesca repressed the answer which rose to her lips. She could have said that the Marie of Guido's love was indeed the creature of his fantasy. But when an illusion thus lingers to the last, it is worse than useless—it is cruel, cruel, to attempt its destruction.

"And yet," continued he, "how evil has her influence been over me! The imagination, which wasted itself in bringing her ever before me, inventing our discourse, combining every possible and impossible event, so that they did but bring us together—of what efforts was not this faculty capable, had it been more worthily exercised! It matters little, though—mine was destined to be an unfinished existence. I firmly believe that my mind has here been trained and tried by suffering, and that the development of its powers is reserved for another sphere."

To many, the visionary hope which is born of the imagination may seem the very mockery of nothing. We cannot understand what we have never experienced. The imagination, the highest, the noblest, the most ethereal portion of our nature, lies in some almost dormant; and to such, how strange must the influence which it exercises appear! On one of the ideal temperament of Guido its power is despotic—it had coloured his life, and it threw its soft, sweet shadow over the bed of death.

"Oh! how passionately," added he, after a brief pause, "I desire to see her again, for the last time, to let her know the deep truth of a heart which has never worn image save her own—to gaze upon her with one long, last look of love, and leave with her an impression no crowd, no gaiety, might ever efface. We shall meet again, Francesca—not so Marie and I. Our natures are far apart—she has no share in my futurity. Our earthly is an eternal farewell."

He sank back, quite exhausted, on his pillow; and at last he slept, but his sleep was feverish and broken, and his waking was unrefreshed.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

> "And feel the shadow of the grave
> Long ere the grave itself be gained."
>
> L. E. L.

"ARE you equal, dearest Guido, to hearing a letter read which has arrived this morning from Richard Arden?" said Francesca, approaching the bedside of the invalid with that light step which seems born of the stillness of a sick room—lost in the deep-drawn breath of exhaustion and pain.

"I have been thinking so much about him!" exclaimed Guido. "Are we likely to see him again? Methinks he must return; none can with impunity sever every link that binds them to their kindred and to their country. Earth were too desolate without some resting-place."

"He has, indeed, found a resting-place, but a gloomy one. He has by this time entered the monastery of La Trappe."

"Holy Virgin!" exclaimed Guido, "he has annihilated the present and the future. How will he ever endure the perpetual presence of the past?"

"Think," replied Francesca, "how much he needs repose."

"He can have it," answered he, "in no shape but torpor—at least on this side the grave. But do read the letter."

Francesca seated herself beside the pillow, and began the following epistle:—

"Dearest Children,

"I had deemed that my words of farewell, when I left my brother's house, were the last I should ever address to the only objects of earth to which my heart yet clings. But it is very hard to break at once all the bonds whereby our vain affections fetter us. I still think of you, still wish to be remembered by you, still believe that you take an interest in my fate; that you will wish to know where my weary steps have found rest, and my wretchedness sought a place of refuge at last.

"It was very sad to leave you; but deep in my inmost soul was written, that the happiness of loving and being loved was not for me. I lived in one perpetual fear of the evil that I might bring upon those for whose welfare I would have laid

down my life. My spirits grew lighter as I increased my distance from you, however the weakness of my human nature might pine to return. I knew that I was removing the curse far from you; and my sorrow, my suffering—had I not stored them up for myself?

"I arrived in Paris, but a residence there was insupportable. The noise, the gay crowds, vexed me with a constant self-consciousness. I could never call up, vivid almost as life, the image of her I loved so deeply. She, who of late had so often stood beside me, with softened look and forgiving eyes, came upon my solitude no more; there was no quiet in that stirring and troubled city. I had no part in its pleasures, I took no concern in its business; why was I to be haunted with their echo?

"I left Paris, and wandered forth by chance; —by chance, did I say?—by that fate which has governed my whole life, and has relented towards me at last. The long shadows of the summer twilight rested on the venerable building as I approached; the soft gray light seemed scarcely to penetrate the arched windows, and not a breath of air stirred the huge boughs of the old trees that spread their quiet around the place. Repose was in the atmosphere—so calm, and so subdued.

The sky, where the passionate hues of sunset had faded into a clear cold blue—the noiseless leaves, which drooped from the heavy branches—the ancient pile, where the ivy hung undisturbed—the stillness, unbroken by a sound—all seemed to whisper to my soul, 'Here is rest.'

"I entered the chapel, and above the altar hung a picture of the Virgin. A gleam of light came from a western window, and fell upon the face of my Beatrice! Her face—but calm, beautiful, and unearthly. I met the radiant eyes turned towards me, and they looked pardon and peace. For the first time I hid my brow in my hands, and wept bitterly; and it was as if these tears washed away the weight which had oppressed me. I looked up again, and still met that sweet look of hope and love. A longing for death seemed to take possession of me; or, if I could not die, to assimilate life to death as much as possible. All the busy concerns of daily existence were utterly abhorrent to me. I loathed the sound of others' voices—I hated to be mixed up with their petty routine of ordinary cares; here was an asylum offered to me—here I might lay down all the offices of humanity, and dwell beside that grave whose rest was now my only desire.

"To-morrow I take the vows of La Trappe—

not in a vain belief that penance may efface the past;—no, if years of desperate despair—of that agony which lays prostrate body and mind—may not avail, no form, no prayer, may, can have greater power. I enter the gloomy abbey, because its solitude offers me all that I seek. I desire no communion with my fellow-men; in the treasury of my remembrance are garnered the few thoughts that are precious, and they are sacred to myself alone. I do not need to speak of them—to me language has long lost its sweetness and its privilege. To live so mechanically that nothing in life can break in upon my meditations—to gaze on that most lovely and beloved face, and dream that even so it will meet me beyond the grave—to be so utterly by myself that no evil influence of mine can extend to those still very dear—is all I ask on this side the tomb.

"I feel calm—even content. The quiet of the sacred walls is on me even now. I could deem that they had power to sanctify my words; and I almost—yes, I do—dare to say, God bless you! and farewell!

"R. Arden."

Francesca's tears fell fast upon the scroll, and some time elapsed before either could speak. Guido was the first to break the silence.

"What a vain dream it is," exclaimed he, "which we call life! First comes the fever, and then the exhaustion. We wear ourselves out with hopes that, night after night, haunt a sleepless pillow—with daily exertions whereof we reap not the fruit. We love, and are unrequited—we believe, and are deceived; and from first to last, our existence is a mockery—the fulfilled hope and the realised desire the worst of all; for then we find how utterly worthless is that for which we craved, and for which we have toiled even unto weariness. We talk of our energies and of our will—we are the mere playthings of subtle and malignant chances."

"And yet," returned Francesca, "the secret of Arden's sufferings seems to have been in himself. From earliest youth he indulged in vain contrasts and repinings, and even his very love was selfish and cruel. Think how much happiness he lost by his perpetual exaggerations!"

"And from what did that exaggeration arise, but from his morbid and sensitive temperament? Could he help that?"

Francesca felt instantly that Guido had made the subject a personal one—that he was speaking of Arden, but thinking of himself. It could do no good to contradict one whom now it was her dearest

wish to soothe; and, by way of attracting his attention, she said,—"Was it not you, Guido, who were telling me of a young maiden, whose lover, in some sudden passion of jealousy or despair, had taken the vows at La Trappe, and who, disguising her sex, followed him to his gloomy retreat, wore the habit, observed the ordinances of that mournful body, and preserved her secret till death? Of all the many instances of woman's strong and enduring affection, none ever produced upon me an impression so forcible. Think of a young, beautiful, and delicately nurtured female, giving up not only the world, with its vanities and its pleasures, but all comfort, all companionship, all feminine employment, not denied to the nun of the strictest order. She renounced them all to live in seclusion, silence, and perpetual dread; for what but a cruel death could have awaited her had her secret been discovered save when dying. And this melancholy, this isolated existence, was dragged on, unsupported by any hope, for no change of circumstance could affect her position; and unsoothed by the thought that her great devotion was held precious by him for whom it was exercised. Not one of the ordinary motives—the vanity or the selfishness which people call by the name of love—actuated her through this long trial; she had

every thing to fear, and nothing to expect. What creation of the poet ever exceeded this terrible reality of love sepulchred in this living tomb? I often marvel to myself what were her feelings when a shadow fell across the path, and she looked upon one of those shrouded and flitting shapes, and dared not ask if the cowl hid the face which she most desired to see!—and yet this went on for years!"

"Enough, my sister!" exclaimed Guido; "I do not like to think of it. What is this story but another instance of the cruel fate whose iron rule is over our world. The love wasted in this pitiless cloister would have made the happiness of a life."

CHAPTER XXIX.

"We know not half the mysteries of our being."

"Let it go down to the grave with me; for there, even as this silken curl will perish, in darkness and decay, so will perish all the links that bind me to Marie Mancini. Ah! how well I remember the twilight, when she bade me choose amid the thousand bright auburn ringlets that danced around her brow! It was such an evening as this. The rich colours of the sunset had melted away into the deep purple sky, whose only radiance was where a silvery trembling on the air came from the moon, shining as she is shining now over yonder casement. We were very young then."

And youth it was that gave its own value to that early pledge of vows never to be redeemed—of faith plighted but to be broken. The fragile chain, the braided hair, are the graceful tokens

of love's childhood—precious for the sake of the many illusions in which we then held such devout evidence. We grow too stern and too cold for such trifles in after-life. The harsh grasp of reality has been upon the most delicate feelings; trifles "light as air" have become important in their results; and where we do not fear, we now do not care for them, unless it be to ridicule—ridicule, that blight of all that is warm and true, but which was so utterly to the fresh unknown world of the yet undeveloped heart.

The day had been intensely hot, and, in Guido's weak state, it overpowered the little strength which he had left; but towards evening he grew even more feverish, his senses wandered, and strong spasms of pain alone seemed to recall him to his actual existence. The recollection of that interview with Marie Mancini haunted him. He fancied she was coming, would start at the least noise, and asked mournfully if he was to die without seeing her.

Francesca sought every means to soothe him, but in vain. Even her sweet and beloved voice fell unheeded on his ear; and it was late before, quite worn out, he fell into a deep slumber.

There was a strange character of mournful beauty flung over the scene passing in that chamber

of death—one that a painter would have chosen when, disappointed with the world, and smitten by some deep sorrow, he seeks refuge in the lovely creations of his art, selecting a melancholy subject, and investing it with the gloom felt within. At the far extremity of the room, placed on a little round old-fashioned table, was a lamp, whose red gleam made a small bright circle on the wall, as if to enhance the darkness which surrounded it. Drawn towards the window was the bed whereon Guido was laid. The curtains were all flung back to admit the air, and the lattices were thrown open to the utmost. The long tendrils and slender leaves of the honeysuckle formed a dark outline, just pencilled on the air, and swayed gently to and fro; for a soft wind agitated the boughs. The moon, directly opposite, flung into the room a long and tremulous line of light, which fell on Guido's face, as he reclined on the pillows which supported his head; he needed the support, for a feeling of suffocation was his constant complaint. It was the face of a statue—so pure, so pale, with the features transparent, like the delicate carving of highly polished marble; the long dark lash resting on the cheek, and the thick curls upon the brow, were the sole likeness to humanity. One emaciated hand lay on the counterpane, the other

was held by Francesca, whose profile was seen, like a gentle shadow, bending over him.

The moonlight became more and more clear as the night advanced, and fell more immediately on the countenance of the sleeper, which grew wan even to ghastliness beneath that chill white beam. She felt his hand cold as the tomb within her own, but still it slackened nothing of its rigid grasp. A nameless terror froze the blood at her heart; more than once the scream rose to her lip, and was suppressed—but with what an internal shudder, lest the sleeper might be disturbed! The sleeper!—did he sleep?

Francesca trembled—the damp air seemed difficult to breathe. She strove to pray—no pious words came to her aid; a vague sensation of horror curdled her faculties. She gazed on the wan face, and strove to look around. She could not—it seemed as if to move would reveal some sight too horrible for humanity; yet some extraordinary fascination seemed to rivet her to the place. Affection—watchfulness—sorrow, all were merged in one vague and unutterable sensation of horror.

The moonbeam grew fainter—the corpse-like features became indistinct. She knew her eyes were fixed upon them, but they could not penetrate the awful obscurity. A stupor stole over her; she

was conscious, but paralysed; and her eyelids dropped, as if to shut out some fearful object. She still felt that Guido's cold hand clasped her own, and she remained motionless—the fear of disturbing him paramount to every other fear.

She felt the grasp relax, and started at once from the shuddering torpor which had oppressed her. It had been upon her longer than she deemed, for the chill white light of coming daybreak was glimmering through the lattice. Guido was rousing, too, but he was convulsed with some fierce agony; his teeth were set, the veins rose upon his temples, and the dews hung upon his brow.

Francesca raised his head tenderly, and endeavoured to make him swallow a few drops of a medicine that stood by. Her care was successful, and at last he revived. His eyes opened, wide and wandering, and filled with a strange, unnatural light; while his features relaxed from their ghastly contraction, but wore still a wild and unusual expression.

"I have seen her!" he muttered, in a faint tone; "we shall never meet again. Farewell, Marie, for ever!"

"Dearest Guido," whispered Francesca, "do not agitate yourself. Your sleep seems to have done you little good."

He drank from the cup which she put to his lips, and sunk back on the pillow, pale and exhausted, but so composed, that she allowed Lucy, who just then entered the room, to watch by Guido during her customary short absence.

We, too, will leave them, and, passing beyond seas, record a strange scene that took place at the Hôtel de Soissons that night.

It was even later than usual when the Comtesse quitted a brilliant *réunion* of all that was gayest in the royal circle, elate with the glittering triumph of gratified vanity, and reading in such success the sure prognostic of more solidly successful ambition. Restless and excited, she could not retire to sleep; but her hair once unbound from its knots of pearls, and a loose wrapping dress thrown round her, she dismissed her attendants, and, drawing a little writing-table to her fauteuil, prepared to exhaust some of her gaiety in letter-writing. She had a thousand flattering and lively things to say, and she was now in the mood for them.

This is a pleasant hour in human existence—the hour after some unusually agreeable fête—agreeable from its homage to yourself; just enough fatigued for languor, but not for weariness—enough to make you enjoy the loosened hair, the careless robe, and the indolent arm chair; while the spirits

are still in a state of excitement, the tones of the music, or yet more musical words, still floating in your ear; your own light replies yet living on the memory, and the fancy animated by their vivid recollection.

In such a mood the Comtesse de Soissons drew towards her the fragrant scrolls on which she intended to record a thousand graceful flatteries, all to forward the same object—her own interest. "Nay!" exclaimed she, flinging down the pen, "that seems scarcely earnest enough! Praise should be given unguardedly and eagerly—rather as it were a relief to express one's feeling—"

The sentence died unfinished on her lips. She started from her seat, for, directly opposite to her stood Guido da Carrara, pale, sad, but with his large dark eyes fixed upon her, with that deep expression of tenderness, once so familiar to her sight, but now wild and melancholy—ay, and something fearful, in their gaze. Marie's cheek blanched as she looked upon him. She strove to scream, but in vain; all her former love—the only real feeling which she had ever known—beat passionately within her heart; a gush of unutterable tenderness, strangely mixed with vague terror, arose upon her mind. Still he stood, pale, sorrowful, and motionless, while Marie found

every other feeling gradually lost in terror. The air grew chill around, and her knees trembled beneath her weight.

"Guido!" she exclaimed, in a voice choked with emotion, "for God's sake, speak!"

Still the figure moved not—spoke not—but continued to fix upon her the same look of reproach and love. All the gentle scenes of their youth seemed to grow present before her; she felt that she had never loved but him, and that all other hopes and ties were but as a vain dream.

"I care not if I die!" exclaimed she, impetuously; "let my head rest but once again on that heart once so dearly mine!"

Marie sprang forwards. She attempted to clasp the hands of her visitor, but her hands closed on the empty air. She staggered as with a blow; again she met that mournful face turned towards her, but even as she looked it melted into air. She glanced hurriedly round, but Guido was gone!—yet the door remained closed. She shrieked his name, but all was still as the grave. She threw a searching glance round the chamber, but in the effort sank senseless on the ground.

CHAPTER XXX.

"How soon
Our new-born light
Attains to full-aged noon!
And this, how soon to grey-haired night!
We spring, we bud, we blossom, and we blast,
Ere we can count our days—our days they flee so fast."

QUARLES.

FRANCESCA was not an hour absent from Guido's room; but on her return, a deathlike sickness came over her as she marked the great change that had taken place in him. The face had suddenly fallen in, the temples were sunk, and the blue and livid mouth seemed unwarmed by the breath that still faintly struggled forth. His wasted hands were stretched out, and worked with a quick and convulsive motion, as if catching some small substances which kept eluding their grasp; while his closed eyes ever and anon opened feebly, and then shut again—they appeared to ask when they should close for ever.

A slant ray of golden sunshine entered the chamber; it drew nearer and nearer as the hour went by, till it fell on Guido's bed. The invalid

turned his head, and looked with a smile upon that glad and glorious light. "It is a good omen!" said he, in a very low but distinct voice; and continued to watch it till his eyes closed from weariness. A moment after his teeth clenched, as if with violent pain; it was soon past, and he grew calm again. Once or twice his lips moved, but the sounds were inarticulate, and the pulse grew more and more faint.

Francesca hung over him in breathless agony; she knew that life was slowly ebbing. Suddenly he opened his eyes, and looked up at her with an expression of strong affection. She fancied, too, that he whispered her name—it was his last effort! The sunbeam approached; but when it shone upon Guido's face, life had passed away to return no more! The radiant line illumined the set features of the corse!

* * * *

Yes, the soul had departed from its mysterious tenement, with which it was so strangely allied, and so still more strangely suited—that long variance is now for aye at rest. The burning passion will no more contend with the ethereal aspiring; the two opposite principles of fevered existence have ceased their conflict. Out of the body grew all that was base, mean, and degraded,—that

rottenness at the core of our noblest hopes, that weakness in the truest of our affections. Strange that it should thus control the spiritual; but the grave is opened, and there let it perish in darkness and in corruption. Not so the soul, which gave it imagination, intellect, affection, hope—all that can redeem mortality; in their very nature these are imperishable, and out of them have grown all good things on earth. The lasting works of philosophy and poetry, the long-enduring efforts that have been wrought in marble, the pyramids whose age we know not, the statue still a vision of beauty, the influence that individual minds have exercised over their kind,—all these are types of that immortality which gives life to our present, and will give eternity to our future. Faint, but glorious revealings of another world!

A weary burden is our human life, from the first even to the last. We talk of the happiness of childhood!—in what does it consist?—in the denied delight, and in the enforced task! Think how the child must turn from the wearisome page, whose future value it is impossible then to appreciate—turn from its dry and intricate characters to gaze upon the sun shining on the grass, and grudge the hours that must pass before play-time!

Think, too, with what unkindness and what injustice they are often treated! How often must the infant heart swell with the quick sense of oppression, when the caprice of an angry moment punishes the fault which has been often passed over, till impunity had appeared a right! And yet restraint is a necessity. Every indulgence from the first exacts some bitter penalty; and we dread and curb the present, for the sake of the retribution which ever lies amid the shadows of the future.

From the beginning of life to its close, we are haunted by the dread of the to come. Now, to childhood, taught by no painful experience, how irksome must this yoke appear! They are galled and checked, and must submit; they know not that all our actions, even the most trivial, are followed by those sad and ghastly spectres—their consequences; but they feel their iron oppression. Or, to pass on to youth, with its warm feelings, so sensitive to the return which they will not meet, so sure in a few passing years to be crushed and withered; but at what expense of misery, let each ask of the records from his own remembrance! True, its hopes are sweet, and its spirits buoyant; but how soon are those hopes disappointed, and those spirits broken down for ever!

How often, during that period of fervour and of heart-burning, must we be forced to shrink within ourselves with all the mortifying consciousness of unreturned affection, of ill-placed confidence, of too kind, and hence erroneous, judgment. The time while such ordeals are being passed, and such lessons being learned, cannot be one of much happiness.

Is its successor better off? Surely no. Look at the arduous exertion required of middle life; the thronging anxieties that spring up for others more than for ourselves; the constant downfal of our best-laid projects; the disappointment attending on the result of those which had mocked us with success; the weariness which gradually steals over the mind; the daily increasing sense of the worthlessness of every thing; the mournful looking back on the many friends who have parted from our side, some gone down to the grave, but more parted from us by the estrangement of cooled attachments and jarring interest. We have lost, too, all those fresh and beautiful emotions which, if they could not make a world of their own, at least flung their glory over the actual one. These are departed, to return no more; and in their places have come discontent, suspicion, indifference, and, worst of all, worldliness. Through

such rough paths do we travel on to old age; and has life there garnered up its treasures to the last? Ah, no! The dust, to which we are so soon to return, lies thick upon the heart; the affections are grown cold; and all vivid emotions have ceased. But the calm is that of monotony, not of content, and is ruffled by the thousand small pettishnesses of temper,—temper which grows stronger as all other faculties weaken and decay. And yet, throughout this busy and excited pilgrimage, whose present would seem so engrossing, man is ever looking beyond it; he never loses the internal consciousness of something undeveloped in his nature —something spiritual and aspiring, which belongs not to earth. That which is good within us seems to claim a requital not of this world; that which is bad trembles before some vague and awful anticipation of judgment. Were it but for the sake of justice, we must believe in a future state—futurity, that only though hidden key to the incomprehensible now! How plainly is vanity of vanities written upon that glorious science, ay, glorious even in its weakness, which once read the history of the earth in the skies, which asked from the stars the mysteries of their shining chronicles, and bade them reveal the future, from the mighty annals of nations and peoples down to the tender

secrets of one lonely and beating heart. And yet how vain was such knowledge! What could the soothsayer foreshow that we knew not before? The future is written in the past; and if we prophesy, it is with eyes that look behind. Let the prophet tell us to the letter of the days to come—we have lived them already; circumstances may mock us with change of form, but the substance remains the same. We shall go through the same rounds of cares whose anxieties were wasted on what never happened—of vain pleasures whose emptiness we felt even while endeavouring to enjoy them—of sorrows cured by forgetfulness—of envyings, hatreds, regrets, and weariness. What needs there to repeat what we perfectly understood? No: the seer's knowledge, to be of aught avail, must pass the boundary of our little existence—it must pierce the shadows of the grave. Let him open but one secret of that far and dark eternity, and its purchase were well worth all life.

There have been those who on the scaffold have bidden a bold welcome unto Death, as the mighty revealer of the unknown. Such reliance was, methinks, lightly founded. Who knows how many links we may have to ascend in the vast cycle of worlds around, ere we arrive at the one which is knowledge—where we may look before,

and after, and judge of the whole? How many stages of probation may we yet have to pass! But can any lot be more bitter than that which was cast on earth? Will its memory endure? Verily there is a deep voice in every heart which answers—Yes. Worn, wasted, crushed, as they are, how strong are the affections which bind us to our world!—they are too spiritual in their nature for destruction. God of that Heaven to whose justice we bow, and on whose mercy we rely, surely those strong and dear feelings were not given in vain! Perhaps the gloomy barrier of the cold and desolate tomb once passed, the soul will be but more intensely conscious of that love which shadowed forth its existence in this life. Will those who have gone before await us on the other side?—and shall we be permitted to watch the arrival of those whom to leave made the only pang of death? Will the hidden and unrequited love be there acknowledged in earnest gratitude for its long endurance?—will it be allowed to breathe the free and happy air of heaven? How vain to inquire—and yet we inquire on! We ask of that which answers not. But when we recall how feverish, how wretched, how incomplete has been the life of mortality, we feel that the present owes us a future.

CHAPTER XXXI.

"Droop not, sister, and thy weeping
For my fated end give o'er.
* * * *
Mourn not—dying is not dying
Unto those who love not life,
But a hope to the relying,
And a glad release from strife."

CORNELIUS WEBBE.

FRANCESCA marked the beloved features grow rigid even while she gazed,—she felt the deadly chill of the hand which she clasped; but still she stood beside the corpse, when the old servant, who had come in, whispered, "It is all over!—let me bind up the head." The sense of her loss thus brought before her was too overwhelming, and she sank insensible on the bed. They carried her into her own room, where it was long before she recovered; and when at last she revived, it was in a state of stupified exhaustion that ended in sleep—the deep heavy sleep of those utterly worn out both in body and mind. It was broad daylight the next morning before she awoke; she was roused

in a moment by the shadowy gleams glimmering through the green branches of an old elm-tree which almost hid her window. She started up—her first thought was of Guido, and that she had slept too long; but a terrible consciousness rushed over her, and her head sank on her pillow, while she closed her eyes, as if to shut out her fear. She was still dizzy with sleep, and the many visions of the night rose confusedly before her. For the moment she essayed to slumber again—suddenly the very suspense she had sought became too dreadful. She sprang out of bed, and ran to Guido's room; it was darkened—the curtains were closed around him who had so loved the light and air. The truth instantly flashed upon her, and she staggered against the wall for support. How welcome was the darkness, which seemed to hide her even from herself! For a few moments she stood as if stunned, and then drew nigh towards the bed, where lay the remains, insensible and cold, of him who but yesterday was alive to her affection, and anxious for her welfare. She could not look upon him, but, flinging herself on her knees, hid her face in the bed-clothes, and wept passionately. All her early life crowded upon her memory—the old palazzo, amid whose deserted chambers each had a favourite haunt; their wandering rambles

through the adjacent woods; their unbroken confidence; their constant union of interests; that future which they always painted together, but now so utterly separated. Not one word of unkindness, nor even of coldness, had ever passed between them; there was not a single recollection unstamped by affection. Love, which so often rends asunder the gentler ties of domestic attachment, had only drawn theirs more closely; each had had such cause to value the deep and true sympathy of the other. As these remembrances arose, Francesca's tears flowed the more bitterly; and the very consciousness that they flowed in vain—that never tear nor prayer could bring back breath to those beloved lips, or light to those once watchful eyes, gave them but added agony.

The vanity of weeping, which in time works out its own consolation, is at first but the aggravation of sorrow. Still, grief exhausts its expression; and Francesca at length raised her eyes,—she would look once more upon her brother; and again the very thought—"Once more!"—subdued her into a fresh burst of tears. It was long before she could compose herself sufficiently to gaze upon the face; but when she did at length command herself to turn towards the pillow, it was strange how sorrow became merged in awe.

She felt that she dared not give way to human emotion in the still and solemn presence of the dead. She trembled to disturb the beautiful composure—as if it could be disturbed!

It is wonderful how, for the day or two after death, all that was lovely in life comes back to the face; the pure marble whiteness of the skin, the closed eyes, the features in such deep stillness, like those of a statue wrought in the highest ideal of art, but with that impressed upon them which was never yet the work of mortal hand. Guido's regular and classic features suited well with this state of entire repose. The calm and sweet serenity belonged to their nature. It was as if the countenance were for a brief while allowed to wear the likeness of the peaceful and spiritual world whither the soul had departed.

Francesca remained watching him with an inexpressible feeling of consolation. He brought to her mind those glorious works of art which they had witnessed together. His dream of their grace and noble beauty was realised in himself; and yet there was something too sad and too tender for marble. The cheek and lip were white, and the hair shewed the only vestige of colour—the hair, which retains its gloss and flexibility to the last, when all else is faded and rigid—how much of

humanity did it still impart! The rich black curls lay in profusion round the graceful head, and the long dark lash yet rested on the pallid cheek, and gave a semblance of life to the statue-like form.

Many have a horror of looking upon the dead —they are wrong; futurity and peace are written on the composed and beautiful countenance; it suggests the idea of an intellectual slumber. The sleep of the living is feverish and agitated—the passion and the sorrow are on the flushed cheek and the tremulous lip—but that of death is the sleep of the soul. No one can gaze upon the dead, and not feel, indeed, that they are gone to a land where "the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest."

Still, that is a dreadful week which elapses before the burial. We defer too long the returning of earth to earth; the loathsome work of corruption should begin in the dust. The darkened house, the stealing steps, the subdued voices, and the haunting consciousness that there is that under the same roof with yourself which is not of this world, all combine to keep the mind in a state of terrible excitement. And yet, with this vague atmosphere of dread around you, how strangely is the ludicrous mingled! The mocking and the absurd is stamped upon the funeral preparations.

The matter-of-fact solemnity, the careless gravity, of those whose employment it is to furnish the coffin, &c.—the customary compliment of "Such a fine corse!" as if the appearance of the dead were their own doing—the importance attached to the trimmings of the shroud and the nails on the lid—the professional pleasantries, ay, pleasantries! handed down from time immemorial—the utter indifference of their proceedings—all natural enough when we think how familiar the spectacle is to them at which our own blood grows cold; but all which is absolute torture to the eye and ear of the survivor.

Francesca took her last look at the muffled figure in the long and narrow coffin, the death-clothes hiding the head, and only allowing the mouth, nose, and brow, to be seen, on which were now impressed the ghastly tints of livid decay; and then left the room, sick and shuddering. Yet again she yearned to see that beloved face, even though changed and loathsome. Good God! how dreadful a penalty exacted of mortality, to think that we must turn with unconquerable disgust from all that was once so dear, and with that affection strong in our hearts as ever! And yet, the revolting triumphs over the spiritual and the tender feeling. With a hasty step she re-

entered the chamber. A sound of most jarring cheerfulness struck upon her ear—a glare of unwelcome light poured upon her eyes—and in the very act of fitting on the lid to the coffin stood a man, singing one of the popular political songs of the time; having previously unclosed the shutters, that he might see to do his work! Hurriedly she retreated to her own room, the careless singing of the workman smiting her with a bitter sense of desolation.

In the first exaggeration of sorrow, it seemed as if every thing must sympathise with her great grief; and in the equal exaggeration of disappointment, it now seemed as if there was no sympathy in the world. She paced the room in a passionate burst of weeping, from which she was first recalled by the quiet entrance of Lucy, who, marking her agitation, took her hand kindly, and, leading her to the window seat, sought to soothe her by the most gentle tenderness. Ah! the magic of a few kind words! how unutterably dear they are! Francesca felt their full value; and her tears flowed less bitterly in the presence of her affectionate and kind companion.

CHAPTER XXXI.

> "And now must the body return to earth—
> The spirit to God, who gave it."
>
> BERNARD BARTON.

AT last—and how long, yet so short, did the time appear!—the day arrived that had been fixed for Guido's funeral. Francesca had resolved that she would follow him to the grave. It is a strange refinement in our modern times, that we should leave it to the hired mourner (mourner! what a mockery!) to pay that last tender office, the last sign of care for their remains that can be given on earth, to those whom we have loved—dear, ay, dearer than ourselves. Few but have known the wretchedness of such a morning—but have listened to the noise of strangers in a chamber so long silent as the grave. The moving of the coffin, the carrying it down stairs, the heavy steps, the creaking stairs, the opening doors, are a terrible contrast to the deep stillness that had before reigned throughout the house.

Francesca listened in agony. She seemed as if she had never felt her utter separation from

Guido till now. A sudden bustle, followed by an entire quiet, announced that the coffin had been carried across the threshold, and that the funeral procession was on its way. She rose from her seat, but the room appeared to flit before her eyes; and she was scarcely conscious of her own purpose, till Lucy entered, and silently offered to help her on with her cloak. She took her arm, thanked her by a gentle pressure, and together they proceeded on their melancholy duty.

All who have long been shut up in-doors know the almost intoxication of their first walk in the free wind and glad sunshine—the common expressions of "you do not feel your feet," or "you seem to tread on air," so completely express the sensation. Francesca, as they wound along the meadow path, beside a hedge crowded with brier roses, and the fragrance yet lingering of the recently mown hay, while the sunshine and shadows chased each other rapidly over the green field, felt the exhilarating influence; but it was as suddenly checked by the remembrance that it was a solitary enjoyment. She looked with a grudging eye on this waste of life and beauty—there was none for him; and the sight of the coffin, with its deep black pall borne slowly along the glancing path, was a contrast of unutterable

misery. It was a relief to change the cheerful meadow for the dark umbrage of the forest which they now entered. She could not but note what a deeper shade was flung round since last she passed. Then the verdure was tender, and many a bough wore only the promise of its future luxuriance; now every branch was heavy with the weight of foliage, and every leaf was at its utmost growth, and wore its darkest green. The narrow road, too, along which they wound, penetrated one of the most secluded glades; and the gloom and stillness accorded well with the silent and melancholy train. Again they emerged into the open country, and at a few paces down a rural lane were the steps that led to the churchyard; they went through the little gate, and Francesca's eye glanced rapidly around. Intuitively it rested on the object which it sought, yet dreaded to find, and caught in an instant the fresh heap of earth which indicated the new-made home. Lucy felt her companion writhe in agony; but Francesca regained her composure, for the service commenced, and the clergyman led the way to the grave. Sublime and consoling are the blessed words with which earth is restored to earth; and Francesca heard them like soothing but indistinct music—she felt their influence, although unconsciously.

The time came for the coffin to be consigned to the ground; she saw them lay aside the pall and prepare the ropes; she sprang forward, but her strength failed her, and she was forced to lean against a tombstone for support. They lowered the body into that damp, dark pit, and involuntarily she hid her face in her hands, to shut out the whole scene. What now remained for her to look upon! She was roused by the sound—that most dreadful of all sounds that ever sank the heart to hear—the gravel rattling on the coffin! To the last day of her life that noise haunted her. Often in the still midnight it came distinct on her ear—a terrible and eternal farewell! Gradually the quick, hard fall ceased—the mould had attained some depth; but the silence was even worse—it told how nearly all was over.

Francesca looked up,—they were trampling down the clay. It was as if they were treading on her own heart. She sunk, half fainting, but still conscious, on the tomb where she had leant. Lucy gently put back the hood from her face, and the fresh air revived her.

It was now over, and Francesca felt for a moment as if all passing around were a dream! She remained still and breathless; to move, to look, might make it reality,—she dared not ascertain

that she was waking. The silence recalled her to her actual wretchedness. Yes, Guido—the only friend, the only relative that she had on earth—lay there, in a foreign grave; and a vain but bitter regret passed through her mind, as she remembered the deep blue skies and the fertile soil of their own and lovely land. Perhaps he might have lived had he never left its genial soil, its dreaming atmosphere, for the colder clime and harsh realities which they had found in other countries. Strange that she took comfort in the knowledge, that the germ of disease was with him from his birth—no circumstances could have altered, no care could have checked the hereditary tendency to consumption! Alas! it was best that he left so little to regret:—happy love and prosperous fortunes are hard to part with! One by one the charms of life had faded: he was sad and weary;—to Guido, death was a release!

"Will you not come home?" said Lucy, who, together with her father, was waiting beside.

"Dear Lucy!" exclaimed Francesca," leave me to follow you; I am best by myself."

Her companion, whose own deepest thoughts were always indulged in solitude, understood Francesca's feelings, and drew her father away.

The young Italian listened to their departing

steps, till the beating of her own heart was the only sound that broke the deep solitude; but theirs being an up-hill path, she could see them a long way off, arm-in-arm, and Lawrence Aylmer looking into the sweet face of his child. The sight of their affectionate familiarity recalled Francesca to the full sense of her desolation. She was in a strange country, without an acknowledged tie of kindred—no friends—and with a future full of uncertainty and anxiety—she started to her feet, and wrung her hands, as one painful thought crowded on another. She looked towards the new-made grave. There lay all that was dear to her on earth,—never more would that kindly voice fall in music on her ear—never more would the soul look through those eyes now closed for ever! She felt how irrevocable and how entire was the loss, while the abandoned and desolate future seemed already present; and, in a sudden burst of grief, she flung herself down on the grave,—one murmur upon her pale lips,—"Alone!—ay, utterly alone!"

END OF VOL. II.

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Francesca Carrara