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HEAPS OF MONEY

HEAPS OF MONEY

BY

W. E. NORRIS

AUTHOR OF

'NO NEW THING' 'MADEMOISELLE DE MERSAC' 'MATRIMONY' ETC.

1420-43

'Multa petentibus
Desunt multa : bene est cui deus obtulit
Parca quod satis est manu'

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HEAPS OF MONEY

CHAPTER I

HERR EICHMANN'S TENANTS

It is now rather more than ten years since the inhabitants of the sleepy little village of Blasewitz, near Dresden, were startled by the intelligence that an Englishman, named Howard, had taken Herr Eichmann's house by the river for a year certain, with option of renewal.

Blasewitz, known by name to readers of 'Wallenstein's Lager'—who will recollect 'die Gustel aus Blasewitz'—known by sight, too, to many a holiday tourist, is a favourite summer resort among the worthy Dresdeners; and by such Herr Eichmann's roomy but somewhat dilapidated habitation, with its spacious, scantily furnished rooms, its neglected garden, cool with the shade of fruit trees, and its lawn sloping down to the swift-flowing Elbe, had been frequently occupied during the hot months, and found not unworthy of the modest rent demanded for it. But that so lonely and draughty an abode should have been chosen by anybody—above all by a foreigner—as a winter residence, appeared to Blasewitz an astonishing thing, and one requiring explanation.

Herr Eichmann, when questioned by the cronies with whom he was wont to enjoy his evening pipe and

beer, had no very flattering account to give of his tenants.

'A clever gentleman,' he would say, 'and one who speaks German nearly as well as I do; but over-sharp in matters of business. He has got the house for nothing—absolutely for nothing! A well-mannered gentleman, I grant you—"Lieber Herr" here, "Mein bester Herr Eichmann" there!—always smiling and polite, and always with a good cigar at your service; not like an Englishman at all, in short. But, for my part, I prefer the others, with their rude ways and their guineas, to this plausible Herr Howard, with his cigars and his empty purse. I am out of pocket by him—many thalers out of pocket; but at least he will keep the house aired; and that is something.'

And Herr Eichmann, who was a well-to-do brewer, would heave a fat sigh, and gulp down a huge draught of his own excellent beer, having in no wise lessened the wonderment of his friends by his description of the stranger. For in some of the less frequented villages of Europe there still lingers a remnant of the once prevalent notion that every Englishman is a millionaire.

As the season advanced, and Blasewitz put on its white winter garb, and blocks of ice came swirling down the brown current of the Elbe, and icicles hung from every roof, the forms of Mr. Howard and the one daughter who constituted all his family became familiar objects to the villagers. He, tall, well dressed, and of benevolent appearance, the venerable aspect imparted to him by his white hair and moustache losing nothing by a certain erect jauntiness of carriage; she, youthful, pretty, and bright-eyed, always ready with a pleasant word or two in response to the gruff 'Guten Morgen' of the peasants—such were the Herr Engländer and his daughter as Blasewitz saw them, nearly every morning, trudging away towards Dresden over the silent snow. The young lady sometimes carried her skates in her hand, sometimes a roll of music under

her arm. It was understood that her education was not yet completed, and that she was taking music lessons from one of the numerous professors of that art residing in the capital.

Those who felt any further curiosity as to the habits of Herr Eichmann's tenants (and there were a good many such) had only to apply to Christine, the cook, or Lieschen, the housemaid, in order to obtain the desired information. The two women required no great pressing to state their knowledge and opinion of their new master and mistress. They joined in shrill praise of Fräulein Linda. Never, so they said, was there a young lady more kind, gracious, and affable. Then she was so clever! She made all her dresses with her own fingers, could cook a dinner as well as if she had done nothing else all her life, and had managed somehow to arrange and refurbish the shabby old furniture of the drawing-room with such skill that no one would have known it again. And with all that she found time to play the piano like an angel. But Mr. Howard, it appeared, was a somewhat alarming Herr. He was the strictest of disciplinarians; nothing escaped his notice; and the smallest shortcoming was sure to be visited upon the delinquent by a steady, silent look, far more terrible than any loud scolding—a look which, as Lieschen said, was enough to make one scream with fright, and drop any plates or dishes one might happen to have in one's hands at the time. Once, when Christine had unfortunately sent up the dinner cold, she had been summoned to a short private interview with her master, whence she had emerged bathed in tears, and casting herself upon one of the kitchen chairs, had declared that she had never been subjected to such treatment before in her life.

'What did he do? What did he say to you?' the sympathetic Lieschen had inquired.

'Oh, he did not say much,' the other had sobbed out; 'but—but he looked at me!'

In truth Mr. Howard's rather prominent blue eyes could assume a sufficiently truculent expression upon occasion. Probably his method of dealing with his inferiors was the result of study and experience: it was, at all events, successful. His house was better kept and his dinners were better served than those of many a richer man; and, as time went on, it became conceivable that his extreme fastidiousness as to his food was prompted not only by mere carnal appetite, but by the nobler motive of a desire to make his house agreeable to his guests. For, before the winter was over, Mr. Howard took to bringing back a friend pretty frequently to dinner from Dresden. Sometimes two, and, upon rare occasions, even three gentlemen would thus partake of Mr. Howard's hospitality. The Fräulein always went to bed at ten o'clock, and usually the guests remained for another hour or so, playing cards with the master of the house; but they kept early hours, leaving, for the most part, before midnight.

What struck Lieschen as a singular circumstance was that Mr. Howard's visitors should be invariably Germans. Seeing how large an English colony was established in Dresden, it would have been natural to expect that some among its members would have found their way to call upon their countryman at Blasewitz; but none came, nor, with the exception of one or two neighbours who thought it incumbent upon them to pay a visit of ceremony to the new arrivals, did any lady, English or German, ever cross the threshold. Mr. Howard's acquaintance did not seem to extend much beyond the officers of the Garde-Reiter, or Body-Guard—blue and silver warriors, with ringing spurs, floating blonde whiskers, and an unquenchable thirst for beer. It was for the benefit of these gentlemen that Christine was expected to produce unpretentious but artistic little dinners.

At length, however, an exception to the rule presented itself in the person of an Englishman, whose

visits, at first short and far between, gradually increased in length and frequency, till it became a matter of course that he should present himself every day at the old house at Blasewitz. This Englishman, being the possessor of a name utterly beyond Lieschen's powers of pronunciation, was known and spoken of by her under no other appellation than that of 'He with the Violin.'

He with the Violin was, as his designation suggested, a person of a musical turn; and it was community of taste, no doubt, that had first attracted him to Miss Howard; for it was rather to her than to her father that his visits were paid. He and the young lady used to strum and scrape away in concert by the hour together, and ere long the violin was permanently installed in a corner of the drawing-room, whence its owner came to take it, every day, with praiseworthy regularity.

The winter passed away; the snow vanished; the sun shone down upon snowdrops and crocuses and hedges sprinkled with touches of green; and He with the Violin gave up walking out along the high road to Blasewitz, as he had hitherto been in the habit of doing, and took instead to pulling up the river, against the current, in a light English-built boat which he had discovered at Dresden, and landing at the end of Mr. Howard's garden. Was it love of music alone that induced him to take so much trouble? Lieschen thought she had detected symptoms of another incentive, and laughed to herself, over her washing and scrubbing, as she noticed how, day by day, the sound of the instruments in the drawing-room grew less frequent, and the pauses for conversation longer. Yet, if she could have heard and understood all that passed in the long *tête-à-tête* interviews between her young mistress and the Englishman, she would have found more familiar friendliness and less approach to love-making therein than she would have expected.

On a beautiful spring afternoon the two above-mentioned people, having diligently worked at their respective instruments for more than an hour, were enjoying an interval of deserved repose.

The violinist was a tall, broad-shouldered man, with a handsome sunburnt face and close-cropped hair and beard. His age did not appear to be above thirty, or thirty-five at most; yet he could hardly have been described as exactly a young man. His clothes were well cut, because he employed a good tailor; but the condition of his boots, necktie, and such small accessories of dress plainly showed that the subject of personal appearance did not occupy a large share of his time or attention. From this carelessness of attire, and from a certain far-away look in his sleepy grey eyes, it was easy to guess that he belonged to that class of mortals who frequently wear their hats wrong side before, generally leave their keys behind them when they start on a journey, and wear beards to save their features from the mutilations of the erratic razor. Such, in fact, was the character which this gentleman bore in Mr. Howard's household. He was always in the clouds—*zwischen Himmel und Erde*, to use the expression of Lieschen, who rather revered this absent-mindedness, taking it as a sure indication of genius.

'The Herr has much talent: he will be a great man one of these days,' Lieschen would sometimes assert; 'but he is no more able to take care of himself than a baby. What he most wants now is a wife to look after him.'

The manner in which good-natured Lieschen hoped that this deficiency might be supplied has been already hinted at; and, if physical beauty be a desideratum in a wife, certainly no man could have gone far wrong in fixing his choice upon Linda Howard. Beauty, as we all know, is very much a question of taste, Providence having—doubtless with a view to the prevention of awkward complications—implanted in the breast of every man his own peculiar standard of excellence in

this matter; but there are certain faces—not usually the most correct in outline—which all the world is agreed in admiring; and it was Miss Howard's good fortune to be the owner of one of these. She was just eighteen at this time, and in some respects looked less than her age. That is to say, the contour of her face was almost childish, and her figure had not yet entirely freed itself from the angularities of girlhood. But there was a gravity in her expression and a staid self-possession in her demeanour rather pathetic, as seeming to show that the cares and anxieties of this world had reached her at a time when Nature intends young people to be free from such troubles. She looked like a child when she laughed, but like a woman when her face was in repose. A low broad forehead, surmounted by masses of golden-brown hair, a pair of soft hazel eyes, and a double row of the whitest teeth in the world—here are materials enough out of which to construct a pretty face; but it was expression rather than beauty of feature that caused people to grow enthusiastic over Linda Howard. Innocence, honesty, friendliness seemed to look out at you from the depths of those gentle brown eyes, and sometimes a touch of sadness withal, which was apt to go straight to the hearts of the male sex in a very dangerous, and perhaps rather deceptive manner; for in truth Linda's troubles were not of a romantic kind. But how should susceptible German youths know that? How could they guess, when Miss Howard sat lost in thought, as she sometimes did, looking like a sad little maiden from one of Greuze's pictures, that the subject of her meditations was the butcher or the grocer? Thus, without any evil intention, the fair young Engländerin made sad havoc among the Saxon Garde-Reiter.

It was not, however, of Linda, nor of the snowy-blossomed cherry-trees beyond the open window, nor of the hills on the other side of the Elbe upon which his eyes were fixed, that He with the Violin was thinking.

The objects reflected on his retina did not reach his brain, or failed to create any impression there; for his thoughts were elsewhere.

'It is no use,' he was saying; 'I am one of those unlucky fellows who can succeed in almost anything up to a certain point—and no farther. Sometimes I think I will "hang up the fiddle and the bow," and never play another note as long as I live.'

'But you play very well indeed,' said Linda.

'Yes, I play very well. So do several score of other men in Dresden alone. But my ambition is to play the violin more than very well; and that I shall never do. It is excessively disagreeable, do you know, to desire a thing with all one's heart and soul, to understand it and see the way to it, and to know that by no amount of labour can one ever get it! Fortunately for the human race, very few people care intensely for what is beyond their reach. I wonder, now, whether you ever wanted anything very much.'

'Oh, yes,' said the girl, letting her fingers wander absently over the keys; 'I want money.'

'Money! that is what you are always saying. Surely you might wish for something better worth having than that. So long as one has a roof over one's head, clothes to wear, and food to eat, what more does one want?'

'Ah, you do not know what it is to feel the want of money,' said Linda.

'Indeed I do.'

'That means that you can't buy the best cigars always, or drink champagne every day; I don't call that feeling the want of money. Poverty like ours means something far worse. It means perpetual pinching, scraping, worrying, degradation, and vulgarity.'

'Poverty is not vulgar,' said the violinist, sententiously.

'Perhaps not in theory; but practically, poor people—at any rate, people as poor as we are—have to

associate with vulgar men and women, and put up with vulgar affronts; yes, and do vulgar things, too, sometimes.'

Linda rose, walked to the window, which opened down to the ground, and stood, half in half out of the room, leaning against the window-frame, and looking out dreamily at the sunny landscape.

'Yes,' she said, 'I want money—heaps of money! Think of what it would bring! Horses and a French cook for papa; a maid and a box at the opera for me; and society, and balls, and flowers, and travelling—in short, everything that is delightful! Do you mean to say all that is not worth having?'

'If you had those things you would want something else. It is not in the nature of man to be contented; and there is no greater mistake than to suppose that riches bring happiness.'

'How can you tell?' said Linda, quickly; 'you have not tried them.'

The philosophical musician smiled.

'I have seen the effect of them upon others,' he answered. 'My father, for instance, who has what I suppose you would call "heaps of money," is about as dissatisfied a man as I know.'

'Your father, Mr. Mainwairing?' said the girl, her face lighting up with interest and curiosity; 'I did not know you had a father living. Why did you never mention him before?'

'Well, it is not a particularly pleasant subject to me,' answered Mr. Mainwairing; 'you see, we have never got on very well together; and I have not even seen him for two years now.'

'Have you quarrelled with him?' asked Linda, in a rather awe-struck tone.

'Oh, no; but we found we could not meet without disagreeing; so it is as well that we should remain apart. The fact is that I have been a disappointment to him—one of his many disappointments, poor old

man! My brother, who will inherit his estates and the greater part of his money, has been a terrible disappointment. Instead of going into Parliament, making a good marriage, and taking the hounds, as of course he ought to have done, he has gone in for science and chemistry, and spends all his life in his laboratory, except when he blows himself up—which he does periodically—and has to go to bed for a few weeks. Then, I was to have had my choice between diplomacy and the Guards, but I declined to enter any profession, and took to wandering about the Continent, and studying music. I believe my father looks upon me as the greater sinner of the two. He says a man who plays the fiddle is only one degree above a counter-jumper. He has had other troubles, too, besides his sons having turned out so badly. For one thing, he had always understood that he was to have the peerage which was as good as promised to my grandfather, but somehow they have never offered it to him, and that has soured him a good deal.'

'I don't think I should care much about that,' said Linda.

'No, but he does. It is his desire to be Lord Mainwairing, just as it is mine to become a second Paganini, and yours to be a female Rothschild.'

Linda was silent for a few minutes.

'Well,' she said at last, 'I suppose rich people are often unhappy; but you will not convince me that it is not a great misfortune to be poor. Oh, money, dear money! how I love you!'

Mr. Mainwairing laughed.

'Why do you laugh?' asked Linda, turning upon him suddenly, with a little gathering cloud of anger on her brow.

'I laugh,' replied Mr. Mainwairing, 'because it is better to laugh than to groan, and because I must do one or the other when I hear a girl of your age, with health, and talents, and—and beauty, making her-

self miserable for the want of pounds, shillings, and pence.'

'But I don't make myself miserable,' said Linda; 'no one can accuse me of not putting a good face upon my troubles, and I have more troubles than you know of. Only I have my longings, and you have yours—why not?'

'The difference between us,' said Mainwairing, 'is that wishing to be a great musician can never do me any possible harm, whereas love of money may lead you—who knows where? Perhaps into marrying a doddering old man, with one foot in the grave, for the sake of his wealth.'

'It would be a great temptation,' said Linda, gravely; 'particularly if his other foot were likely to follow soon.'

'How disgusting,' exclaimed Mr. Mainwairing, with unusual emphasis.

Linda coloured, and for a moment looked more than half disposed to quarrel with her friend; but she thought better of it, and broke instead into a peal of ringing laughter, in which Mr. Mainwairing presently joined, though with hardly equal heartiness. Their merriment was checked by the entrance of Mr. Howard.

'How are you, Mainwairing?' said he, in a loud cheery voice. 'Come to dinner, I hope?'

'Oh, thanks,' said Mr. Mainwairing, hesitatingly; 'you are very kind, but I am afraid I must be off.'

He was not very fond of Mr. Howard, and, in truth, few of the people who enjoyed the privilege of that gentleman's acquaintance were so. The members of the English club at Dresden had unanimously voted him a 'thundering cad,' and had shown him the cold shoulder ever since his first appearance among them. Yet, though it would have been impossible to have pronounced him a perfect gentleman, the man could not fairly be said to belong to the species ordinarily stigmatised as cads. I am afraid that if his position

in life had been different—if, for instance, he had been an M.P., with several thousands a year (as he might easily have been but for certain accidents), he would have been thought a very good sort of fellow in his way. Under no circumstances, perhaps, would he have had many intimate friends; but had he been possessed of wealth and rank, it is probable that the world would have submitted to his rather noisy familiarity, his boastfulness and self-assertion, with as much philosophy as it is accustomed to display at the dinner-tables of a thousand other equally offensive members of society. Being, however, what he was—a wandering, out-at-elbows Englishman, his compatriots looked upon him with no favouring eye, and, for the most part, declined to acknowledge the existence of his daughter.

Mr. Howard had started in life under sufficiently favourable auspices. The son of a rich woolstapler, he had been educated at Eton and Christchurch, at which latter place of learning he had made many distinguished acquaintances, had acquired what for one of his years was a very creditable knowledge of whist and écarté, and had learnt to spend money in a noble and reckless fashion. At the conclusion of his university career he was placed, not without protestation on his part, in his father's office. Old Mr. Howard pulled a long face over the heavy bills which came dropping in from time to time in his son's name; but he paid them all, remarking, with a sigh, that boys would be boys, and that every man must sow his wild oats. At the same time the young man was given to understand that the sowing of wild oats must now give place to the cultivation of more profitable crops, and that he would be expected for the future to keep within the limits of the very liberal allowance assigned to him. To this admonition he chose to pay no attention whatever. He neglected his work, spent the greater part of his time at race meetings, and finally, after an unlucky week at Newmarket, found himself compelled to inform his father

that unless five thousand pounds were forthcoming on the following morning he would be a ruined and disgraced man. Mr. Howard senior was a short-necked, choleric gentleman of the old school. He paid over the money, cursed his first-born with much elaboration of diction, and requested him never to darken his doors again.

'You have thrown away your chance,' said he; 'and now your brother will take your place. Henceforth four hundred pounds will be paid to your bankers annually on your account, and a sum sufficient to produce the same amount, at the usual rate of interest, will be handed to you at my death. You will never get anything more, so you need not trouble yourself to ask. My servants have orders to prevent you from entering my house after to-day. Now be off!'

Mr. Howard went off accordingly, and was never re-admitted under the paternal roof, though he did subsequently make some efforts in that direction. He went abroad, and for many years was a well-known figure at Rome and Florence during the winter, and at Homburg or Baden during the summer months. He managed, by cards and billiards, or otherwise, so far to increase his income as to be able to live at the best hotels in these places, and to lead a life not differing outwardly from that of the richer men with whom he associated; and, upon the whole, passed a fairly merry and agreeable existence. It was not until his father had been long dead, and he himself was upon the confines of middle age, that he committed his crowning act of folly. This was a runaway marriage with Lady Helen Blount, the plain-featured daughter of the Earl of Sturdham, whose acquaintance Mr. Howard chanced to make at Rome, where she was spending the winter. Much to the surprise and chagrin of the mature bridegroom, Lord Sturdham refused absolutely to hold any communication with his son-in-law, and held to this resolution till his dying day. Mr. Howard not only

gained nothing by what he had intended for a clever stroke of business, but found himself encumbered with a wife, and eventually with a daughter, whose support became a problem not easy for him to solve. Meek Lady Helen, wandering over Europe with her husband, struggling with penury, receiving little but neglect and hard usage, and falling in with many queer associates, may have often had cause to repent her choice; but, if so, she kept her regrets to herself. No syllable of complaint was ever heard to pass her lips, and up to her death, which occurred within six years of her marriage, she continued to show herself the best and most patient of wives.

It is unnecessary to follow the widower and his little daughter through their drifting voyage across the more or less turbulent waters, which, driving them now here, now there, had at last stranded them for a time upon the tranquil shores of Blasewitz. Given a roving gentleman of not over-scrupulous character and predatory instincts sharpened by necessity, and it is not difficult to form a guess as to the probable manner of his life. Mr. Howard's finances were subject to sudden and violent fluctuations. Sometimes he would be found living in comfort, and even with a certain amount of modest luxury, at Paris, Berlin, or Vienna; anon he had vanished, leaving many creditors to deplore his loss. Then, before the memory of him was well out of men's minds, or his bad debts crossed out of his tradesmen's books, he would reappear, smiling and genial as ever, pay his bills, and recommence his former mode of living. This system worked satisfactorily for a longer period than might have been expected; but a protracted course of such irregularities must needs tell upon a man's character in the long run, and as the years went on, Mr. Howard fell perceptibly in the social scale. Respectable people fought shy of him; hotel-keepers gave him a chill welcome, and British matrons declined to occupy a place at the *table d'hôte* next to

'that disreputable person.' There was nothing definite to be urged against the man. He had never been caught cheating at cards, though perhaps it would be asserting too much to say that he had never been suspected of so doing; he was not known to have committed any offence against the law, yet there was no lack of people ready to affirm that he dared not show his face in England. 'The fellow is an adventurer,' these well-informed persons would say, cautioning the unwary against being drawn into an intimacy with him; 'and the less you have to do with him the better.'

Recognising this hostile disposition on the part of his compatriots, Mr. Howard gradually ceased to seek their society, and withdrew more and more into the companionship of foreigners, by whom he was more cordially received. He liked, if possible, to have a few English acquaintances in a place, for the sake of appearances; but if he found himself repulsed by these, he turned smilingly away, and, like the immortal Major O'Gahagan, 'shut himself up in the impregnable fortress of Dunkeradam.' Foreign Counts, Princes, and high nobly-born Herren liked him very well. A certain loudness of voice and rakishness of demeanour did not jar upon their nerves as they did upon those of Englishmen; his frequent allusions to my 'brother-in-law, Lord Sturdham,' were held to be a sufficient guarantee that he was what he represented himself to be—a gentleman of ancient lineage; he was a good shot and a lively companion. And then his daughter was so charming! Graf von Podewitz, Freiherr von Oberndorf, and several others of Mr. Howard's friends among the Saxon Garde-Reiter, had already been vanquished by the witchery of Linda's bright eyes, and thought the small sums which their amiable host was wont to win from them at cards, after each of his sociable little dinners, by no means too long a price to pay for the felicity of passing a few hours in her company. It must not, however, be supposed that any smoking,

drinking, or card-playing went on in Linda's presence. Mr. Howard, whose most ardent wish it was that his daughter should make a good marriage, was fully alive to the necessity of enforcing a respectful demeanour towards her on the part of all the men frequenting his house, and knew that, in his somewhat equivocal position, too much care could not be exercised to ensure this result. Punctually at ten o'clock, therefore, Linda took up her bedroom candlestick and bade her father's guests good night. She was not allowed to see very much of these gentlemen, nor was she ever left alone in their company for more than five minutes at a time. In the case of Mr. Mainwairing, as we have seen, a much greater amount of freedom was permitted to her; but then Mainwairing was an Englishman; and that, as Mr. Howard conceived, made all the difference. He was not ill pleased at the intimacy which had sprung up between Linda and the young man whom he had discovered to be the second son of a wealthy Staffordshire baronet, and sometimes cherished a hope that this friendship, brought about by a common love of music, might terminate in the establishment of his daughter in a position of ease and high respectability.

Within the whole wide range of creation there was no single person or thing that Mr. Howard loved with anything approaching to the same intensity as he loved himself. Nevertheless, in so far as he was capable of feeling attachment to any mortal, he did care for Linda. He had given her a good education; he had sedulously striven to keep her free from contact with his own doubtful associates; he had endeavoured, by every means in his power, to bring her under the influence of irreproachable ladies of her own nation; often, with a humility not devoid of pathos, abstaining from intruding himself upon the society of these virtuous persons, lest his presence, which he knew to be distasteful to them, should prejudice his daughter in their eyes. All this he had done; and though, as has been hinted

above, the smile which Mr. Howard usually wore before the outside world was apt to change into a menacing frown if his dinner were ill cooked or the meagre sum allotted by him to the payment of household expenses exceeded, he had not been, upon the whole, an unkind father. The man could not have been altogether bad, or how should Linda have loved and reverenced him as she did? In her eyes, her father was all that is lovable and admirable. She saw that he was looked upon coldly here and there; but this she attributed solely to his poverty, which she imagined—perhaps not wholly without reason—to be the one unpardonable crime of which an Englishman can be guilty. To her this broken-down old rascal was a noble, talented, and fascinating gentleman—and who could wish her to think otherwise? Illusions and fallacies are not without their uses in this world; and though Truth is a divinity which we are all bound to revere, I don't know that one is always the happier for having made her acquaintance. Mr. Howard, who had been of a practical turn from his youth upwards, and who was not given to the cherishing of illusions upon any subject, had long since arrived at as correct an estimate of his daughter's good qualities as his nature admitted of. He thought her a good girl, cheerful in disposition, clever in the management of money, and—what was most important of all—undeniably pretty. It was gratifying to him to have such a daughter in his house; but it would have occasioned him no sort of grief to part with her. On the contrary, he asked for nothing better than to resign her to the care of a husband of good family and comfortable income; and, in the absence of any more eligible suitor, he was disposed to be very civil to Mr. Mainwairing, though he had no great personal liking for the violinist, and suspected that his antipathy was more than reciprocated.

He therefore reiterated his invitation to dinner, and pressed the point so strongly that Mainwairing, having

in truth, no valid excuse to put forward, was compelled at length to murmur an acceptance. It was the first time that he had broken bread in Mr. Howard's house, though by no means the first time that he had been begged to do so.

Mr. Howard, unlike the generality of Englishmen, made it a rule to conform, as far as possible, to the customs of the country in which he might happen to be residing; for he rightly thought that only in this way could a reasonable amount of comfort be secured. In accordance with this principle, he was in the habit, now that Fate had landed him in North Germany, of dining at the astonishing hour of half-past five.

'Sorry to have to ask you to sit down to dinner in the middle of the afternoon, Mainwairing,' he said; 'but when one is in Germany one must do as the Germans do, you know.'

'It is all a matter of habit,' answered Mainwairing. 'At the Hôtel Bellevue we dine at five o'clock; and, upon my word, I think it is a very good hour.'

'Yes, yes,' assented Mr. Howard; 'habit is everything, as you say; an old traveller, like myself, gets accustomed to all sorts of queer things. Gad! we should make them stare at the club at home, though, if we asked for dinner at five o'clock, shouldn't we?'

'Oh, I don't know,' said Mainwairing, who never for the life of him could help disagreeing with Mr. Howard; 'I fancy it would take a good deal to astonish a club waiter. Which is your club, by the bye?'

Mr. Howard quite understood the insinuation veiled under this query. 'The Buckingham,' he replied, meekly; and indeed it was true that, even in his most impecunious years, the exile had always managed to remit his annual subscription to that exclusive establishment. 'I used to belong to half-a-dozen others,' he continued, enjoying his small triumph; 'but I have given them up, one by one. As a man gets older he

finds one club about as much as he wants. And they give you a very fair dinner at the Buckingham.'

'Very fair! Why, they have the best cook in London,' said Mainwairing. And he thought to himself, 'What an egregious old humbug you are! I don't believe you belong there at all.'

'Ah! well, you'll have a precious bad dinner to-night, I'm afraid,' said Mr. Howard. 'There's no use in trying to get these German servants to understand cooking. But I can give you a bottle of pretty good Hochheimer, if you care about Rhine wine.'

'Oh, I'm not particular,' answered Mainwairing, a little ungraciously. 'Would you mind trying over that passage once more, Miss Howard, before we put the violin into its case again?'

Linda seated herself obediently before the piano, and music took the place of conversation till dinner was announced. Surely Mr. Howard must have foreseen the presence of a third person at his table that evening. Surely so simple and yet so perfect a dinner as that which was presently served in Herr Eichmann's old-fashioned dining-room could not have been altogether unpremeditated. Mr. Mainwairing, who, for all his declaration that he was not particular, appreciated good cooking as much as anybody else, allowed some such suspicion to cross his mind as he helped himself to mayonnaise, and wondered whether this impecunious Englishman and his daughter fared as sumptuously every day. And then, since one form of suspicion naturally begets another, he began to ask himself what could be the cause of all this civility on the part of a man to whom he had always been rather persistently rude; and even went so far as to select the exact terms in which he proposed to refuse the loan which he imagined that his host might probably request of him before the evening was over.

But he dismissed such unworthy thoughts after a time. Mainwairing, albeit an abstemious man, was no

more insensible to the effects of a bottle of excellent Hochheimer than the rest of humanity; and by the time that he was sitting in the garden before the house, sipping his *café noir* and smoking a capital cigar which Mr. Howard had handed to him, his views of the world in general were several degrees brighter than they had been earlier in the afternoon. Musical proficiency no longer seemed so utterly beyond his reach; his host's familiarity and vulgarity appeared to have diminished; and as for Linda—well, she was always, and under any circumstances, a beautiful girl; but had she ever looked so lovely as she now did, sitting with her hands clasped loosely in her lap—somewhat quiet and silent, as she generally was in her father's presence—the last rays of the sun turning her golden-brown hair into a glory?

The cherry-blossoms were flushed with the glow of the dying day; the river, sweeping out from the dusky shadow of its banks, caught flecks of gold from the western sky; the hills beyond lay bathed in ruddy light, and all the earth was sleeping in the dreamy stillness of evening. Mr. Mainwairing, furtively watching Linda from beneath his half-closed eyelids, fell into a reverie, and began building all manner of preposterous castles in the air, while Mr. Howard, loquacious after his Rhine wine, poured forth into inattentive ears a monotonous stream of egotistical anecdote about the Court balls at Vienna, and hunting on the Roman Campagna, and my brother-in-law, Lord Sturdham. Suddenly a quick movement from Linda brought the dreamer back to earth again.

'Mr. Mainwairing,' said she, 'you promised to take me out in your boat some day. Shall we go now; or are you too lazy to row after dinner?'

'I'm not too lazy at all,' answered Mainwairing, 'and I should like it of all things. But are you not afraid of the cold?'

'It won't be much colder on the river than it is

here,' said Linda. 'Besides, I can wrap myself up. May we go, papa?'

'Eh? Go out for a pull? Well, upon my word, I don't think it's a bad idea,' said Mr. Howard, who was in a gracious humour.

'What do you say, Mainwairing? You won't have to do all the work, you know; I can take an oar. I used to be pretty good at that kind of thing when I was at Oxford. Indeed, I believe I might have been in the University eight if I had cared about it; but I couldn't stand the nuisance of training, you know. What sort of a tub have you got hold of? Nothing much smaller than a barge, I suppose?'

'The boat is Thames-built,' said Mainwairing, getting up and stretching himself. 'Good enough for me. I never was even in my College crew myself.' And as they walked slowly down to the river bank he thought, 'Ought I to ask him to pull stroke? I wouldn't mind giving odds that he doesn't know an oar from a scull. Still one must be civil.'

But when Linda had seated herself upon the cushions, and gathered up the tiller-cords under her arms, Mr. Mainwairing thought, No, by Jove! he wouldn't; and, seating himself opposite to her, allowed his venerable friend to scramble into the bows.

Mr. Howard was not at all offended. He much preferred that the young people should have an opportunity of conversing together than that he should be placed facing his daughter, to whom he could hardly be expected to have much to talk about. In order to show that his presence need not be regarded as any obstacle to confidential intercourse, he made a great show of withdrawing into a state of mental abstraction, and whistled *La Donna è Mobile* out of tune, while he drew his oar jerkily through the water in what he imagined to be perfect unison with Mainwairing's measured stroke. Now, the Elbe runs pretty strongly in the neighbourhood of Blasewitz, and a man pulling

against the stream might find a better use for his breath than to expend it in whistling. Linda very soon perceived an unaccountable disposition on the part of the boat's nose to slew round on the side of her father's oar. By way of counteracting this tendency she waited till they were very nearly at right angles with the stream, and then took a vigorous pull at her stroke side tiller-cord, continuing to tug at it till she had altered her course, say from S. by E. to NNE. This appeared to her to establish a just equilibrium, and to fulfil the essential functions of a coxswain. It also gave Mr. Howard the occasion to call out good-humouredly, 'Hullo, Mainwairing! pulling you round, eh? Upon my word, I'm not so rusty as I thought I was!'

When this manœuvre had been executed some half-dozen times, and had elicited an equal number of observations similar to the above, Mainwairing felt that he must either stop rowing or give way to bad language. Remembering the presence of Linda, he very properly chose the former alternative.

'Don't you think this is rather poor fun after dinner, Mr. Howard?' he said. 'Suppose, instead of struggling against the current, we let ourselves drift down to Dresden? We might go and listen to the band for a bit, and you could drive home later.'

'Oh, yes!' exclaimed Linda, 'that would be delightful. But I don't know whether we can,' she added, checking herself. 'It would make us so late; and papa has letters to write.'

Which meant that Linda had grave doubts as to whether papa would relish paying the fare of a droschke back to Blasewitz. She need not, however, have felt alarmed. Papa was in one of his most amiable moods that evening.

'Anything you and Mainwairing please, my dear,' he said, benevolently. 'My letters can wait.'

So they swung round with the stream, and floating

smoothly down through the fast-falling night, had soon left the vine-covered hills of Löschwitz behind them, and were in sight of the twinkling lights of Dresden. Mainwairing brought his boat alongside of the landing-steps and helped Linda to step out. Directly above them towered the illuminated Brühlische Terrasse, the fashionable promenade of Dresden, whence came the faint sounds of a distant band, the hum of voices, and the crunching of many footsteps on the gravel. It was one of the first warm evenings of the year, and all the worthy citizens and their families had turned out to enjoy it.

CHAPTER II

ON THE BRÜHLISCHE TERRASSE

Dresden, like most of the smaller German cities, has seen its best, or at all events its most brilliant days. It is a tolerably bright and prosperous little town at the present time; but some faint shadow of the departed glories of the last century hangs over its castles and palaces—so much too vast for the requirements of the diminished Court, with its circle of sober officials and modest retinue of canary-clad footmen—and pervades the place with a certain melancholy. Even after the lapse of close upon a century and a half the town and its neighbourhood are full of the echoes of the hunting parties and fêtes and other splendid entertainments with which Augustus the Strong, Elector of Saxony and first Saxon King of Poland, was wont to delight neighbouring potentates. Dresden's days of glory—socially speaking—came to an end very shortly after the death of this stalwart monarch; and the town still seems to wear a decent sort of half-mourning for him, much as Versailles does for Louis-le-Grand. There is a statue of him in the Neustadt, in which he is represented bare-

headed and mounted upon a rampant cart-horse—in so great a hurry to gallop off to his new Polish dominions, say the Dresdeners in their humorous way, that he has forgotten to take his hat with him. No doubt the Saxons are well rid of their debauched Hercules, who must have been very expensive to support during his lifetime, and whose only claim to the distinction of a statue seems to have been his power to break a horse-shoe in halves with his hands, to bend a broad silver piece between his finger and thumb, and to spend an unlimited amount of money; but they are proud of having produced him, for all that, and cherish a sneaking kindness for his memory. In truth it is much easier to forget a good man than an extravagant one. Prime Minister Count von Brühl, for instance, who, by all accounts, was neither good, great, nor wise, has left his mark upon Dresden in an unmistakable manner, and will be remembered there, in all probability, for centuries yet to come, by reason of the Palace and shady gardens, overlooking the Elbe, which still bear the name of their former owner, though they have long since been thrown open to the public. One can fancy the little man strutting along his newly-planned walks in his fine clothes—(he had a suit for every day in the year, they say)—and the herd of powdered and bedizened sycophants trooping after him, and the honest burghers staring open-mouthed at their gorgeous ruler.

A far less picturesque assemblage congregates on the Brühlische Terrasse, on warm evenings, in these latter times. Long-haired students saunter arm-in-arm down the gravel walks and stare through their spectacles or *pince-nez* at the homely servant girls who are flirting with diminutive soldiers in sky-blue tunics with white facings; smooth-shaven tradesmen, with their wives and children, elbow countesses whose coats of arms show sixteen quarterings; officers with trailing sabres and murderous spurs stroll up and down, not unconscious of the admiring attention they excite; and of course the

itinerant Britisher, in his shooting-coat and pot-hat, is not wanting.

Through such a crowd did Mr. Howard, Linda, and Mainwairing make their way after they had ascended the broad flight of steps which leads up from the river's bank; and reaching the garden of the Café Belvedere, at the end of the terrace, where the band was playing, were admitted, on payment of a few groschen, into the enclosure.

'Now, this is the sort of thing I enjoy,' said Mr. Howard, passing his arm familiarly through that of his companion; and I daresay he would have been very much astonished if he could have known what angry and unchristian feelings were aroused in Mr. Mainwairing's breast by this simple action. 'What I like about the Continent is the freedom from restraint—the *sans gêne* and the out-of-door life. If we could give our working classes at home some amusement of this kind, we should not hear of half the drunken assaults and wife-beatings that make us a byword among the nations now. Look at these good people here. Give 'em a glass of beer, a pipe, and a good band, and they're as happy as kings. Depend upon it, Mainwairing, there's nothing like music to refine and civilise a man. Good music, of course, I mean—Haydn and Beethoven and --and the rest of 'em—not your rubbishing waltzes and polkas,' says Mr. Howard, who would have been puzzled to distinguish between Mozart and Offenbach.

'I like a good waltz all the same,' said Mainwairing.

'Yes, yes, of course; so do I in its proper place, you know—in its proper place. I used to be very fond of dancing as a bachelor; and though perhaps I ought not to say so, I can tell you I was about as good a dancer as you would have met anywhere in those days. I recollect once, at Vienna, poor old Strauss telling me that I was the only foreigner he had ever seen who really understood the waltz. Who was that lady you

bowed to? Very fine-looking woman! Is that her daughter? English, of course. I haven't called on half the people here. I am afraid they must think me very uncivil. But, living out of the town, one gets lazy about paying visits. And, between you and me,' adds Mr. Howard, confidentially, 'I don't much care, now that my girl is old enough to go into society, about making the acquaintance of people I know nothing of. Such a lot of queer specimens travel nowadays that one can't be too particular about whom one knows. Don't you agree with me?'

'I am sure you are quite right. But Miss Howard must be tired of walking; don't you think we might as well sit down?' said Mainwairing, who perhaps did not much relish being paraded in the full glare of the gas-lamps by this loud-voiced personage.

The trio accordingly seated themselves at one of the little round tables which were dotted all over the garden; and a white-aproned waiter coming up presently, Mr. Howard was graciously pleased to order an ice for his daughter and a carafe of cognac and a siphon for himself and his friend. Mr. Howard had all the talking to himself. Mainwairing subsided into silence and contemplation of the musicians; and as for Linda, she was fully occupied in studying the features and costumes of the throng around her.

Linda's knowledge of the manners and habits of polite society had been acquired principally at theatres, concert-rooms, and other places of public entertainment. Her naturally quick powers of observation and retentive memory had been strengthened by her solitary mode of life, and upon the rare occasions when her father took her with him to any such assemblages she was accustomed to watch closely the dress and bearing of the ladies—particularly of the English ladies, who interested her most—to take mental notes thereof, and thus glean a few hints for her own future use. During the winter she had made good use of her eyes on the skating-

pond in the Grosse Garten, whither the fashionable world of Dresden was wont to repair daily; and in a very short time she had become familiar with the features of nearly all the members of the English colony, though she had not discovered the names of more than half a dozen of them. The girl, looking on, a little wistfully, at the laughing, chattering, and flirtation from which she was excluded, used to amuse herself by conferring imaginary names and histories upon these people, and watching them work out their several destinies, day by day. She now recognised a few of these sitting near her, and, among others, two ladies, evidently mother and daughter, whose handsome faces and fashionable attire had frequently attracted her attention in the course of the winter. She had just noted the fact that the elder lady was still wearing her winter bonnet, whereas the younger had arrayed herself in a new and beautifully-fitting costume more suited to the season, when they rose from the table at which they had been seated, and making their way towards the exit, passed so close to Mr. Mainwairing's chair that he had to rise to make room for them. The elder lady returned his bow with a smile and a 'Good night,' and was moving on; but the daughter, a tall, erect blonde, who looked very self-possessed, very handsome, and on the best terms with herself and the world at large, paused before Mainwairing's chair, and looked him full in the face.

'*Well*, Mr. Mainwairing!' said she. 'I hope you feel ashamed of yourself.'

'Not more than usual, I think, Miss Tower,' replied the person addressed. 'Is there any reason why I should?'

'Well, considering that you promised to bring us here this evening, that we waited more than half an hour for you, and that we had to come at last without an escort, I really think there is,' answered the young lady.

Mainwairing dropped his hat, and made a gesture as though he would tear his close-cropped hair.

'I am covered with confusion,' he said. 'I don't know what to say. It is the fault of my atrocious memory, which has kept me in hot water ever since I left the nursery. Please consider me humbled in the dust before you.'

'Oh, don't apologise,' said the young lady. And then, without troubling herself to lower her voice, she added, with a significant glance at Linda, 'You have an excellent excuse, I see.'

'Could you possibly be induced to forgive me if I promised never to offend again?' asked Mainwairing, choosing to ignore this last remark.

'I suppose I must,' answered Miss Tower. 'There are so very few civilised people in this dreary place that it would hardly do to quarrel with one of them, would it? Besides, I haven't really missed you. I have been talking to one of the French *attachés*, who has been ten times more amusing than you ever are in your liveliest moments. Come—to show you that I bear no malice—you shall have the honour of accompanying me to a picnic at Moritzburg to-morrow. It will be horribly slow, of course; but we shall have a good long ride out there and back again, which will be just a shade better than doing nothing.'

'I shall be delighted,' said Mainwairing. 'What time do you start?'

'Twelve o'clock sharp. We will meet in front of the hotel. By the bye, I forgot to thank you for sending me that music. I have practised it diligently; and if you will come in to-morrow evening——'

The rest of the speech was inaudible to Linda; for Mrs. Tower, who had shown several signs of impatience during the above colloquy, now imperatively beckoned her daughter to follow her, and she and Mainwairing walked slowly away, talking as they went.

The latter returned, in a minute or two, to find

Linda looking decidedly cross. He thought she had been annoyed by his leaving her so abruptly, and hastened to offer an explanation.

'The Towers are very old friends of mine,' he said. 'It was really too bad of me to forget my engagement to them. They come from our part of the country, and I have known them all my life.'

'Oh, indeed!' said Linda, coldly; and not another word of comment could Mainwairing's account of Mrs. Tower and her daughter, and the reasons which had induced them to spend a winter in Dresden, elicit from her. But, after a time, Mr. Howard having sauntered away to examine the programme, Linda turned suddenly round and exclaimed—

'Do you understand now why I wish to be rich?'

'What do you mean?' asked Mainwairing, a little surprised at this irrelevant query.

'Do you think it is pleasant to be treated as your friends treated me just now?' cried Linda, with some warmth. 'Do you think I am resigned to being despised because papa—poor dear!—has to wear an old coat, and because my dress is old-fashioned and has been turned?'

'You are thinking of what Miss Tower said,' answered Mainwairing. 'It was very impertinent of her; but she is only silly—not intentionally rude. She is a very good-natured girl.'

'Is she? If we had been rich people, though, I don't think she would have shown her good nature exactly in that way. And I don't think her mamma would have stared at me as she did, with the corners of her mouth drawn down and her eyebrows almost disappearing under her hair.' Here Linda gave a very fair imitation of Mrs. Tower's supercilious expression. 'All the time you were talking,' she continued, 'every line in her face and every hair on her head was bristling with notes of interrogation. I could hear her saying, "Pray, who is this person?" as distinctly as

if she had spoken the words. Confess the truth, now—she did say so, as soon as you were out of earshot, didn't she?'

At this Mainwairing stammered, and became somewhat red about the ears; for some such inquiry had indeed been addressed to him by Mrs. Tower, and his answer had drawn from that lady a pleasant remark to the effect that the girl was really remarkably pretty in her way, and that she had been told—though, of course, she could not vouch for the truth of the report—that the father was a returned convict.

Linda laughed. 'I suspect your friend had nothing very complimentary to say about me,' she said. 'Yet it is impossible that she can know anything whatever of us, except that we are badly off.'

'I think you are rather too sensitive,' said Mainwairing. 'English people are always apt to put on a rather stand-off manner towards anybody they do not happen to have been introduced to. It proceeds from shyness as much as anything else.'

'Yes; I should think Mrs. Tower suffered a good deal from shyness,' said Linda, drily. Then, after a short pause, she resumed: 'I think English people, when they are ladies and gentlemen, are superior in every way to all other nations; but I think there are fewer ladies and gentlemen in England than anywhere else. It always makes me laugh when I read in the newspapers that old fiction about Englishmen having a partiality for taking the weaker side; because, as far as my experience goes, that is exactly what Englishmen never do. So long as you are rich or have a title they can't be too civil to you; but if you are poor and friendless and unknown they are not contented with ignoring you—they must needs insult you into the bargain.'

'I hope you don't include me in the general condemnation,' said Mainwairing.

'No,' answered Linda, 'I don't think you are like

the rest. I watched you, just now, to see whether you would look ashamed of us when your friends spoke to you, and I saw that you did not. I always liked you, you know, from the first, and now I look upon you as a real friend. I always feel that I can talk to you without thinking before I speak—just as I should to papa.'

If Mainwairing had been at all disposed to fall in love with Linda he might not have found this frank avowal altogether agreeable; but he was not in the least so disposed. He had prudently examined himself with reference to this point at the time when his visits to Blazewitz were becoming more frequent, and had convinced himself that he was not in danger of gliding into any foolish attachment. In the first place, he had no intention of falling in love with anyone. Music was his mistress, and to music he purposed, at any rate for some time to come, to remain faithful. Secondly, his income was not sufficiently large to permit of his marrying a dowerless maiden. And, lastly, he could not, under any circumstances, have brought himself to accept Mr. Howard as a father-in-law. Fancy that awful man slapping one on the back and addressing one by one's Christian name! The bare thought of such a thing made Mainwairing shiver from head to foot. Being thus entirely free from any wish to become more than a friend to Miss Howard, Mainwairing ought to have taken her candid assurance as a great compliment, and that he did not so regard it is only an additional unneeded proof of the perversity of human nature.

'You talk as if I were seventy,' he said, in a rather aggrieved tone.

Linda contemplated him consideringly for a few seconds from under her long eyelashes.

'You never seem quite like a young man, somehow,' said she. 'I can't bear young men,' she added hastily, thinking she had been rude.

'It seems that there are a good many classes of society that you can't bear,' observed Mainwairing, rather amused. 'What have young men in general been doing to arouse your animosity?'

'Oh, nothing special: only I never get on so well with them as with older people. Young men are generally either sensitive or conceited, so that one must always be careful of hurting their feelings. And then one soon gets tired of talking nonsense and listening to laboured compliments.'

'I suppose one does.'

'Now, you,' continued Linda, 'are not in the least that sort of person. How long is it that we have known you now? Nearly three months, is it not? And I don't think I have once heard you make a pretty speech. Indeed, you very often sit for half-an-hour without saying a word.'

'I am afraid I am a very dull companion sometimes,' said Mainwairing, compunctiously. 'But it is such a comfort not to be perpetually obliged to make conversation when you have really nothing to say. I believe the principal reason why there are so few friendships between men and women is, that most ladies can't be happy unless they are talking.'

'You remind me of a queer old lady who was very kind to me, a few years ago, at Florence,' said Linda. 'She used to say, "My dear, study the art of silence. Any fool can learn to chatter; but a woman who has got ideas in her head, and yet manages to hold her tongue occasionally, may go far." She was an incessant talker herself, nevertheless.'

'Most people who admire the beauty of silence are,' remarked Mainwairing.

'She was a very odd old woman,' resumed Linda. 'Do you know she had a most intense dislike to papa?'

'You don't say so!'

'Yes; she used to be so rude to him that at last he was obliged to give up going to see her; and,

though he did not mind that, it annoyed me. So that the acquaintance gradually dropped. Papa used to think she would leave me something when she died; but she didn't, unfortunately. I read her will in the *Illustrated*, and I think the greater part of her money went to a home for destitute dogs, or something of that kind.'

At this juncture Mr. Howard reappeared, bringing with him a tall, broad-shouldered young man, clad in the blue tunic and silver lace of the Body Guard, who bent low over the hand which Linda extended to him, and who was introduced by her to Mr. Mainwairing as Freiherr von Oberndorf. Mainwairing lifted his hat, and the young officer bowed, *more Germanico*, bringing his heels together with a click, bending forward from the waist, and recovering himself with a jerk, as if a string somewhere about his person had been pulled and then suddenly let go.

'You are not long in Tresten—no?' he said.

'Several months,' said Mainwairing.

'Inteet? It is sdrainch that we are not met before.'

'Not very,' said Mainwairing, smiling. 'I don't go into society here at all. In fact, I came to Dresden principally to take lessons in music, and I find I have very little time for anything else.'

'You have heard me speak of Mr. Mainwairing's wonderful violin-playing, von Oberndorf. He talks about taking lessons; but, upon my word, I don't think he can have very much to learn,' put in Mr. Howard, meaning to be agreeable.

'Ah, so-o-o!' said the German. 'Yes; I have heard—it is a friend von me, Herr von Podewitz, who has told me of your talent, sir.'

And Mainwairing wondered what evil report of him Herr von Podewitz could have given to induce his new acquaintance to desist from the conversation so abruptly; and, turning away, to plant himself astride upon a chair

beside Mr. Howard, whence, with his arms resting upon the back, he sat silently gazing at the Englishman with a countenance full of trouble and displeasure.

The matter, however, did not greatly interest Mr. Mainwairing.

'Is that one of the young men whom you cannot bear?' he asked, in a low voice, bending forward towards Linda.

'Well, no,' she replied. 'He is one of the exceptions that prove the rule. I don't think anybody could dislike Herr von Oberndorf. You will like him, I think, though he is not exactly your style. He is not clever, you know; but such a simple, honest, kind-hearted fellow!'

'*Brave comme son épée, et bête comme son cheval,*' muttered Mainwairing. 'I have no doubt one would get very fond of him if one knew him better; but I don't think there is anything specially attractive about him to a stranger. Why doesn't somebody tell him not to speak English?'

'I daresay he speaks it better than you do German,' retorted Linda, slightly nettled by this disparaging tone. Which was so undeniably true that Mainwairing judged it best not to pursue the subject further.

A short interval of silence followed, during which Mr. Howard was heard conversing in affable and fluent German to the young officer, who, for his part, was too busily engaged in watching Linda from beneath his straight brows to give much attention to the remarks addressed to him. There was no misunderstanding those pathetic glances. Mainwairing, reading their meaning rightly, began to perceive the cause of Herr von Oberndorf's coldness towards him. 'I believe the foolish boy is doing me the honour to be jealous of me,' thought he, amused, but not altogether displeased at the discovery. Now, since Mainwairing was not himself in love with Linda, it should have cost him no great self-sacrifice to relinquish his position at her side in favour

of the new arrival and take his turn of Mr. Howard's entertaining company. But I am sorry to say that no idea of performing this little act of renunciation crossed his mind for a moment. On the contrary, being, from various causes, in a somewhat dissatisfied mood, that evening, with himself and with things generally, he was in no way disposed towards disinterested benevolence, and derived an unkind satisfaction from Herr von Oberndorf's visible discomfiture, which he thought it would be very good fun to augment. With this unworthy end in view he proceeded to initiate what bore all the outward semblance of a strong flirtation with Miss Howard. Mainwairing, though in general a taciturn man, was capable of making himself very agreeable when he chose. He had greater conversational powers than most Englishmen, had travelled a great deal; and, having been always provided with good introductions, had seen something of nearly all the celebrated men and women of the day. It was, therefore, no very difficult task for him to enthral the attention of an inexperienced girl like Linda Howard, who was at the age when the sound of great names excites more awe and veneration than it is apt to evoke in later years. She drank in eagerly Mainwairing's descriptions of the Emperor of the French, of Herr von Bismark—at that time a most unpopular and distrusted personage in Germany—of Victor Emmanuel, Garibaldi, and Cavour. Mainwairing had made his bow to all these eminent persons; and some of them had even accorded to him the honour of a private interview. This was very interesting and delightful; and Linda had a hundred questions to put as to the private bearing of the rulers of France, Prussia, and Italy, and their famous ministers. Did Garibaldi always wear a red shirt? Was it a fact that Napoleon III. smoked twenty cigars a day? And was the great Bismark as phenomenal a beer-drinker as he was represented?—and so forth, and so forth. To these and other queries of a similar nature Mainwairing

replied to the best of his ability; but it was when he went on to talk of the musical world in Paris, and of the celebrated *maestri* who had taken up their abode there, that his hearer's interest became most excited. To her a man who had actually conversed with Rossini and Auber and Meyerbeer was no ordinary individual; and her respect for Mainwairing was more increased by her discovery of his acquaintance with these great composers than by his anecdotes of political notorieties. For, after all, any man of good birth and sufficient means can make his way into kings' palaces, whereas one must have some higher claims to distinction than these to be admitted into the companionship of a genius —or so, at least, Linda thought. And by degrees Mainwairing, warming with his subject, proceeded, from the composers, to speak of their works, and thence by a natural transition, of the supremacy of the violin over all other instruments. Having reached that point, he was soon fairly seated upon his hobby and cantering gently through pleasant places—cavatinas, rondos, and symphonies—forgetful of time and place, and unconscious of the angry blue eyes which were peering at him from the other side of the table through a veil of tobacco-smoke.

Meanwhile the concert came to an end. The band concluded its programme with a crashing march; the gas-lamps were turned down, one by one, and there was a general scraping of chairs and shuffling of footsteps as the company rose to disperse. Mainwairing, following the stream, found himself presently in the clutches of Mr. Howard again, while before him was the broad blue back of Freiherr von Oberndorf, who had adroitly seized his opportunity and offered his arm to Linda. This order of going was preserved as far as the Schloss Platz, where Mr. Howard hailed a passing droschke.

'Well, Mainwairing,' said he, holding out his hand, 'we will bid you good night here. See you again,

soon, eh? Von Oberndorf, can we give you a lift? We are going your way.'

Mainwairing approached the dilapidated conveyance in which Linda had already taken her place.

'Good night, Miss Howard,' he said. 'I shall turn up for my practice to-morrow, if you will allow me.'

'Not to-morrow,' said Linda. 'You are going to Moritzburg, you know.'

'Ah, yes to be sure! Thanks for reminding me. Good night.'

Herr Von Oberndorf stiffened himself all over, raised one hand, with the palm outwards, to the side of his forage cap, and kept it there while he solemnly bent what appeared to be the only joint in his body, in acknowledgment of the Englishman's somewhat curt 'Good evening;' and then dived, head first, into the recesses of the droschke, where he must have found it a little difficult to dispose of his long legs and his still longer sword.

Mainwairing remained on the silent, moonlit square till the rattle of the departing vehicle had died away in the distance. Then he turned and took his way meditatively back towards his hotel. But, on arriving at the door, he changed his mind, and thought he would look in at the English Club before going to bed. There he found a few of the young men and Paterfamiliases who, for educational or economical reasons, were temporarily domiciled in the Saxon capital, trying to get up a pool; and, upon their invitation, adjourned with them to the billiard-room.

'I say, Mainwairing,' said one of the young men, after play had been going on for some few minutes, 'do you know much of that fellow Howard, you were with at the band this evening?'

'Not much,' answered Mainwairing. 'About as much as I know of you—or anybody here. Why do you ask?'

'Oh, nothing. I thought perhaps he was a friend of yours.'

'Not at all,' said Mainwairing.

'Well, I'll tell you what,' said the young man, winking, with the solemn knowingness of youth; 'I wouldn't play écarté with him, if I was you. I know something of the game, but he's one too many for me, I can tell you.'

'Mr. Howard,' said Mainwairing, after making his stroke with much deliberation, 'has probably been studying the game of écarté for the last forty years, more or less; you, I should say, have been at it for about four. Why on earth you should suppose that you are likely to beat him I can't see.'

'Oh, I don't want to swagger about my play,' returned the young man, rather annoyed. 'I'm not exactly a beginner, as it happens; but of course I can't win money out of a man who turns up the king every other deal.'

'Now, look here, my boy,' said Mainwairing, laying his hand upon the speaker's arm; 'take my advice, and don't go about saying that sort of thing, or you will find yourself in trouble one of these days. You either mean nothing or you mean that Mr. Howard cheats at cards. And as one who has perhaps seen rather more of club life than you have, let me tell you that it don't *do* to make speeches of that kind, in a club or anywhere else, unless you have clear and positive proof to bring forward—and not always then.'

'I didn't say he cheated,' blurted out the young man, growing very red and confused.

'I certainly understood you to hint it,' said Mainwairing.

'Oh, hang the man!' struck in another player. 'Who the deuce cares whether he's a swindler or not? He's an awful snob, anyhow, and I don't know why they let him in here at all. Green upon brown—player in hand. On you go, green!'

Nothing more was said as to Mr. Howard or his character; but there was a general and evident feeling of restraint till the end of the game; and Mainwairing, as he walked homewards in the moonlight, could not help wondering what the members of the club were saying of him, now that his back was turned. He was angry with himself, and wished he had had the sense to hold his tongue. Why should he have taken up the cudgels for this adventurer—a man whom he personally disliked excessively, and had the worst possible opinion of? What business was it of his if people chose to say unpleasant things of the fellow?

Not being able to answer these questions to his satisfaction, Mr. Mainwairing went to bed in a very bad humour.

CHAPTER III

IN MR. HOWARD'S GARDEN

The following day dawned bright and fresh—a genuine spring morning, such as one imagines—erroneously perhaps—to have been more common in former times than now. Dresden, basking in the sunshine, was full of life and colour. The vista of double windows along the streets, not yet removed after the long winter, was blazing and glittering so that the eyes of the passers-by ached when they looked upwards; the shops in the Schloss Strasse had lowered their awnings; in the Altmarkt, where old women, under huge umbrellas, were selling fruit and vegetables and flowers, groups of homely housewives, making their morning purchases, collected together to gossip and enjoy the warmth; the flagstones under foot were positively too hot to be pleasant; the dogs lay panting in the shade; and there was nothing, except the whiteness of the lights and the pale blue shadows, to show that it was not yet summer.

But out at Blasewitz, where a cool breeze was sweeping fitfully down from the hills, and fleecy clouds, sailing high overhead, made dark moving patches upon the bright green of the fields, the season manifested itself more plainly. There every bank and hedgerow was gay with wild-flowers; the buds on the trees were breaking, almost visibly, into verdure; the birds were in full song; and, in Mr. Howard's garden, the hyacinths and crocuses and violets, still sparkling with the dews of the night, were drinking in a feast of sunshine.

On a morning like this it was impossible for a young and healthy girl to remain indoors—even though household duties might render it advisable for her to do so; still less could such a one contemplate with equanimity the practising of scales and exercises, which is but a doleful occupation at the best of times. Feeling this, Linda gathered up into a basket a mass of brown holland, which was destined, at some future time, to be converted into as fashionable a summer dress as the cheapness of the material and the ingenuity of the maker would admit of, and, collecting needles, thread, scissors, and other necessary implements, betook herself to a certain seat upon the lawn, where, with her head in the shade and her feet in the sun, she was able to combine inevitable labour with a consoling enjoyment of the good gifts of Nature.

I am given to understand by those who should know that, among all the troublesome tasks which must needs fall to the lot of impecunious ladies, there is none more distressing than that of making one's own gowns. There is, it appears, in this kind of work a laborious monotony, together with a grievous conviction of ultimate failure—more or less absolute—very trying alike to the temper and the spirits; and I have heard it asserted that many a weary maiden has thankfully accepted the first eligible offer made to her merely in order to escape from this painful drudgery. There are,

however, exceptions to every rule; and Linda, though, as we have seen, she had a thorough appreciation of the evils of poverty, desired riches rather for their indirect than for their immediate consequences, and was too clever and experienced in the use of her needle to count dressmaking as a hardship.

Moreover, she was, partly by temperament, but partly also by will, accustomed to make the best of things, and to accept small troubles without crying out. Therefore she stitched away contentedly enough, though her father had quarrelled with his breakfast, and had made himself excessively unpleasant before setting out for Dresden; though there was a little difficulty about the washing bill; and though she had every prospect of passing the whole of this delicious spring day in complete solitude.

Nevertheless, as the hours wore on she began to be sensible of a strong desire to have somebody with whom to exchange ideas. Mainwairing's daily visit had become so much a matter of course in her uneventful life that she missed him to-day much more than she had expected to do.

'He does not say much,' thought Linda, 'and I don't think he always listens when I speak; but at least he is better than nobody, and I have got accustomed to seeing him. He was really very amusing last night too. Oh, dear! I suppose he is half-way to Moritzburg by this time, cantering along beside that detestable Miss Tower.'

Linda sighed, and pulled out from her waistband a small silver watch, presented to her, in an unwonted excess of generosity, by her father some years before.

'Nearly half-past one,' she remarked, getting up and putting her work back into its basket.

Luncheon was a feast unknown to the Howard *ménage*. The master of the house was seldom at home in the middle of the day; and Linda, if she happened to feel hungry between breakfast and dinner-time, took

the simplest and least expensive means of satisfying her wants. She now entered the house, and presently emerged thence, carrying in her hand a slice of dry bread—Mr. Howard was the only member of the household permitted to indulge in the headlong extravagance of butter—which she proceeded to dispose of, in a leisurely and contented manner, while she gazed at the sunny landscape before her.

An immense, clumsy raft, with timber from the Bohemian mountains, was floating down the stream, guided by a few rough-looking fellows, who, having felled the wood in their own country, were drifting down in this easy fashion towards the sea, to dispose of it, raft and all. Linda, watching the occupants of the unwieldy craft, was thinking to herself that such a mode of travelling must be very amusing, and that, upon the whole, it must be pleasanter to belong to the lower classes than to the tag-end of the upper-middle, when a sound which had of late become familiar to her, the distant noise of oars turning in the rowlocks, caught her ear, and startled her with a sudden thrill of expectation. Could it be possible that Mr. Mainwairing had not gone to Moritzburg after all? Almost before she had had time to put this question to herself the sharp bow of a boat shot out from behind the evergreens at the end of the lawn, and there, sure enough, was Mr. Mainwairing in his shirt-sleeves, making for his accustomed landing-place. Linda ran down to meet him. He was busy making fast his boat to the stump of a tree, but he looked up and took off his hat as the girl approached him, her face beaming with a bright welcome.

'I *am* so glad to see you!' she exclaimed.

Mainwairing stepped out of the boat, and held out his hand, striving ineffectually not to look too much gratified at this announcement.

'Are you really?' he said. 'I was just thinking I ought to apologise for taking you by surprise in this way.'

'Pray don't do anything of the kind. I don't know when I have been so pleased to see anybody. I was simply dying of loneliness when you appeared. Generally I can bear a good deal of my own company; but there are some days—don't you know?—when one feels that one must have somebody or something to talk to—even if it were only a dog or a cat.'

'You are very flattering,' said Mainwairing, gravely.

'Oh, I did not mean to say that I don't prefer you a thousand times to a dumb animal. In fact, I had rather talk to you than to anybody else in Dresden. Papa has gone out, and I suppose I shan't see him again till dinner-time.'

'For this and all His mercies!——' muttered Mainwairing inaudibly, stooping to pick a flower.

'So I hope you mean to stay a good long time. By the bye, why are you not at Moritzburg? You didn't forget again, did you?'

'No,' replied Mainwairing, 'I did not forget; but unfortunately I woke with such a bad headache that I really could not have ridden out there in the hot sun.'

Linda looked surprised. 'You are better now, I suppose?' she said; 'because I should think rowing must be at least as bad for a headache as riding.'

'I thought a row to Blasewitz would do me good—and it has,' said Mainwairing, smiling.

'Do you mean to say,' said Linda, with a quick side-glance at him, 'that you did not *want* to go to Moritzburg?'

'I most certainly did not. But you need not look as if you thought I had told a dreadful fib; I really had a headache. At the same time, mind you, I think one is justified in saying anything to escape the infliction of a picnic.'

'Well, I don't know about that,' said Linda, doubtfully; 'but, at all events, I am delighted that you have come. You don't want to practise at once, do you? It is so nice sitting out here.'

'I don't want to practise at all,' said Mainwairing, stretching himself full length on the ground beside his hostess. 'I want nothing, except to hear you talk, and feel the sun, and see the flowers, and listen to the birds, and thank Heaven that I haven't got to entertain Ada Tower.'

'But I thought you liked Miss Tower so much,' said Linda, looking up from the work which she had resumed.

'Did I say so? Oh, yes, I like her very well: I have known her all my life, as I told you. But I don't feel quite up to being bored with her to-day.'

'Do you know,' said Linda, beginning to stitch again, 'I have an idea that some day or other you will marry Miss Tower?'

Mainwairing had clasped his hands behind his head, and was staring up at the sky. He showed no signs of surprise or discomfiture at this abrupt prediction; but said, without altering his attitude—

'No one can tell what the future may have in store for him; but I have more than one excellent reason for thinking that you are mistaken. Without taking into consideration my own personal wishes, I can assure you that Mrs. Tower is far too ambitious to dream of marrying her daughter to a pauper like me. I fancy I see her face if anyone proposed such an alliance to her!'

'And Miss Tower—what would she say?'

'Really, I don't know,' answered Mainwairing. 'I have had no opportunity of getting at Miss Tower's sentiments with regard to me in the light of a possible husband, and I never shall have, for I have not the faintest intention of questioning her upon the subject.'

'I am glad of that,' said Linda, thoughtfully, 'because she did not seem to me to be exactly the sort of person who would suit you.'

'Very few people do suit me,' said Mainwairing; 'I am a cantankerous sort of brute, taking me altogether.

But Ada is not so objectionable as you imagine. She is one of the most popular girls I know.'

'I daresay,' said Linda; 'but is she quite—quite——'

'Quite a lady? Well, yes, I think she is. You see, ladies in the present day are very different from what they used to be twenty or thirty years ago. It is the custom nowadays to be unceremonious and familiar, to talk loud, and to know everything and say everything. It is not a fascinating custom, I admit, and the novelty of it has worn off long ago. Still the best people follow it; and one can't blame a girl, who naturally wishes to be considered fashionable, for doing as others do.'

'I don't know anything about fashionable people,' said Linda; 'but I don't think a lady ought to be ill-bred. Miss Tower treated me last night as if I were her servant—much more rudely, indeed, than I would ever have treated any servant. And yet my family is at least as good as hers, though I am poor,' added Linda, drawing herself up proudly. For had not her mother been Lady Helen Blount? And did not her father bear the name and arms of Howard? The truth is, that that modest gentleman wore, upon his little finger, a signet-ring engraved with a lion statant guardant, and was in the habit of referring blandly to certain eminent persons as belonging to 'the Catholic branch of the family.' Poor Linda had heard very little about her paternal grandfather, and was quite unaware that the valuable plate left by him to his son, Mr. Thomas Howard, of Lombard Street, E.C., and Lancaster Gate, W., bore the device of a sheep proper, encircled by the motto *Sic vos non vobis*.

Mainwairing attempted no further defence of Miss Tower, nor did Linda care to pursue the subject.

'Do you dislike picnics very much, Mr. Mainwairing?' she asked, after a pause.

'Dislike is not the word,' replied he; 'I positively loathe them. I never met a man who didn't—unless,

of course, he was in love. In that case picnics may be tolerated as a means towards an end; but that any human creature, in a healthy state of mind, can enjoy squatting cross-legged on the ground, with his plate on his knees, and drinking out of somebody else's glass, is simply inconceivable.'

'How unfortunate!' said Linda. 'We are thinking of making a small party to spend the day at Schandau to-morrow, and papa meant, if he had met you to-day, to have asked you to join us; but, of course, now we must not venture to inflict such a trial upon you.'

'That,' said Mainwairing, 'is quite a different thing. It is large picnics that I object to—not small ones. Besides, I really feel that I ought to see the Saxon Switzerland.'

'You will come, then?'

'With all the pleasure in life. Who is going besides yourselves?'

'Only an old lady who lives near us here—a Countess von Zerlitz—and her daughter; and perhaps Herr von Oberndorf, if he is not on duty.'

'H'm! What sort of a person is Fräulein von Zerlitz? Dumpy and blonde and dowdy, of course; has a great flow of artless conversation, in all probability; being a German, is safe to be musical; so that we shall have that in common. I daresay I shall get on very comfortably with her.'

Linda was forced to confess that this slight imaginary sketch was not wholly devoid of resemblance.

'But why are you so anxious about Fräulein von Zerlitz?' she asked.

'Because it is forcibly borne in upon me that she and I will have to employ the greater part of to-morrow in cultivating one another's acquaintance. Your father will naturally pair off with the old lady; and you, I presume, will be monopolised by your friend the Freiherr.'

'Indeed, you are quite mistaken,' said Linda. 'I should not think of remaining with the same person all

day; papa would not like it. Besides, if I had to choose my companion I should certainly prefer you very much to Herr von Oberndorf.'

'Would you?' said Mainwairing, almost eagerly.

'Undoubtedly,' replied Linda. And she was about to state her reasons for this gratifying preference—reasons which, perhaps, might not have been found altogether palatable by its object—when a peremptory, rather high-pitched voice was heard calling 'Linda! Linda!' and presently Mr. Howard emerged from behind a clump of bushes, his eyes fixed upon a strip of blue paper which he held in his hand, and which appeared to be arousing in him feelings of no slight displeasure.

'What is the meaning of this, may I ask?' said he, tapping the offending sheet with an indignant forefinger. 'Here's a grocer's bill sent into me, amounting to upwards of nine thalers, for biscuits and preserved fruits, and God knows what else! I thought it was clearly understood between us that the money which I allow you for housekeeping was to cover all expenses of this kind.'

Linda had stood up to receive her punishment bravely, thereby unintentionally concealing the recumbent form of Mr. Mainwairing, whose existence, indeed, she had entirely forgotten in this terrible and sudden moment of detection.

'We have had people often to dinner lately,' said she, humbly. 'I was obliged to get dessert for them. I am very sorry that horrid man has sent in his bill to you, papa; I never thought he would do that. And I am sure I shall be able to pay him off by degrees.'

'That,' said Mr. Howard, with calm indifference, 'is entirely your affair. But you will please understand, once for all, that I will not be annoyed by housekeeping bills, that I will not pay such bills, and that, if anything of this kind occurs again, I shall stop the amount out of your next——Hullo, Mainwairing!

(with a swift dissolution of sternness into amiability) didn't see you before. Glad I got home in time to catch you. We are going to make a short expedition into the Saxon Switzerland to-morrow—quite a small affair—and I hoped you might be prevailed upon to make one of the party.'

'So Miss Howard has been telling me,' answered Mainwairing, staring straight before him, as his custom was when addressing Mr. Howard, for he harboured so strong a prejudice against that gentleman that he never looked at him when he could avoid it. 'I shall be very glad to accept your kind invitation.'

'That's all right. Linda, my dear, would you mind going and getting me a pocket-handkerchief out of my room?'

And, as soon as his daughter had dutifully departed on this errand, Mr. Howard took occasion to remark upon the dangerous and often fatal habit into which, as he said, young people were only too prone to fall, of obtaining goods upon credit.

'I daresay you thought me harsh just now,' observed this careful parent, 'but it is a subject upon which I feel very strongly; and Linda, poor child, is sometimes apt to be careless. I had far rather put her to a little temporary pain than let her get into the way of running up unnecessary bills; for I know well,' said Mr. Howard, wagging his head mournfully, 'how rapidly such a tendency increases if it is once given way to.'

'I should rather imagine you did!' thought Mainwairing, but he said nothing, and continued to contemplate space.

'Yes,' went on Mr. Howard, finding his pause productive of no reply; 'a father, if he wishes to do his duty by his children, must sometimes show himself severe. It is easier, of course, to be always pleasant; but what I say is, a spoilt child has had unkind parents. Don't you agree with me?'

Still no answer.

'I must say, however,' proceeded Mr. Howard, 'that I very seldom have to scold Linda. She is not perfect, I admit; who is? But, making allowances for a few small failings, she really is as good a little girl as ever breathed, though I say it. I shall lose my right hand when I part with her—as I suppose I shall have to do, some fine day.'

Mr. Howard sighed quite pathetically at the anticipation of so sorrowful an eventuality.

Mainwairing, who had not moved from his recumbent position on the grass, thrust his hands into the pockets of his flannel trousers, turned his head away towards the river, and began to whistle *La ci darem*, softly.

'Deuce take the fellow! What's the matter with him?' thought Mr. Howard, snapping off a spray of laburnum and pulling the yellow flowers from their stem a little nervously. 'Is he going to sleep?'

Apparently not; for on Linda returning, at this moment, with the requested handkerchief, Mr. Mainwairing sprang hastily to his feet and bade his friends good-bye.

'I shall be late for the *table d'hôte* as it is,' said he. '*Au revoir*, Miss Howard. I will be up in good time to-morrow morning.' And so strode away to his bcat.

'Good fellow, Mainwairing,' observed Mr. Howard, watching the young man's retreating figure, 'but not brilliant. I never can get a word out of him.'

'He is not a great talker,' acquiesced Linda; 'but I think he is a very pleasant companion.'

'Not to me,' said Mr. Howard, turning away with a yawn; 'but that only shows that old men and young ladies belong to different species.'

CHAPTER IV

HERR VON OBERNDORF UNSHEATHES HIS SWORD

The picturesque district through which the Elbe flows on its way from the rugged mountains of its birth towards the plains of Saxony and Prussia, and which has received the exceedingly inappropriate name of the Saxon Switzerland, is well known to English tourists, of whom small armies annually invade its quiet valleys and leafy ravines, scale its modest mountains, and carve their honoured names upon the soft sandstone of its rocks. The scenery of this country, which is of a very peculiar order, would be sublime if it could be looked at through a magnifying glass. Precipices, crowned by waving woods, tower smooth and sheer above the winding Elbe; fantastic peaks and pinnacles and masses of rock, bare of any vegetation, save lichens and, here and there, a solitary fir-tree clinging to a cranny, rise in abrupt isolation above miniature bright-green meadows, and hem in gorges so narrow that, as you peer down into them, they seem scarcely wide enough to accommodate even the tiny streamlets which hurry through them to join the river. But the element of size is everywhere wanting; and it is probably only the common possession of an abundance of rocks and pines that has led to the discovery of a similarity between this region and Switzerland, which country it resembles in much the same sense as Amsterdam may be said to resemble Venice.

Few people, however, desire perpetual grandeur of scenery; and a man must be hard to please who would quarrel with the many charming landscapes that open out before him as he makes his way from Pillnitz to Bodenbach. There is pleasant enough occupation for

a week or ten days of an idle tourist's time in exploring the by-ways of the *Sächsische Schweiz*, as well as in making the excursions prescribed by the inexorable law of Murray—the Bastei, with its far-stretching prospect of woodland, river, and plain ; the lofty (comparatively lofty) Winterberg ; the fortress of Königstein, once considered impregnable, but no longer so, I presume, in these days of Krupp cannons—and divers other points of interest, duly done justice to in the red book. It is a country, too, which has many associations, legendary and historic, if the tourist care about such things—which, in all probability, he will not.

What is more likely to interest him is the fact that hotel accommodation, unpretending but cleanly, and fairly good living may be obtained in the trim little villages that nestle under the cliffs on either side of the brown Elbe. Among these Schandau, which boasts of mineral springs, and is frequented, during the summer season, by Herrschaft of the most highly-born description, enjoys a special preeminence ; and it was rather the good character he had heard of the hotel of that little town than its proximity to some of the most celebrated spots in Saxon Switzerland that had influenced Mr. Howard in choosing it as the object of an excursion.

Mainwairing, in obedience to the instructions he had received, left his bed at an abnormally early hour on the appointed morning, dressed himself as quickly as he was able, and arrived at the station just in time to catch the train in which the rest of the party had already taken their places. It is always a mistake to run a train too close ; but it is more particularly so when the traveller desires to have the choice of any particular seat, or to place himself next to any special person. In the present instance, Mainwairing, on being hastily thrust by a flustered guard into the compartment secured by Mr. Howard and his friends, found the seat next the further window occupied by Linda, while

that opposite to her had been taken possession of by Herr von Oberndorf. The two places in the centre of the carriage were filled by Mr. Howard and Fräulein von Zerlitz, a plump, fair-haired maiden of the true Teutonic type; and there was obviously no resource for the latest arrival but to ensconce himself in the corner facing that in which the Frau Gräfin von Zerlitz had disposed her ample form.

The Frau Gräfin was one of those old ladies whose form and features are apt to prove terrible obstacles in the way of their daughters' matrimonial prospects. No one could look at the younger lady without being convinced that time must inevitably develop her into the counterpart of her mother, nor could any impartial person, scrutinising the lineaments of the elder, fail to perceive that, at some not very remote period, she must have been the exact image of her daughter. What was a comely roundness of outline and youthful healthiness of colouring in the one had become mere obesity and rubicundity in the other; the plump cheeks and flaxen hair of the daughter were cruelly caricatured in the mother's vast countenance, and in the mud-coloured bandeaux which she wore plastered down to her head with a smoothness only attainable, I fancy, by German ladies of advanced years; and when it is added that the Countess had had the misfortune to lose all her teeth, with the exception of one tusk, which (following, no doubt, the natural law of the survival of the fittest) had outlasted its fellows, and now rose defiant from her lower jaw, as if calling the world to witness to its exceptional tenacity of existence, it will be perceived that the good lady was not precisely one of those whose external charms are likely to fascinate a new acquaintance. She was, however, of an innately sociable and amiable disposition; and though she, in common with nine-tenths of the rest of humanity, disliked nothing more than raising her voice to the shrieking pitch demanded for conversational purposes

by the rattling of a train, she conceived it to be her duty to entertain the Englishman whom circumstances had thrown in her path, and proceeded accordingly to devote herself to that charitable task.

The Countess's education had not gone so far as to enable her to express herself in English; but in the French language she believed herself to be quite at home, and it was in an astonishing rendering of that tongue that she addressed her first remarks to Mr. Mainwairing. It must, I suppose, be conceded that society could not hold together if people only spoke when they had something to say; still, there are times when unnecessary small-talk appears a burden greater than anyone has a right to inflict upon an unoffending fellow-creature, and when closing of the eyes and simulated snoring on the part of the victim seems justifiable, if not laudable. So, at least, thought Mainwairing, as the slow train jogged gently on, and his neighbour discoursed to him of Dresden and its attractions to foreigners, in accents of piercing hideousness. But, for the honour of British politeness, it is gratifying to be able to state that he did not give way to any such temptation, but stood his ground like a man, never even indulging in a yawn till the seemingly interminable journey was at an end. Then, while the Frau Gräfin, assisted by Mr. Howard, was slowly lowering her ponderous person from the carriage-step to the platform, he made his escape, and, catching up Linda, walked by her side down to the ferry, which had now to be crossed; for Schandau stands upon the opposite bank of the river to the railway. Freiherr von Oberndorf, who had hurried Miss Howard away from the station with needless precipitation, fell back reluctantly at his approach, and waited for the rest of the party with a downcast countenance.

The young Saxon officer was desperately in love with Linda. Several weeks back he had interrogated his heart upon the subject, and had arrived at a

realising sense of the profound and unalterable nature of his attachment. Since then, being a true German, and absolutely free from self-consciousness or false shame, he had manifested his passion unreservedly to all such as cared to notice it. He reduced his daily allowance of beer; he became politely distant in his attentions to the ladies of the ballet, with whom he had hitherto been upon terms of easy familiarity; he never smoked a cigar without brushing his teeth afterwards; he took to the use of scent, and bought so many pairs of gloves that his servant, though profiting by this extravagance, could not refrain from uttering a respectful remonstrance against it. From being a young man of equable and placid temperament, he now showed himself, by turns, boisterously gay and unbearably irritable; and when his brother officers, divining the source of these symptoms, rallied him upon them, and begged to be informed of the name of the lady whose charms had wrought so great a change, he shook his head, with a sad and mysterious smile, and wrapped himself in a sorrowful silence. If Herr von Oberndorf had been asked, he would have said that he had never been so wretched as at this period of his life; but in truth I think he enjoyed his misery immensely. He wore upon his watch-chain the key of a box, in which were preserved certain relics which he would not have exchanged for a colonel's epaulettes—a white kid glove, several faded flowers, a broken fan, and a couple of formal invitations to dinner, written in a neat, but not very formed hand. In moments of depression he was wont to spread these treasures out upon the table before him, and sigh so loudly over them that he could be heard in the room below. Herr von Podewitz, his comrade and bosom friend, surprised him thus occupied one evening, and very nearly quarrelled with him over it, being himself much smitten with the beauty of the fair Engländerin. But true friendship knows no limits, and stops short at no sacrifices. Herr von Podewitz,

on being made the depositary of his comrade's confidence, magnanimously cast away from him all idea of rivalry, and declared himself willing to do all in his power to further von Oberndorf's suit. His generosity dispersed the gathering clouds. 'Like torrents from a mountain source,' the two young men rushed into one another's arms, and embraced with effusion.

'Henceforth,' said von Podewitz, when he had recovered a little from his natural emotion, 'we have no secrets from each other. We strive, both of us, to secure the same object—thy happiness. Therefore I warn thee to be upon thy guard against one Mannerung, an Englishman, who is too often at the house of our good Herr Howardt.'

'He shall die,' responded von Oberndorf, gloomily.

'Na—that will I not say,' said the other, stroking his fair moustache. 'But he is a dangerous fellow. He plays the violin—hu-u-u!' (Here von Podewitz threw back his head, pursed up his mouth, and emitted a sound intended to express unlimited admiration of the musician's skill.) 'I had not believed that an Englishman could produce such sounds! Beware of him, my friend; for we know the power of music upon a young girl's heart.'

With this caution fresh in his mind, Herr von Oberndorf had been greatly perturbed by the long *tête-à-tête* between Linda and Mainwairing of which he had been an unwilling witness on the Brühlische Terrasse. He had walked up and down the platform of the Dresden station for an hour before the departure of the train for Schandau, with the express purpose of forestalling the violinist by securing the seat next to his lady-love; and so unreasonably exacting are lovers of his description, that he was now furious because his rival had contrived to secure a few minutes of private interview with the adored object. The poor young man, in short, was in that pitiable state of mind which sees a rival in every male creature, and cause for

jealousy in the simplest and most innocent actions. He ground his teeth because Mainwairing helped Linda into the ferry-boat; he could hardly contain himself for rage when the Englishman offered to hold her parasol over her head for her, and he inwardly anathematised poor Frau von Zerlitz, whom he found himself obliged to assist in landing, and whose slow movements enabled the rest of the party to get a considerable start of her and her impatient escort.

By Mr. Howard's forethought, breakfast had been ordered at the Schandau Hotel on the preceding day, and was awaiting the hungry excursionists when they arrived. The landlord, his wife, and the one waiter who constituted all the staff of the establishment at this early season of the year, were at the door to receive their guests. Mr. Howard acknowledged their profound bows with a dignified hauteur which immediately raised him in the estimation of these worthy people. Their experience of the English nation had led them to believe that, with us, an unassuming demeanour bespeaks an empty purse, and that the higher a man stands in the social scale the more difficult will he be to please.

Mr. Howard must have held similar views; for it was his invariable habit, on entering a strange hotel, to begin by giving as much trouble as possible. He now beckoned the landlord into a corner, and demanded the bill of fare, over which he frowned with silent severity.

'No fish!' he ejaculated at length. 'Pray, why is there no fish?'

The landlord looked up at the fierce white moustache, the hooked nose, and the stern grey eyes of his patron, and trembled. He excused himself to the best of his ability. It was true, alas! that, in spite of all his efforts, he had been unable to procure the salmon ordered by the gracious Herr. The gracious Herr would kindly take into consideration that the bath

season had not yet commenced, and that there was a difficulty about obtaining delicacies at short notice. If the honoured Gesellchaft had timed their visit a little later in the year, he would have been in a position to set before them a repast with which he ventured to think they would have been satisfied. As it was, he had done his utmost, and could only trust that any shortcomings might be generously overlooked.

'Understand me,' said Mr. Howard, not in the least mollified by this humble appeal. 'For myself, I am easily satisfied. Give me a couple of eggs, a loaf of bread, and a bottle of drinkable Rhine-wine, and I am content. But I cannot have my friends starved or poisoned. If I find your meat tough, your salad made with rancid oil, or your omelettes made with bad eggs, I shall not only abstain from employing you again, but I shall take care to let my friends in Dresden know why I am dissatisfied with you.'

At this terrible threat the landlord literally shook in his shoes. He reiterated his assurances that he had spared no pains to provide the best breakfast that the circumstances permitted of, and backed towards the door, bowing obsequiously at every step.

'Stop!' shouted Mr. Howard, when his host's hand was already on the door-handle. 'Don't attempt to palm off any of your Saxon Champagne on me as Moët and Chandon, do you hear?'

'I beg you to believe, milord, that I am incapable of such dishonesty. Also the labels are upon the bottles, for anyone to see.'

'Labels are easily washed off and gummed on. I know your tricks. Have you ordered the carriage to take us to the Kuhstall?'

'The horses are even now being harnessed, milord.'

'Then the horses are being harnessed an hour too soon. Take care that they are ready when wanted, that's all. Now you can go.'

And, upon the departure of the landlord, Mr.

Howard resumed his ordinary aspect of smiling affability, and placed himself at the head of the table, beside Gräfin von Zerlitz, who had listened to the above colloquy open-mouthed, and was beginning to doubt whether her entertainer were not a man of much greater wealth and importance than she had hitherto imagined.

Linda was seated opposite to her father, with Mainwairing upon her right hand and von Oberndorf upon her left. The former, surveying his neighbour in his usual dreamy way, thought he had never seen her look so pretty before. Her white piqué dress—the work of her own fingers—fitted her perfectly; her hat, also a home production, would not have disgraced a Regent Street window; and the light blue ribbon which encircled her neck was fresh and unwrinkled. Linda had not studied 'How to dress on fifteen pounds a year, as a lady,' that ingenious work not having been given to the world at the time we are writing of; but I doubt whether her annual expenditure greatly exceeded the infinitesimal sum declared therein to be sufficient for a lady's yearly wants. Yet she never looked dowdy. Mainwairing was vaguely wondering why some women of obviously limited resources manage to dress better than others whose pin-money must probably reach four figures, when a question from Miss Howard roused him from his speculations.

'Did you see Miss Tower last night?' she asked.

'Indeed I did,' he replied, making a wry face. 'It was just like my luck that she should be dismounting at the door of the hotel at the exact moment when I was going in, with flannels and boating-shoes on. That kind of thing only happens to me.'

'Did you tell her where you had been?' asked Linda.

'I told her I had been out on the river. I didn't think I was bound to say that I had been to see you.'

'And was she very angry?'

'Well, I don't think she was altogether pleased. It did look a little bit rude, you know.'

'I wonder what she thought of you!'

'I don't know, I'm sure—and I don't in the least care. Let us talk about something more interesting. May I direct your attention to the fact that, as far as we have got, my prophecy about our respective companions to-day has been very nearly verified? The only point as to which I was mistaken is that I have been told off to Mamma von Zerlitz instead of to her daughter—which is scarcely an improvement.'

'Why, to whom are you talking now?' said Linda, laughing.

'Oh, to you, for the moment; but it won't last long. Your military friend will seize upon you directly we leave the table, if not before; and I sha'n't get another word with you for the rest of the day. He is looking at me now as if he would like to eat me up, body and bones, for daring to speak to you; and he is listening with all his ears to catch what I am saying. Only, he can't manage it, because I am talking too fast for him, and because he is obliged to pay some semblance of attention to that voluble young lady beside him. If you would like to see the effect of impotent wrath upon the human countenance, just give a glance at him.'

Linda turned her eyes for a second upon her left-hand neighbour, who indeed was looking like a thunder-cloud.

'How I do detest young men!' she exclaimed, irritably, drumming with her fingers upon the table. 'I thought this one was better than the rest; but he is not—not the least! He has been perfectly hateful the whole morning. Would you do me a very great favour?' she continued, bending forwards towards Mainwairing, and speaking with hurried eagerness.

'Only too proud!'

'Then will you keep beside me for the rest of the

day? We shall drive for a few miles from here, in a waggonette, I believe, so that it won't matter then; but afterwards we shall have to walk; and, unless you come to my assistance, I know I shall be left alone with him. And you can't imagine what a nuisance he is!'

'No friend ever yet applied to me for help in vain,' replied Mainwairing, gravely. 'If I had only my own inclinations to consult, I should naturally choose to devote myself to that beautiful and fascinating Countess; but, to please you, I am willing to make a sacrifice. You need feel no further anxiety on the subject. For the next six or seven hours—or even longer, if needful—I am prepared to follow you like your shadow. Is there any other way in which I can be of use to you? If you would like me to entice your young friend to the brink of the river, for instance, and gently shove him in, I shouldn't mind doing it. In fact, I should rather like it.'

'Thank you,' said Linda. 'But I don't think it will be necessary to drown him, poor fellow! After all, I ought not to mind being left alone with him; for he is very kind and pleasant. But he gets so utterly wearisome after a time!'

'You will probably say the same thing of me to-morrow.'

'No, I shall not. You are quite different. So much older than he is, for one thing.'

'I would not mind betting long odds,' said Mainwairing, in a tone of ill-disguised annoyance, 'that when you are my age, you will think yourself still young.'

'Oh, I don't call you old,' said Linda, generously. 'Only, you know, there is a difference between you and Herr von Oberndorf.'

'Well, yes; I don't mind going so far as to admit that, more particularly as you have such a prejudice against youth. At the same time, I don't want you to look upon me as a fogey.'

'I should never have thought of calling you a fogey,' said Linda.

In the meantime Herr von Oberndorf was not enjoying his breakfast at all, though the feast turned out a more satisfactory one than might have been expected, and even elicited a few words of qualified approval from Mr. Howard himself. It is doubtful, indeed, whether the infatuated youth was even aware of the nature of the dishes set before him. He partook pretty freely of them all, it is true; but those whose experience includes any knowledge of German officers will be aware that among many excellent qualities, both physical and moral, these gentlemen possess no characteristic more distinctive than that of a noble and unfailing appetite; and I am inclined to think that mere force of habit, and instinctive obedience to the behests of Nature, would have led Herr von Oberndorf to eat with equal heartiness had he been on the brink of execution, instead of being only the victim of that torture of mingled love and jealousy which every son of Adam has to pass through once or twice in the course of his earthly pilgrimage. To the same cause may be attributed a somewhat larger consumption of liquor than was quite consistent with prudence.

By the time that he had emptied the small glass of cognac which was handed to him with his black coffee, the young man's imagination —not in general a very active one—was heated to such a degree by the combined influences of wine and indignation, that he began to see prophetic visions of the most consolatory and triumphant character. In one of these he pictured himself scaling a hideous precipice to secure a flower for which Linda had thoughtlessly expressed a wish. He saw the whole party standing, pale and affrighted, watching the progress of the adventurous climber, who reaches his prize, seizes it, and, descending rapidly, presents it, with a bow, to the agitated Fräulein, while the Englishman, too cowardly to attempt himself such

a feat, sinks discomfited into the background. In another, he imagined Linda venturing too near the edge of a treacherous slope. Her foot slips—she falls, and disappears. Everyone rushes to the edge, only to find that the unfortunate girl has arrested her headlong course by grasping a tuft of brushwood. At any moment her hold may relax. Who dares imperil his life upon the chance of saving hers? It is now that the gallant von Oberndorf shows of what stuff he is made. Without a second's hesitation, he swings himself over the brink of the precipice, reaches the half-fainting maiden, and to restore her to her weeping friends is but the work of a moment. The venerable Herr Papa comes forward, with tears in his eyes, and embraces the preserver of his only child. 'The life which you have saved belongs to you,' says he, in accents broken by emotion. Again, it is the poor creature, Mainwairing, who, thrusting himself forward, with his usual officiousness, to help Miss Howard into the ferry-boat, loses his balance, falls into the river, and is being rapidly swept away to inevitable death by the current. Von Oberndorf has his coat and boots off in no time. He casts himself into the stream, rescues the drowning man, and with a few powerful strokes, brings him to shore, a sorry, dripping figure. 'How can I thank you for your courageous presence of mind?' asks the miserable man, through his chattering teeth. 'By refraining, for the future, from obtruding your attentions where they are neither wanted nor appreciated,' responds the magnanimous rival, with crushing, but deserved severity.

Unluckily for the poor dreamer, the day brought with it no realisation of these bright possibilities. No striking incident marked the drive up the sunny valley from Schandau; and though, in the course of the subsequent ascent through budding woods and over stony paths, Miss Howard collected a bouquet of gigantic dimensions, the flowers of which it was composed were

culled from the most dispiritingly accessible spots, and it was Mainwairing who gathered them for her. Nor did the young lady show any disposition to imperil life or limb by an incautious approach to dangerous places. The incident of the ferry-boat remained, to be sure, for the end of the day; but this had from the first appeared an occurrence of doubtful probability, and seemed still more so when the champagne of which it had been born had had time to disperse itself over its imbiber's system.

Early in the afternoon the object of the expedition was reached. This was the Kuhstall, a large natural arch or tunnel on the hill-side, which derives its name from a tradition that, during the troublous time of the Thirty Years' War, the peasantry used to drive their cattle thither, for safety from the marauders. It is one of the lions of the Saxon Switzerland, and is a favourite spot with excursionists. Looking out from the cool shade of its recesses, you discover a wide landscape beneath you—woodlands, hills, valleys and rocks melting away into blue distance—the whole enclosed in a semi-circular frame of rugged stone. It is a comfortable stage-box, as it were, provided by beneficent Nature for such of her admirers as are short of breath, or not so young as they once were. Gräfin von Zerlitz, to whom the ascent had been pain and grief, sank upon a bench, with an enormous sigh of contentment, as soon as she set foot within this haven of rest, and began to fan her heated brow with a pocket-handkerchief, the size of a table napkin, while her daughter produced from her pocket a piece of embroidery, and set to work upon it, emitting from time to time an ejaculation of '*Wunderschön!*' or '*Riezend!*' in the plaintive sing-song accents by which German ladies are accustomed to express their appreciation of the picturesque.

They were easily satisfied, these good-natured people, and not prone to take offence. Fräulein von Zerlitz did not consider herself neglected because neither of the

younger men of the party had addressed a word to her since breakfast. She was very well contented to sit beside her mother, to breathe the fresh air, and listen to Mr. Howard's somewhat antiquated gallantries. She laughed a little at these, as she bent over her *Stickerei*, and thought her entertainer eccentric but very amusing.

Meanwhile Herr von Oberndorf had seated himself on the stone parapet at the mouth of the cavern, and had turned his back to the company. He looked so sad and solitary that Linda's compassion was aroused, and she thought she would go and talk to him for a little. He did not move at her approach, and peeping over his shoulder, Linda perceived that he was busy tracing with a pencil upon the soft stone, which already bore the names and initials of a multitude of previous visitors, the outline of a big letter L. At this sight Linda's heart became hard again.

'What *are* you doing?' she asked, in a tone of some annoyance. 'What in the world does L. stand for?'

Herr von Oberndorf explained that his Christian name was Ludwig.

'Oh!' said Linda, not quite satisfied with this announcement. She made no further effort at conversation, but remained standing where she was; for she could not help suspecting that the Freiherr might proceed to follow his L. by an H.; and, in that case, she was prepared to protest against the likelihood of his bearing the additional name of Heinrich.

The young man did not, however, commit this indiscretion. He finished his L., surveyed it critically, with his head on one side, from various points of view, and then dived into his pockets for a knife wherewith to complete his design. Apparently he had left that useful article at home; for, after a prolonged and fruitless search, he ended by drawing his sabre from his scabbard, and set to work with the point of that redoubtable weapon.

'What a touching testimony to the advance of universal peace!' murmured Mainwairing, who, true to his engagement, had stationed himself at Linda's elbow. 'One has heard of swords being converted into ploughshares, but it never occurred to me before that they might be made serviceable as penknives. The Saxon army, it seems, can turn its weapons to some account after all.'

The remark was made in a low tone, but not low enough to escape the ear of the person to whom it related. He wheeled round with his handsome young face ablaze with anger. 'The Saxon army,' said he, 'is quite so ready to fight as the English army, sir.'

'I am sure of that,' answered Mainwairing, politely; 'and I don't doubt either your courage or your skill. All I meant to say was that, under existing circumstances, you are not very likely to have an opportunity of displaying either.'

'I beg your pardon, sir,' returned the other,—(what he said was 'I bake your barton;' but it is doubtful whether a strictly phonetic rendering of Herr von Oberndorf's English would add to the comfort of the reader)—'I beg your pardon. Before the year is over there is good chance that we will have war mit Prussia; and then you will see that we can use our sworts as good as whoever you please.'

'Well, I hope you may have war, if you wish it; but I don't see much prospect of it myself,' replied Mainwairing, ignorant of the approaching catastrophe of Königgrätz.

'And in the meantime,' continued the irate German, 'if I choose to carve a name mit my sabre, I do not think it is the business of anybody but myself.'

'Certainly not,' acquiesced Mainwairing, imperturbably.

'Then, sir, you have no reason to laugh at me.'

'My dear sir, I am not laughing,' began Mainwair-

ing; but Linda twitched his sleeve, and drew him away before he could finish his sentence.

'Don't tease him,' she said. 'He is put out, poor fellow, because we have left him alone so long. Go and talk to Fräulein von Zerlitz for a little, while I get him into good humour again.'

Mainwairing shrugged his shoulders, and sauntered away obediently; and Linda seated herself beside the offended warrior, whom she had no great difficulty in restoring to equanimity. He had quite recovered his usual spirits long before he had put the finishing touch to his letter L, which was pronounced by Miss Howard to be a very successful piece of work, and which visitors to the Kuhstall may inspect and judge of for themselves at the present day, unless somebody has scratched it out.

Gladly would the pacified von Oberndorf have prolonged so pleasant an interview; but, in course of time, Mr. Howard pulled out his watch, remembered that a considerable distance intervened between the Kuhstall and Schandau, and declared that it was time to make a move.

'If we want to catch the steamer for Dresden, we must be off,' said he. 'Come along, Linda; make haste!'

And, standing politely aside to let the ladies pass out first, Mr. Howard gently pushed Mainwairing in front of him, and linked his arm firmly within that of the young German, who was not a little surprised at this friendly demonstration.

'Can it be that the Herr Papa understands my wishes, and is favourable to them?' he wondered. His heart began to thump at the idea. Poor youth! He no more saw that Mr. Howard's object was to bring about a *tête-à-tête* between Mainwairing and Linda than he was aware that the knowing old gentleman had made inquiries about his (von Oberndorf's) private fortune, had weighed him in the balance against the son

of Sir George Mainwairing, with only one precarious life between him and a fine estate, and had found him wanting.

Thanks, however, to the steepness of the path, which rendered walking arm-in-arm a process of extreme difficulty and discomfort, Herr von Oberndorf effected his escape by-and-by, and joined the rest of the party. He did not contrive again to obtain undisputed possession of Linda's ear; but it was at least some satisfaction to him to observe that his rival was not more fortunate; for Miss Howard now chose to devote herself exclusively to the Gräfin von Zerlitz, and never quitted the old lady's side till the carriage was once more in sight.

A waggonette is not a vehicle well adapted for purposes of confidential intercourse; therefore von Oberndorf attempted nothing of the kind during the return drive to Schandau; but when Linda had seated herself, a little apart from the others, on board the steamer, he thought he saw his opportunity, and slipped into the vacant place beside her. It was true that the inevitable and obtrusive Englishman lay stretched on a rug at her feet; but he was smoking a cigar and contemplating the sky, and seemed too much absorbed in his own reflections to offer any serious impediment to conversation.

In truth, Mainwairing displayed no inclination to interrupt the flirtation—if flirtation it were—which ensued. He listened to the fresh young voices above his head rising and falling through the beating of the paddle-wheels, and glanced up, from time to time, at the German's handsome, beardless face with a certain feeling of pity and complacent superiority.

'Poor devil!' he thought, 'he is hard hit—and no wonder! So should I have been, I daresay, ten years ago. Ah, well! one is only once young. At my age a man wants something more than a pretty face and an amiable disposition; he wants connection, or fortune, or some other substantial bait to tempt him into matri-

mony. I wonder whether she really cares about that good-looking, thick-skulled young cub ? I should hope not; for really he isn't good enough for her. She certainly is one of the prettiest girls I ever saw in all my life; clever too, and kind-hearted. A man might do worse, if he had money enough to be able to please himself, and didn't mind an objectionable father-in-law. In me, of course, it would be simply idiotic to think of such a thing. And yet——. But I suppose she wouldn't take me in any case. She seems to put me upon about the same footing as her father; which has its conveniences, though it is scarcely flattering.

With these and other disconnected thoughts Mainwairing was so much taken up that he never once opened his lips between Schandau and Dresden. The steamer hurried swiftly down with the stream, through winding defiles, and past cosy white villages and yellow cliffs and overhanging pine woods, and so out to the broad plain where the towers and spires of Dresden rose, fired by the sunset

Here the Frau Gräfin's antiquated carriage, with its ill-groomed horses, and coachman clad in threadbare livery and peaked cap, was awaiting the arrival of its mistress. The three ladies and Mr. Howard installed themselves therein, and, having made their adieux to Mainwairing and von Oberndorf, were presently lumbering away, at a slow jog-trot, over the stones.

And now an incident occurred which, though it appeared trifling enough at the time, proved subsequently productive of unpleasant consequences to more than one of the persons with whom this history is concerned. Mainwairing, who had remained, for a second or two, gazing absently after the Gräfin's retreating coach, turned sharply round on his heel, forgetful of the vicinity of the young officer, and, catching his leg on the latter's trailing sabre, came near to falling headlong on the ground.

'Confound it!' he exclaimed, rubbing his shin.

Then he added, with a smile, 'I seem fated to fall foul of your sword to-day.'

The words were spoken thoughtlessly, and without any evil intention; but von Oberndorf, in his readiness to take offence at anything the Englishman might say or do, really believed the whole thing had been done on purpose. He turned white with anger, and drew himself up to his full height.

'Berhaps, sir,' said he, 'you shall find my swort yet more in your way before you have done mit me.'

And with that he wheeled about, and marched off majestically—left-right, left-right—as if he had been on parade.

Mainwairing watched him for a moment with mingled surprise and amusement, and then sauntered away towards the Hôtel Bellevue, and forgot his existence.

CHAPTER V

MAINWAIRING GETS INTO TROUBLE

The violin which lay in its case in the corner of the drawing-room at Blasewitz was not the only instrument of its kind possessed by Mainwairing. He had two others in Dresden, one of which was intrusted to the keeping of Herr Messner, his instructor, while the third he kept in his room at the hotel, and was in the habit of practising upon, for an hour or more, every day, after breakfast, to the delight of such of his neighbours as were of a musical turn, and, it must be confessed, to the no small annoyance of the rest.

On the morning after the Schandau expedition, Mainwairing was beginning to tune up as usual, when a waiter brought him a limp glazed card, on which was engraved, in sloping characters, surrounded by flourishes, the name of *Graf von Podewitz-Seeburghausen*. 'Beg the gentleman to come in,' said he; and while he was

still studying the card, and wondering who his poly-syllabic visitor might be, the door was thrown open, and an officer, dressed in full uniform, with twinkling eyes and a formidable blonde moustache, entered.

Mainwairing recognised him at once as a merry, good-natured little fellow whom he had met, some weeks before, at Mr. Howard's, and advanced, holding out his hand, which the other somehow did not seem to notice.

'I am very sorry, Mr. Mainwairing,' said the new-comer, bowing profoundly, and speaking with almost tragic solemnity, 'that I have to visit you upon a most unpleasant business.'

'Indeed!' said Mainwairing, raising his eyebrows slightly. 'Please sit down. And what may this un-pleasant business be?'

The Count's jolly round face wore an expression of portentous gravity.

'I am sent,' said he, 'by my friend, Herr von Oberndorf, who says you will understant, after what has passed yesterday, that he desires satisfaction from you.'

'A challenge!' exclaimed Mainwairing, laughing outright. 'How absurd! Why, I have no quarrel with Herr von Oberndorf. Certainly, I accidentally stumbled over his sword last night, and I recollect now that he seemed rather unreasonably irritated at the time; but, upon my word, the impression left on my mind was rather that he owed me an apology than that I should offer him any. However, I am willing to say that I am sorry for my awkwardness, if that will satisfy him. Do sit down.'

Herr von Podewitz shook his head, and remained standing.

'It will be more regular that I discuss this with any friends you may please to name, sir,' said he. 'I shall be very glad if the affair can arranche itself with-out ploodshed; but I must warn you that Herr von Oberndorf will not be content that you apolochise only

for the small matter you speak of. There is more behind,' said the little officer, gravely.

'Stupid young idiot!' thought Mainwairing. 'He will bring Linda's name into this foolish business, and get her talked about all over the town. He deserves a good sound thrashing!' Then he said aloud, rather more coldly:

'I am not aware of any other cause of dispute. But as your friend seems determined to quarrel, I suppose one excuse will do as well as another. I don't know much about the etiquette in matters of this kind—we don't fight duels in England, as perhaps you know—but probably I had better refer you to some friend of mine.'

Herr von Podewitz intimated that this would be the proper course. Mainwairing paused in some perplexity. He had very few acquaintances in Dresden whom he could ask to act for him in such a case, and he was particularly anxious that the fracas should, if possible, be kept from reaching the ears of the gossiping English colony. In this extremity he bethought him of a certain M. Lepkine, *attaché* to the Russian Embassy, and a skilful violinist, with whom he had become tolerably intimate at the house of Herr Messner.

'I will write to M. Lepkine, one of the Russian *attachés*,' he said. 'Perhaps you may be already acquainted with him?'

Herr von Podewitz bowed assent.

'I will write and ask him to receive you at the Russian chancellerie at twelve o'clock to-morrow. Will that suit you?'

'Perfectly,' replied the little Count, and, bowing once more, withdrew.

'So I am going to fight a duel,' thought Mainwairing, when he was alone again. 'How very ridiculous! And, at the same time, how excessively unpleasant! Of course I shall get shot, or run through the body, if the thing takes place. It is a remarkable fact

that I always do get the worst of it in everything. I wonder, now, whether I can't get out of it in some way.'

Mainwairing debated this question, with the help of a pipe, for a quarter of an hour, and finally felt compelled to answer it in the negative. He might, no doubt, decline altogether to meet his adversary, on the ground that duelling has become obsolete among Englishmen; but he knew that such a course would assuredly cause him to be branded as a coward by the whole of his German acquaintance, and he was not philosophical enough to contemplate that eventuality with indifference. Moreover, he had virtually shut himself off already from adopting any such line of conduct by referring Herr von Podewitz to his Russian friend. There was obviously a second alternative. It was sufficiently evident that an assurance on the part of the Englishman that he harboured no pretensions to the hand of Miss Howard would prevail upon Herr von Oberndorf to withdraw his challenge. But Mainwairing decided at once that he would say nothing of that kind. He was determined that in no case would he allow Linda's name to be brought into the quarrel; and this resolution was uppermost in his mind when he sat down and wrote the following note:—

'Hôtel Bellevue, April 1866.

'My dear Lepkine,

'I scraped the skin off the shin of my left leg, yesterday afternoon, tumbling over the sword of a young officer—von Oberndorf by name—and, in pursuance, I presume, of the custom of this enlightened country, he has sent a friend to me, this morning, with a challenge in due form. I hope you will not think I have taken too great a liberty in referring this young man to you, and requesting him to call upon you at twelve o'clock to-morrow. His name is von Podewitz, and he says he knows you.

'I am entirely ignorant of the ordinary course of

procedure in matters of this kind; but I suppose that, in the event of your kindly consenting to act for me, some conversation will take place between you and Herr von Podewitz as to the origin of the quarrel, and that you will be required to make some apology or concession on my behalf. If so, please say that I am ready to apologise for any clumsiness I may have displayed—I have already done so, in fact—but that I absolutely decline to discuss any other real or fancied grievance that Herr von Oberndorf may have against me; and should Herr von Podewitz begin to hint at anything of the kind, I shall be much obliged if you will cut him short at the outset.

'If you have no other engagement, will you dine with me to-morrow evening, and let me know the upshot of your interview?

'I am taking it for granted, you see, that you will be good-natured enough to see me through this stupid business; but I don't know that I have any right to expect that you should put yourself to so much inconvenience.

'The bearer will wait for a reply.

'Very truly yours,

'GEORGE MAINWAIRING.'

Within an hour Mainwairing received M. Lepkine's answer:—

'Enchanted, my dear Mainwairing, to be of service to you in any way! Let your von Podewitz come and find me to-morrow; I shall be ready to receive him. It seems to me that I know his name, and also that of the other; but in this country all the officers are so much alike that it is difficult to distinguish one from another even when they are present, much more when their backs are turned.

'But what droll instructions you send me, my dear friend! What; you trip upon a gentleman's sword—he challenges you—you apologise—and the affair

continues? You do not understand, then, that I cannot allow my principal to fight without any reason? I do not ask for your confidence; but you have placed me in a difficult position.

'*Enfin!* I will do my best to carry out your wishes. If I can persuade this young man to accept your excuses, so much the better. If not, we will teach him a little lesson that shall keep him in bed for a week or two to think over his impertinence.

'I shall present myself at the Hôtel Bellevue to-morrow punctually at the dinner hour.

'Always yours,

'L.'

'All very fine,' muttered Mainwairing, as he thrust this missive into his pocket; 'but it seems to me that, if one of us is to be sent to bed, it is not likely to be von Oberndorf, who has probably been fighting duels, more or less, ever since he left school. What a nuisance the whole thing is!'

For the present, at all events, he determined that he would dismiss the disagreeable subject from his mind, and proceed to occupy his day as he had intended to do before Herr von Podewitz's unexpected visit. So he took his way down to the river-side, and, jumping into his boat, pulled up to Blasewitz, as usual.

On his arrival there he found Linda at the piano, and her father seated in a cane chair outside the open window, smoking a cigarette, and reading 'Galignani.' Mr. Howard had discovered in his paper a mysteriously-worded announcement relating to the disclosure of certain scandals in high life, and was chuckling over it gleefully.

'I say, look here,' he whispered, catching Mainwairing by the elbow, and thrusting the interesting paragraph under his nose. 'Here's a pretty kettle of fish! I always said that marriage would end badly. Know the Princess?'

'I have met her in Paris,' answered Mainwairing.

'So have I.' (And so, indeed, he had—in the Bois de Boulogne.) 'Charming woman! Clever too—uncommonly clever. But not quite clever enough to keep a secret, hey? I'll tell you what it is, Mainwairing—the Prince has got his work cut out for him. Depend upon it, he'll have half-a-dozen duels to fight before he gets to the end of this business.'

'More fool he,' said Mainwairing. 'Of all ways of revenging oneself I think duelling is the most absurd. Why on earth, because a man has done me the greatest injury in his power, am I to give him the chance of taking my life into the bargain?'

'My dear fellow,' replied Mr. Howard, grandly, 'there are situations in which a man of honour has no alternative.'

'Yes, I know that is the Continental idea; but I think we are much more sensible in England. If the Prince were an Englishman, he would simply put his wife into the Divorce Court, and there would be an end of the matter.'

'There is no divorce in France; and if there were, I doubt whether Frenchmen would ever be cold-blooded enough to accept it as a substitute for sword and fire. And I am not sure, mind you, that duelling has not its advantages even in cases of less serious offence. It keeps up the standard of manners and politeness, and so on. A man has to be upon his P's and Q's, you see, when he knows that a trifling incivility may cost him the sight of an eye or the use of a leg.'

Mainwairing shuddered involuntarily.

'People must be utter savages,' he said, 'who can't behave themselves without having pains and penalties of that kind held over their heads. Besides, I altogether deny that the system acts as you say it does. The effect of it is simply to produce a race of bullies, who, being pretty sure of their own skill with their weapons, go about the world treading on the corns of

their inoffensive neighbours, in order to gain a character for physical courage without running any risk. There is no living creature for whom I have a more complete contempt than a professed duellist.'

And having delivered himself of this harangue, with an emphasis which clearly came from the heart, Mainwairing marched into the house, leaving Mr. Howard a little astonished at his visitor's warmth.

And now the customary crash of chords and the twanging of the violin burst forth. It was impossible to peruse a newspaper with any sort of profit or comfort within a hundred yards of such a din; so Mr. Howard took up his chair, and sauntered away to a more distant part of the garden, whence he did not emerge again till after Mainwairing had left.

There was more honest practising than conversation that day. Mainwairing was in one of his silent moods, and either left Miss Howard's remarks unanswered or replied to them so totally at random that she gave up talking to him at last as a bad job. But when the time came for him to take his leave, he kept Linda's hand in his rather longer than was his wont, or than the occasion seemed to warrant.

'Good-bye, Miss Howard,' he said. 'I sha'n't be able to come to you to-morrow, I'm afraid.'

'Sha'n't you?' said Linda. 'How tiresome! But you will come the next day?'

'Yes, if I can. Good-bye.'

And so he walked away quickly towards the river, sighing as he went; for he thought, 'Perhaps I shall never see Linda or Blasewitz again.'

Then the ludicrous side of the situation presented itself to him, and he winced and coloured at his own sentimentality, not being a man who could bear to be ridiculous, even though there were no one to laugh at him but himself.

Mainwairing was as brave a man as another, but he was of a somewhat nervous and irritable tempera-

ment; and it must be confessed that the next twenty-four hours—or, at least, those during which he was not asleep, or playing the violin—seemed to him to pass very slowly. He was prepared to take his chance of any ill-luck that fate might have in store for him; but he did not like being kept in suspense. It was, therefore, with unmixed gratification that he bailed the approach of the dinner hour, and dressed himself to receive his Russian friend.

M. Lepkine made his appearance with exemplary exactitude. He was a short, smooth-shaven man, whose age it would have required a skilled physiognomist to determine. He was a great favourite in society, particularly among ladies, with whom his musical and histrionic talents, his smart sayings and inexhaustible flow of gossip, made him always a welcome guest. He spoke English, and several other languages, with perfect fluency and scarcely any accent; but he affected the French style of dress and manners, wore his fair hair cut short *à la brosse*, had very white hands and teeth, a perpetual smile, half jesuitical, half debonnair, on his lips, and was an unmistakable Russian, from the crown of his head to the sole of his foot.

'Eh bien, mon cher,' said he, taking his host's hand in one of his own, while he patted him gently on the shoulder with the other, 'I have arranged your affair for you.'

'What! is there to be no duel, after all?' asked Mainwairing, unable to keep his features from relaxing into a slight smile of satisfaction.

'Certainly there is to be a duel! It was that that you wanted, was it not?'

'Oh, all right!' said Mainwairing, turning away towards the dinner-table. 'By all means let us cut one another's throats if it is necessary. But why you should have thought that I *wanted* to do anything so senseless I don't know.'

'Why, did not you tell me as much in your note? I was to offer an apology, which you seemed to know in advance would not be accepted, and I was to refuse to listen to another word upon the subject.'

'Ah, well,' said Mainwairing, 'I suppose there was no help for it. Now let us hear all about your interview.'

The Russian sat down, spread his napkin over his knees, and laughed to himself, as at some diverting reminiscence.

'He is a good boy, that von Podewitz,' said he, 'but a funny fellow. Everything passed, at first, exactly as I had expected. I began by offering excuses, on your part, for your having accidentally stumbled against his friend. "Yes," said he; "Mr. Mainwairing has already apologised to me himself. But that will not do." "Will not do?" said I. "And pray, sir, what more do you want?" Then he began a long rambling story about English insolence, and the honour of the Saxon army, and goodness knows what else, and ended at last by saying that he had a proposition to make. "A la bonne heure," said I. "What is your proposition?" And what do you think it was?'

'I don't know, I'm sure.'

'Why, nothing more nor less than that you should leave Dresden within a week, and pledge your word not to return here for a year's time.'

'Cool!' remarked Mainwairing, laconically.

'Naturally,' resumed M. Lepkine, 'I laughed in his face. "It only remains now, I think," said I, "for us to arrange the place and time of meeting." I had no difficulty with him after that. We fixed upon a meadow that I know of near Tharandt. (Have you seen Tharandt and the Plauensche Grund? A charming country!) The day after to-morrow, early in the morning, is the time agreed upon. There are some little irregularities about the affair; for instance, there

should have been two seconds on each side, but we decided to waive that, for the sake of greater secrecy.'

'For Heaven's sake,' interposed Mainwairing, 'let us have as few witnesses as possible.'

'Just so. I knew that would be your wish. Then as to the choice of arms. We both claimed that; and for a time it seemed as if we should not be able to come to an understanding; but I stood firm, and at last he conceded the point. *Apropos*, what weapon do you fancy?'

'It would be difficult to say with which I should be most awkward,' answered Mainwairing. 'Can I choose anything I like?'

'Any recognised weapon.'

'Then I should propose that we attack one another with life-preservers,' said Mainwairing, with grim jocularity. 'That is about the only instrument that I am likely to have the advantage of him with.'

'*Eh, mon pauvre bon*, it is not to preserve your life that he desires, this bloodthirsty Saxon. Are you a good shot?'

'Pretty well. I don't think I am much good with a pistol.'

'The rapier, then? I could show you a pretty *coup*. *Une—deux!—crac!*'

And M. Lepkine, catching up a fork, made two rapid passes with it and spitted an imaginary foe.

'Very clever, I daresay,' said Mainwairing, smiling. 'Only, as I have not had a foil in my hand half-a-dozen times in the course of my life, I am afraid it is not likely to be of much service to me.'

'*Tiens, tiens!* You understand neither sword nor pistol, and you provoke a quarrel. Permit me to offer you my compliments on your courage.'

'But I tell you I didn't provoke the quarrel. Surely I have shown that sufficiently by apologising.'

The Russian shrugged his shoulders.

'I presumed that your apology was not meant to

be serious,' he answered. 'You are pleased to surround yourself with mystery, my good Mainwairing. Never mind. I am the least inquisitive of men. Well, which is it to be—pistol or sword?'

'Which do you advise?'

'In your place I should choose the sword. A bullet through the lungs—that, you see, is a serious matter; but a thrust with a sword in the fleshy part of the arm can do no great harm to anybody. And you cannot be touched in any other place, if you only keep cool and steady. For the rest, I will take you to the Salle d'Armes to-morrow; there will always be time to give you a little instruction.'

'Thanks, very much. And, by-the-by, Lepkine, I have a favour to beg of you.'

'You have but to speak.'

'Will you, like a good fellow, refrain from saying a word about this affair to your friends? I have reasons for wishing it to be kept quiet.'

'I am mute,' said M. Lepkine, closing his lips firmly, and tapping them with his forefinger.

Mainwairing eyed him a little doubtingly.

'Are you sure,' he said, 'that you can keep a secret?'

'He asks me whether I can keep a secret! I, a diplomat and a Russian! But for what, then, do you take me?'

And M. Lepkine assumed an air of such affronted innocence, that Mainwairing felt ashamed of his ignoble suspicions.

'I take you for a very good-natured fellow,' he said. 'And if I had not trusted you do you think I should have asked you to help me out of this scrape? I shall be very much obliged if you will give me a few hints to-morrow; but in the meantime let us forget, if we can, that such things as duels exist.'

So very little more was said upon the subject that evening; but the next day M. Lepkine, true to his

promise, took his friend to the fencing school, and after a short encounter with the foils was able to prove to him, in the most conclusive and satisfactory manner, that, had the combat been a real one, he must have been killed ten times over in as many minutes.

'Alas, my poor friend!' he exclaimed at last, 'you are of a clumsiness beyond belief. As for attempting to touch your man, you must not even think of it. What you have to do is quite simple. Keep always well behind your sword; never take your eye off your adversary's face; don't allow yourself to be flurried; and perhaps, if you have good luck, you may get off with nothing worse than a scratch.'

With these reassuring words to comfort him, Mainwairing returned to his hotel, and, going to bed early, that he might wake up fresh in the morning, was soon sleeping as soundly as condemned criminals are said to do upon the eve of their execution.

CHAPTER VI

THE DUEL

Mainwairing woke with a start out of a sound sleep, and saw in the dim, uncertain light of the early morning a figure bending over him.

'Who is that?' he asked drowsily, turning over and yawning.

'It is I—Lepkine,' replied the figure. 'Wake up; it is time.'

These words acted upon the person to whom they were addressed with all the pleasing effect of a sudden cold shower-bath. He sat up in his bed and rubbed his eyes silently, wishing from the bottom of his heart that he could lie down again and forget all about his unpleasant position.

Of all hours of the twenty-four surely that chill

grey one which immediately precedes the dawn is the most melancholy—that hour in which the earth lies brooding under a stillness more oppressive than that of the night; in which cold mists rise from the ground, and the stars grow faint overhead, and souls which have been struggling to escape from their mortal prison since evening most commonly take their flight. I never yet met with anyone who could assume or preserve a cheerful aspect at this particular hour of the day; and I imagine that few people who, for reasons of their own, have caused themselves to be roused before sunrise have ever failed, at the first moment of awakening, to execrate their folly in so doing. What cub-hunting can be exciting enough, what mountain-climbing sufficiently exhilarating, one asks oneself at such a moment, to atone for the miserable discomfort it entails? If only shame did not forbid one to turn over and go to sleep once more! And if the pursuit of pleasure appear inadequate to make up for so great a sacrifice, how deplorable must be the mental condition of a man who opens his unwilling eyes upon the cheerless prospect of a long cold drive, and a duel at the end of it!

M. Lepkine, warned, it may be, by previous experience, had avoided this bad moment by not going to bed at all. It happened that he had been engaged to a ball on the preceding evening, and there he had remained up to the not very advanced hour at which such entertainments close in Germany; after which he had persuaded some kindred spirits to join him in a game of baccarat, and had kept them at it till their exhausted systems could hold out no longer. Then, being a man whom long habit had rendered almost independent of sleep, he had betaken himself to the Hôtel Bellevue, and now stood by Mainwairing's bedside, looking a little red about the eyelids, but not otherwise the worse for his vigil.

'Get up and dress yourself, my friend,' said he,

briskly. ‘I will wait for you in the next room. We are going to have a delicious morning.’

‘All very well for you to talk about a delicious morning!’ growled Mainwairing, *sotto voce.* ‘*You* are not going to have your eye poked out with the sharp point of a sword. *You* are not going to make an exquisite fool of yourself for the amusement of a couple of barbarous young ruffians. Much I care whether I am to be assassinated in fine weather or rain!’

But as soon as the door had closed upon the Russian, and he had jumped into his bath, he felt better. The shock of the cold water braced his nerves and revived his spirits. As he rubbed himself vigorously with a rough towel he was sensible of such a degree at least of relief as we have all experienced on being summoned by the dentist’s grave butler to leave the choice literature of the waiting-room and enter that dread chamber where the operator, instrument in hand, is ready to welcome us. It is not pleasant to have a tooth drawn, but if go it must, the sooner it goes the better. This excessively foolish and uncalled-for duel had to be gone through, and, that being so, Mainwairing was glad to think that it would be over in a few hours.

It was more the absurdity than the danger of the coming encounter that disturbed him. A hundred years ago, he soliloquised, nothing would have been more usual than that two gentlemen should fall out over a question of jealousy, and nothing more natural than that they should settle their dispute forthwith at the point of the rapier. The propriety of such a course would have been universally recognised; nor would the lady concerned have felt any resentment if she had chanced to hear of it. But nowadays the customs of society are changed. There is no longer any glory to be got out of hostile meetings, nor, indeed, anything at all except annoyance, ridicule, compromising of innocent people, the possibility of fine or imprisonment, and the certainty of a doctor’s bill. Mainwairing did not

imagine that he ran much risk of losing his life; still less had he any intention of taking that of his antagonist; but when he reached this point in his reflections he made up his mind that, so far as in him lay, he would strive to be the giver and not the receiver of the inevitable sword-thrust.

'After all,' he thought, as he stood brushing his hair before the glass, 'one man, with a long arm and a sword at the end of it, ought to be pretty nearly a match for another'—forgetting that the use of a rapier is as much a matter of skill and education as the use of a billiard-cue or a racquet-bat, and that in the game of duelling, as in all other games, a novice is entirely at the mercy of a practised player.

His toilet completed, he entered the little sitting-room which adjoined his bedroom, and there found M. Lepkine outstretched upon three chairs and smoking a cigarette. On the table beside him stood a huge flask and the half of a roll, on which lay a slice of galantine. M. Lepkine pointed to these provisions with modest pride.

'You see I have not forgotten you,' said he. 'Last night at the ball I said to myself, "What the devil! that poor Mainwairing will starve, for he will get no breakfast before he starts from the hotel." And so, when nobody was looking, I went to the supper-table and slipped the refreshment that you see into my pocket. If I have not brought you a cold turkey and a *pâté de Strasbourg* it is because evening coats of the present day are made to fit too tightly to the figure. If I had had my paletot on, for example, I should have been able to offer you a greater choice. *Enfin! A la guerre comme à la guerre!* This flask contains good old Burgundy, which will warm your heart and your stomach. Eat and drink while you can; you will not fight the worse for it.'

'Very thoughtful of you, I am sure,' said Mainwairing, setting to work upon the galantine. 'I was

just beginning to wonder how I should get on without breakfast. By-the-by, Lepkine——'

'Well?'

'I don't suppose anything very tragic is likely to come of this business; still it is as well to be prepared for all contingencies.'

The Russian nodded.

'And in case anything should happen to me, the best thing you could do would be to telegraph to my father. I have left his address in my desk, where you will also find money enough for any expenses that may arise.'

'Good—good; depend upon me. But you need fear nothing, if only you will remember what I told you and efface yourself behind your sword. No other instructions?'

'Nothing else, thanks.'

'No message to anyone in Dresden? To any lady, for instance?' asked the Russian, with a quick side-glance. 'I am discreet; I ask no questions; but you conceive, my dear friend, that I can hardly suppose Herr von Oberndorf wants to banish you from Saxony for fear you should tumble over his sabre again. Somewhere or other there must be a lady who has caused this mischief.'

'There is nothing of the kind,' answered Mainwairing, hastily. 'The whole thing has been the most utter nonsense from beginning to end. It is not essential that there should be a lady at the bottom of every quarrel, is it?'

'Assuredly not. And in your case it is easy to believe that no lady is concerned; for I believe you know none in Dresden, except that pretty compatriot of yours who lives out at Blasewitz—I have forgotten her name.'

'Miss Howard, I suppose you mean?'

'Howard, yes—to be sure! Von Oberndorf is also among her friends—how odd!'

'Shall we go now, if you are ready?' said Mainwairing, a little impatiently.

'As you please,' said the Russian, smiling, and enveloping the evening costume which he still wore in a fur-lined coat. He moved towards the door, followed by Mainwairing; and the two, stealing softly down the staircase, were soon standing on the wide, deserted Place in the keen air of the morning. A few steps brought them to the corner where M. Lepkine's light phaeton, with its wiry iron-grey horses, was waiting in charge of a groom. The man touched his hat to his master, and looked at the stranger with a mixture of curiosity and amusement which did not escape the latter's notice.

'He knows all about it, and be hanged to him!' thought poor Mainwairing, as he seated himself in the phaeton and drew the rug over his knees. 'And a precious fool he thinks me! One thing is tolerably clear; however the affair may end, there is very little prospect of its being kept a secret long. Even if Lepkine holds his tongue—which is doubtful—this rascally groom will be sure to entertain his friend with a circumstantial account of the fray. Then there is the porter of the hotel, who will tell his wife, who will tell the washerwoman, who will tell everybody's servants, who will tell their masters and mistresses; and I shall be universally sniggered at. It really is very hard lines.'

And then Mainwairing fell to wondering, as he had frequently done during the last two days, whether Linda would be among the sniggerers. Upon the whole he was inclined to hope that she would not. She had too kind a heart, he said to himself, to make merry over the misfortunes of her friends; and had she not distinctly told him that she included him in that category? Vexed she might be, or angry, or frightened, or sorry, but surely, surely she would not laugh.

Nevertheless Mainwairing was so far from feeling

any certainty with regard to this point that he thought of very little else, throughout the long drive, than of how Miss Howard might best be kept in ignorance of the encounter which she had unconsciously provoked.

The phaeton clattered over the stones, waking the echoes in the tenantless streets, and rousing many a heavy-headed citizen from his morning slumber, whirled out into the open country, where the first rays of the sun were falling aslant over the dewy fields, and birds were twittering in the hedgerows, and so hurried on towards Plauen and the picturesque valley known to tourists. M. Lepkine, who possessed a fine flow of easy conversation, and was anxious that his principal should appear upon the ground in good spirits, beguiled the way with a series of piquant anecdotes and with many sarcastic criticisms upon the leaders of Dresden society, of which it is to be feared that the wit was utterly thrown away. For his absent-minded companion had no ears but for the imaginary tones of a full, soft, girlish voice, and no eyes but for the unseen face which corresponded to them. He answered at random when he answered at all, and maintained a demeanour of such persistent gravity that when the ruined castle of Tharandt, perched on its rocky eminence, came in sight, the Russian deemed it advisable to speak a few words of remonstrance.

'Come, come, my friend!' said he. 'Let us try to look cheerful, whatever we may feel. With your dolorous countenance one would say you were going to your own funeral. We shall arrive in a minute. For the love of Heaven get up a smile, if it were only to show these Germans that you are not afraid of them.'

'Eh?' said Mainwairing, rousing himself. 'I'm all right, old fellow; and I'm not in the least afraid. I don't see much to laugh at; but I will endeavour to produce a grin, if you think it essential. Are we nearly there?'

'Within five minutes' walk,' replied M. Lepkine.

'The others are already waiting for us, you see,' he added, pointing with his whip to a droschke, drawn up by the wayside, whose driver started round at the sound of the approaching wheels.

'Another witness!' thought Mainwairing, despairingly, as the Russian pulled up behind the other vehicle, and, handing the reins to his groom, swung himself to the ground.

'*Allons!* let us lose no time,' said M. Lepkine.

And Mainwairing, following his second through a pine-wood and over the shoulder of a rising ground, found himself in a small meadow surrounded by a belt of trees, and shut in on all sides by low hills.

Here the lanky figure of von Oberndorf and the thickset one of his friend, Herr von Podewitz, were discovered pacing leisurely to and fro, in plain clothes, and emitting clouds of tobacco-smoke, which rose straight above their heads in the still, crisp air. There was also a third person, a little fat man, in a tall hat and gold-rimmed spectacles, whom M. Lepkine presently introduced as the Herr Doctor Hirsch. The Herr Doctor bowed, observed that it was a beautiful morning, and that the day would probably be hot; and then stood smiling blandly, and passing his plump hands slowly one over the other, while a short colloquy, conducted in an undertone, took place between M. Lepkine and Herr von Podewitz, during which Mainwairing took stock of his opponent, and, with that absurdly quick perception of trifles which most people have experienced in any uncomfortable crisis in their lives, noticed how astonishingly the beauty of the human form may be enhanced by the addition of a showy uniform. In truth, Herr von Oberndorf, clothed in an ill-fitting black coat, a tight pair of yellowish-grey trousers, and a wide-awake hat, was as commonplace a looking youth as one could wish to see. Mainwairing could not repress an ungenerous wish that Miss Howard might some day see her friend in this garb.

Herr von Oberndorf, on his side, eyeing the Englishman gloomily, remarked, with much irritation, the slow faint smile which grew upon the latter's lips and the twinkle in his sleepy grey eyes. 'You shall see presently,' thought he, 'that Ludwig von Oberndorf is not one to be laughed at.'

But now further mutual inspection was arrested, for the two seconds parted from one another with a bow and approached their respective principals. Herr von Oberndorf took off his coat and waistcoat and handed them to his brother officer, and Mainwairing hastened to do likewise. In return he received a sword from M. Lepkine, together with some last words of advice, delivered in an impressive whisper.

'Keep yourself always covered by your arm; never cease to feel his sword for an instant; try to tire him out; thrust only when you are *sure* of touching. Above all, no agitation!'

Thus fortified, Mainwairing threw himself into position and crossed swords with his adversary. It did not take him long to discover his utter powerlessness to inflict any injury upon the German. There had been small need for M. Lepkine to warn him against thrusting without certainty, for what was there to thrust at? All that he saw was a handsome, slightly frowning face, with lips firmly set, peering above an arm curiously foreshortened, and a flashing line of steel, which twisted and darted hither and thither like lightning. 'It will be over in a minute,' he thought. But he gained confidence with time, and when he had successfully parried three or four lunges in carte and tierce began to hope that his chance might come, if only he waited patiently for it. He did not in the least realise that von Oberndorf was merely playing with him, as a cat does with a mouse, before giving the *coup de grâce*. He was inclined to be pleased with his own *sang froid*, and was especially careful to comply with that part of his instructions which related to the

feeling of his antagonist's blade, flattering himself that, so long as he did so, it would be impossible to get either over or under his guard.

So, though sensible that he was being steadily forced backwards, he in no wise despaired of his case, and was even congratulating himself upon his unexpected proficiency in the art of fencing, when an occurrence took place which had formed no part of the programme sketched out for him. Suddenly, without any warning, behold! Herr von Oberndorf's sword was gone! A second of utter bewilderment, during which Mainwairing's weapon described widening circles in the empty air, and, whizz! down it came from above with tremendous force, piercing Mainwairing's arm, which he had instinctively thrown up, through and through, and even inflicting a slight wound upon his chest behind it.

This, of course, put an end to the combat. M. Lepkine ran forward to the assistance of the wounded man, and insisted on supporting him, in spite of his protestations that he was perfectly well able to stand alone, while the doctor deftly rolled up his shirt-sleeve and bandaged the injured arm. Von Oberndorf, after looking at the group for a short space, as if undecided whether to join it or not, lifted his hat, without looking at anybody in particular, and moved slowly away.

The little doctor glanced indignantly at him over his shoulder.

'*Ein unverschämter Kerl!*' he exclaimed. 'I liked not that thrust. In my young days, gentlemen, I can assure you we knew of no such tricks. Truly a most dangerous thrust! It was nearer to being your death, mein Herr, than perhaps you know. And then to walk off like that, without so much as saying, "I am sorry you are hurt"—it is unheard of!'

But if Herr von Oberndorf displayed, upon this occasion, some want of humanity, his friend, von Podewitz, was less callous. The good-natured little man

came running back, after he had walked for a short distance beside his brother officer, and addressed the doctor, with a face full of sympathy and regret.

'Nothing serious, I hope, doctor?' said he.

'Serious?' returned the doctor, looking up from his bandages. 'Not in the least. The gentleman will be none the worst for his hurt.'

'So—that is well!'

'Not but what things might have fallen out very differently,' resumed the doctor. 'Where, in the Devil's name, did your friend learn that thrust?'

'Oh, as for that, the thrust was regular enough,' replied Herr von Podewitz. 'I appeal to M. Lepkine here.'

'Regular enough!' acquiesced the Russian. 'Unfortunately, I had not had time to teach my friend how to parry it; but it was nothing new.'

'New to me, at all events,' grumbled the doctor; 'and this is not the first duel I have seen, let me tell you. Perhaps it is also nothing new to do your best to kill your man and then face to the right-about and march away as coolly as if nothing had happened.'

Herr von Podewitz stroked his moustache.

'I am very sorry that anybody should be hurt,' he said, after a pause; 'but you will admit, Herr Doctor, that these gentlemen did not come out here to-day to pay one another compliments. As for me, I hate all duels.'

Then, turning to Mainwairing, and speaking in English, he added—

'I hope, sir, you will soon be yourself again, and that we shall not be worse friends on account of this unfortunate quarrel. I shall now bid you good morning, unless there is any way in which I can serve you.'

Mainwairing had hitherto taken no part in the conversation, by reason of a certain feeling of sickness and a singing in his ears, which had led him to summon up all his energies to keep himself from fainting away

—a weakness of which he would have been very sorry to be guilty. But at these last words he roused himself, and answered distinctly, though in a somewhat weak voice—

'I shall be all right, thanks. In fact, I believe I am all right now, and I don't want any assistance. But there is one thing you might do for me, if you were inclined to be very obliging.'

'And that is?' asked Herr von Podewitz, bending forward politely.

'Not to say anything about this in Dresden. I have reasons for wishing that it should not be talked about.'

'I understand,' said Herr von Podewitz. 'And you may trust me, sir. I will be careful that no report of the matter shall reach the ear of the publikum.'

And with that he solemnly saluted each member of the company in turn and retired.

Mainwairing swallowed a mouthful of brandy at the doctor's request, and, reaching M. Lepkine's phaeton without much difficulty, was soon rolling swiftly once more along the road to Dresden. All things considered, he thought he had got out of his first duel tolerably cheaply.

CHAPTER VII

MAINWAIRING RECEIVES SOME VISITORS

It is proverbial that a secret known to three people is no secret at all. Experience has shown that the third person invariably finds himself irresistibly impelled, sooner or later, to betray the confidence reposed in him; and it is obvious that, the greater the number of those cognisant of a mystery, the more speedy will be its unfolding to the world.

Indeed, when we consider the magnitude of the

self-denial required from A., when he is entreated not to mention the painful circumstance that B. has been discovered cheating at cards; or from Mrs. C., when she is begged to keep to herself the history of Mrs. D.'s scandalous flirtation with young E., the fatuity of those who try to 'hush up' such matters becomes plainly apparent. A. does not, perhaps, personally dislike B.; has no reason for wishing to injure him, and may believe in his repentance and resolution to lead a new life; nevertheless, it is as certain that he will eventually find it necessary to caution X. against sitting down to the card-table with him as it is that Mrs. C. will feel it her duty to confide Mrs. D.'s antecedents to the poor Z.'s, lest they should unwittingly drift into too close a friendship with her, and thus run the risk of moral contagion. Upon the whole, a man whose career contains some episode which he does not care to have talked about will probably act most wisely in himself communicating it to all his friends, in order that it may be the sooner forgotten.

Mainwairing, when he had received a dozen cards inscribed 'With kind inquiries,' began to realise this truth, and to regret the excess of caution which had led him to announce to the servants of the hotel that he had met with an accident which would confine him to his room for a few days, and at the same time to request them to say nothing about it to anybody.

In the afternoon of the day following that on which the duel had been fought he was sitting in his arm-chair, with a book before him, smoking a pipe and wondering disconsolately how long it would be before the news of his unlucky encounter penetrated as far as Blasewitz, when two or three sharp taps, as from a stick, rattled on his door. 'Come in,' he said, resignedly, and immediately the handle was turned, the door was pushed open by the ivory stick of a parasol, and a young lady entered. She was a tall, handsome, and very fashionably-dressed young lady,

Her costume of blue silk and white cashmere was so perfectly made that none but a captious critic could have quarrelled with it on the ground of its showiness, and her white felt hat, with its pale blue feather, suited her complexion admirably.

She was also a very self-possessed young lady, for she shut the door behind her, glanced at herself in the mirror over the fireplace, and took a chair, without waiting for any invitation to do so.

'Miss Tower!' exclaimed Mainwairing, rising in some surprise.

'Don't look so horrified,' said Miss Tower. 'Nobody saw me come up, so you won't be compromised. Mamma is out, paying a round of visits. I went with her to two houses; but after that I was so utterly done that I came home. So I thought I would just look you up, and see how you were getting on. Very improper of me, wasn't it?'

'Well—rather,' said Mainwairing, smiling.

'Yes; but if one hadn't the consolation of doing an improper thing every now and then, what use would one's life be to one? They say American girls go about with men just as they like—drive with them, and go to the opera with them, and so on, and nothing is thought of it. How glad I am I was not born an American! There is some pleasure in doing what one ought not; but I have yet to meet the man whose society would be exciting for its own sake. You, for instance, are apt to be very heavy, in spite of all your cleverness. So you are on the sick-list, are you?'

'I have met with a—an accident,' began Mainwairing.

'So I heard. And you have damaged your right arm. No more violin-playing for some time to come, eh?'

'That is the worst of it,' sighed Mainwairing. 'Goodness knows when I shall be able to hold a fiddle-

bow again! It is very kind of you to come and cheer me up. Only, if I had known, I wouldn't have filled the room with smoke.'

'My dear George,' said Miss Tower, who had risen, and was investigating the contents of the little sitting-room with some curiosity—Miss Tower occasionally took advantage of her long-standing intimacy with Mr. Mainwairing to address him by his Christian name—'My dear George,' do you suppose that I have arrived at my time of life to object to the smell of a pipe? I shouldn't mind smoking a cigarette myself, if you had such a thing by you.'

No answer being forthcoming to this suggestive remark, she resumed—

'What a jolly little room! You bachelors know how to make yourselves comfortable. You have got a piano, too, you luxurious fellow!' She seated herself upon the music-stool as she spoke, and, after striking a few chords, began to sing. Miss Tower's voice was her strong point. It was a pure contralto, neither powerful nor cultivated, but true and sweet and sympathetic—a voice whose low notes were as delicious as those of a nightingale—a voice which seemed to have lost its way and got into the wrong lungs, so little did it harmonise with the outward appearance of its owner. She sang first a plaintive Italian ballad, and then broke out with Gounod's 'Printemps,' a charming song, of which every note seems jubilant with the awakening joy and strength of spring; and so well did she render both the words and the accompaniment that Mainwairing could not refrain from drumming his heels on the floor, by way of applause—hand-clapping being, under existing circumstances, impossible to him.

'Do you think I am improving?' she asked.

'Undoubtedly. But you don't practise enough. Your voice is nothing to what it might be if you gave up a couple of hours every day to your scales.'

'I hate scales,' said Miss Tower.

'Of course you do; so does everybody: but you can no more get out your voice without them than you can row in a race without training. Your voice is like your arms and your legs: you can never discover its power till you have thoroughly exercised it.'

Here Mainwairing, having got upon one of his hobbies, proceeded to deliver a dissertation upon the art of educating the vocal organs, which, being neither novel nor interesting, may as well be omitted. It took him ten minutes to exhaust his subject, and while he was talking Miss Tower continued to run over, softly, the rippling accompaniment of her song. Then, when he had quite done, she whirled suddenly round upon her music-stool and said, in the quietest and most matter-of-fact way in the world—

'And now let us hear all about the duel.'

Mainwairing was not much taken aback. He had suspected from the first that Miss Tower's visit was not prompted solely by motives of humanity.

'If you know that there has been a duel, and that I have had a hole poked in my arm, you know about all there is to tell,' he said.

'All that you intend to tell me, you mean. Of course I know there has been a duel. When a gentleman leaves his hotel at sunrise and returns before breakfast, with his arm in a sling, and accompanied by a friend and a doctor, it doesn't require a conjuror to guess what he has been about. At the same time I think you might be a little more communicative. It wouldn't hurt you, and it might amuse me. Well—she is a pretty girl, I admit.'

'Who is a pretty girl? What on earth do you mean?' asked Mainwairing, not over civilly.

'Tell me,' resumed Miss Tower, 'are you really very much in love with her?'

There was a suppressed eagerness about the tone in which this question was put which might have suggested flattering possibilities to the mind of a self-

appreciative man. But Mainwairing only frowned and made an impatient movement.

'In love with whom? I really haven't the faintest idea of what you are talking about,' he said, mendaciously.

'Because, if you are not,' continued Miss Tower, 'the best thing you can do is to make a bolt for it. Everybody is talking about this duel, and you certainly have compromised the girl, in a way. She has got a pull over you now; and you are just the sort of lazy, selfish man who always does go to the wall on these occasions.'

'I don't think I am selfish at all,' said Mainwairing. 'And really you are running away with an altogether mistaken notion.'

'So, if you will take a friend's advice,' continued Miss Tower, ignoring the interruption, 'you will be off somewhere at once for change of air. You really want a change; you are looking wretchedly pale and pulled down. Stay here another week, and you will find yourself engaged to that girl, as sure as you sit there. And you know as well as I do that, if you married her, you would regret it to the end of your days. You had better be off while you can. Four o'clock! Good gracious! I must be off myself, or my esteemed parent will come in and want to know where I have been.'

She got up and moved towards the door.

'Take my word for it,' she said, turning round, with her hand on the lock, 'your name is Walker. Ta-ta!' And so vanished.

Mainwairing, as soon as he was left alone, began to pace up and down the room in considerable anger and vexation. He was very much put out by Miss Tower's cool impertinence; but perhaps he would not have resented it so keenly had he not felt that there was a germ of truth in her assertion that he had compromised Miss Howard—not so much by fighting with von Oberndorf as by his frequent and prolonged visits to

Blasewitz. He admitted to himself, ruefully, that these visits, which had been so innocent and pleasant in their time, ought not to be resumed. There had been a sort of tacit understanding between him and Linda that their friendship was of a purely Platonic character, and that the difference in their ages was sufficient to warrant them in passing mornings and afternoons together alone and unchaperoned. But it was evident that outsiders—such as Miss Tower, for instance—could hardly be expected to adopt a similar view of the intimacy; and Mainwairing, now that he was forced to look the thing in the face, could not but acknowledge that friendships between persons of the opposite sexes, though agreeable enough to the man, are apt, in the end, to prove very damaging to the lady.

He was too sincerely attached to Linda—so he told himself—to be indifferent as to what her little world might say or think of her. Besides this, he began to be conscious, in the depths of his heart, of certain disquieting symptoms which warned him that he might indeed do wisely to take Miss Tower's advice and leave Dresden.

The sensation of running away is never an agreeable one; but there are certain dangers which increase instead of growing less, when confronted; and the more Mainwairing thought over his position the more he became convinced that, in the present case, prudence, propriety, and possibly also duty, commanded him to beat a retreat. But not on that account was he the less sensible of the sacrifice which he had almost made up his mind to make. It was a grievous thing to him to abandon the easy, unconventional intercourse which had formed the great charm of his life in Dresden; and the dim, old-fashioned drawing-room at Blasewitz had never seemed so home-like, nor the shady garden so peaceful, nor the slight, girlish form, which was inseparably connected with both, so dear as now, when he was contemplating the casting of all these out

from his life for ever. He even went so far as to ask himself whether, when all was said and done, it would be such a fatally foolish thing to offer his hand and name to the unknown and penniless girl, and take the chance of her accepting them. For a moment he more than hesitated; but then the vision of her father, vulgar, patronising, and familiar, rose up before him and appalled him. No, he said to himself—he would go away, and he would conquer this insane longing. No doubt the task would become easy with the lapse of time. He was not a boy, to break his heart over a fancy, nor a fool, to rush headlong into a connection of which he might learn hereafter to feel ashamed. Decidedly he would never accept as a father-in-law a man who was not a gentleman.

It was at this unpropitious moment that the door was once more flung open from without, and that a waiter, standing aside to admit somebody who was following closely upon his heels, announced—'Herr Howard.'

Mr. Howard made his entrance much as if he were a *tenore robusto*, advancing, after the time-honoured fashion, to the footlights, preparatory to bellowing forth a tale of woe into the ears of an appreciative audience. He came forward with a quick, agitated step, and stretched out both his hands towards his disabled friend, while his countenance expressed the deepest sympathy and concern.

'My dear boy!' he cried; 'my dear Mainwairing, what is all this?'

'How do you do, Mr. Howard?' said Mainwairing, holding out his left hand with frigid politeness. But Mr. Howard was not to be put off in that way.

'I can't tell you how vexed I was when I heard of this affair,' he said, seating himself in an arm-chair. 'As for young von Oberndorf, I am very much displeased with him—very much displeased indeed. I am still quite in the dark as to the true facts; but,

unless he has some more satisfactory explanation to offer than I anticipate, I shall feel it my duty to forbid him my house. Of that, no doubt, I shall be better able to judge presently; but I am anxious to say at once, Mainwairing—in fact, my chief object in coming here was to say—that I am convinced that you have been in no way to blame. In no way to blame,' repeated Mr. Howard, nodding his head emphatically, as though some assertion to the contrary had been made.

There was an assumption of virtuous magnanimity about Mr. Howard's voice and manner as he made this announcement, which exasperated his hearer as much as it surprised him.

'You are very good,' he said, lifting his eyebrows slightly.

'Not at all, my dear fellow, not at all! I simply do you justice. And how are you getting on? Pretty well, I hope. Arm very painful?'

'It is nothing of any importance, thank you,' replied Mainwairing, resisting a strong inclination to show his visitor the door.

'Well, well, I hope not. And now tell me all about it.'

Thus, for the second time that afternoon, was this obnoxious request made to the unfortunate duellist. If he had not chosen to satisfy Miss Tower's curiosity he was assuredly not disposed to be more communicative with his present interrogator; and it was with visible impatience that he answered—

'Really, Mr. Howard, if you will excuse me, I should prefer talking about anything else. The subject is not a very pleasant one to me, and I am heartily sick of it.'

'Come, come, Mainwairing,' said Mr. Howard, 'this is hardly fair! All sorts of reports are going about—I don't believe them, as I told you—still, there they are: and really I think I have a right to expect that you should be more frank with me.'

'May I ask what reports?' inquired Mainwairing, quietly. But he guessed, only too accurately, at what their nature must be.

Mr. Howard dived into his pocket and produced from thence a copy of a newspaper—the *Sächsische Beobachter*—which he pushed across the table, indicating a corner of the first page with his forefinger.

'Read that,' he said.

Mainwairing took the paper, and, after a struggle with crabbed characters and involved construction, arrived, at length, at the sense of the following paragraph:—

'Yesterday occurred, in the neighbourhood of the Plauensche Grund, a determined and, only through the forbearance of one of the combatants from having a fatal termination prevented duel between the Freiherr von O——, an officer in the Royal Body-Guard, and Herr M——, an Englishman, who seemingly possesses all the eccentric qualities of his nation.

'The history of the quarrel, which we report under all reserve, is sufficiently characteristic and amusing. It would appear that Herr M——, having become enamoured of Fräulein H——, a beautiful and accomplished English lady, at present residing near Dresden, made lately to her an offer of his hand and estates, which last cover, it is said, more than half of the large county of Manchester. The lady, not wishing to decide immediately upon so momentous a matter, begged for twelve months to consider Herr M——'s proposal, and requested of him that he should absent himself during that period. Herr M—— agreed to these conditions, and took his leave.

'But now what does this original? He swears by all his gods that if he is himself to be debarred, for a year, from entering the house of his beloved, no other man shall enjoy so great a privilege. He stations himself before the lady's gates and watches.

'Seeing, a few days afterwards, the Freiherr von

O—— in the act of leaving the house of Fräulein H——'s father, he darts out and places himself in his path. "No one enters that house but by my permission!" says he. Naturally the young officer resents such interference with his liberty of action, and declines to pay any attention to Herr M——'s orders.

'"Then," says the Englishman, "one of us must die; for I have sworn that no man shall speak to Fräulein H—— before this time next year!"

'From this it has resulted that, in spite of the pacific disposition of the Freiherr von O—— and the efforts of the Herr Graf von P—— upon the one side, and of a distinguished diplomatist, well known in the fashionable society of our brilliant capital, upon the other, the above referred-to hostile encounter has taken place.

'Fortunately Herr M—— is no good swordsman. The fury of his onslaught was easily checked by his antagonist, and it is to the skill and generosity of the same that he owes it that he has now no worse misfortune to deplore than a wound in the arm, which will confine him for a short time to his hotel, and prevent him from mounting his customary guard at the gates of his beloved.

'Whether the Freiherr has profited by this circumstance to renew his visits to the fair lady we know not.'

Long before Mainwairing had arrived at the end of this outrageous narrative he had guessed at the source from whence it emanated. Ah, treacherous Lepkine! Who but he could have constructed so circumstantial a statement upon the frail foundation of von Oberndorf's absurd demand that his rival should remain a year away from Dresden? Who but he would have ventured to place such a tissue of falsehoods before that 'publikum' which Herr von Podewitz had charged himself with keeping in ignorance of the affray?

'I will never trust a Russian again as long as I live!' exclaimed Mainwairing, dashing the newspaper down upon the table, and starting to his feet in much wrath.

'A Russian?' said Mr. Howard, interrogatively. 'Well, as I said before, I don't in the least blame you; but in cases of this kind it is generally best not to trust anybody. This newspaper story is, of course, untrue——'

'It is scarcely worth while to contradict such palpable rubbish,' said Mainwairing, still fuming.

'Just so; but the more absurd a story is, the more certain it is to be believed. It is very annoying to me that my daughter's name should be dragged into print in this way—for we may take it for granted that everybody will know who is meant by Fräulein H——. Very annoying indeed.'

'Not more so than it is to me, I can assure you,' said Mainwairing. 'I hope you will believe me when I tell you that my quarrel with Herr von Oberndorf was brought about simply by an unintentional piece of awkwardness on my part, and that Miss Howard's name was never once mentioned between us.'

'Yes; but the ostensible cause of a dispute is not always the real one,' said Mr. Howard. 'I was quite sure, from the first, that you would never have acted in any way—er—disrespectful to my daughter or myself; but you spoke, just now, of being sorry that you had trusted somebody. That looks, you know—I don't say it is so—but it looks as if you were concealing something. Now, don't you think it would be better if we were perfectly open with one another?'

'By all means,' answered Mainwairing, who had resumed his seat. 'I am endeavouring to be so.'

Mr. Howard smiled, and shook his head gently, as if he thought he was scarcely being met in so friendly a spirit as he was entitled to look for.

'The subject we have to speak about is rather a

delicate one,' he said, 'and I should have been glad to avoid it; but my duty as a father leaves me no alternative. You must see, Mainwairing, that, whatever the truth may be, people will be sure now to make remarks about you and Linda; and unluckily your intimacy with us—an intimacy which I am sure has afforded me personally the greatest pleasure—will be likely to give ground for a good deal of foolish gossip. In this censorious world it is, unfortunately, impossible for two young people to meet so regularly as you and Linda have done without exciting some comment.'

'I can only say that I am very sorry,' said Mainwairing. 'I ought, of course, to have known that, and to have made my visits less frequent.'

'Not at all!' said Mr. Howard, dismissing the apology with a gracious wave of the hand. 'If there has been any imprudence, I alone am to blame for it. In general I am obliged to be very particular about admitting young men into my house: my position as the father of a motherless girl requires the utmost circumspection. But in your case I have ventured to relax somewhat of my ordinary strictness. The truth is,' continued Mr. Howard, patting Mainwairing on the shoulder with friendly, and almost paternal familiarity, 'that I have always liked you. I saw that you and Linda understood one another—got on well together; and—and—well, I like to see young people happy.'

Good Heavens! what was the man going to say next? Mainwairing hastened to check him while it was yet time.

'You have been most kind and hospitable, Mr. Howard,' said he; 'and I am very much indebted to you. But I quite agree with you that we can't pretend to disregard gossip. When you came in I was just making up my mind to be off somewhere for a little change; and what you have said quite decides me. I shall start as soon as I can get leave from the doctor.'

'Oh, but my dear fellow,' interrupted Mr. Howard,

who perhaps had not intended to lead up to this simple solution of the difficulty, 'I really couldn't think of putting you out in that way.'

'You will not be putting me out at all,' answered Mainwairing. 'I should probably have gone, in any case. Shall you spend the summer at Blasewitz?'

'Well, yes, I think so. The situation is healthy, and the place suits us, and—yes, I think we shall certainly stay where we are till the autumn.'

'Then might I ask you to be so kind as to take charge of the violin I have left at your house till I come to claim it? I don't know when I shall go back to England, but I shall manage to take Dresden on my way home, and then I shall hope to say good-bye to you and Miss Howard. By that time I trust this preposterous newspaper paragraph will have been forgotten.'

Mr. Howard protested, for a time, against Mainwairing's determination; but, finding him resolute, gave way, promised that every care should be taken of the precious violin, declared that he should look forward anxiously to the return of the traveller, and, shortly afterwards, with many expressions of good-will, took his leave.

If the worthy gentleman's design, when he entered the Hôtel Bellevue, had been to secure an eligible son-in-law; if he was mortified and disappointed at the failure of that design; and if he was now far more disposed in his heart to kick Mainwairing than to shake hands with him, it must be allowed that he behaved himself very creditably under trying circumstances, and accepted his defeat with a good grace.

CHAPTER VIII

LINDA'S FIRST OFFER

During Mr. Howard's absence on the mission dictated by paternal solicitude Linda had been passing a somewhat agitated day at home.

She was sitting before the piano, practising, as usual, after breakfast, and wondering not a little what could have caused Mainwairing to absent himself from Blasewitz during three whole days, when Lieschen burst into the room, without waiting to knock at the door, and approached her young mistress, wringing her hands and giving vent to many ejaculations indicative of dismay.

'I know what it is,' said Linda, at once, with the calmness of despair. 'You have broken the Dresden china candlesticks at last. Oh, Lieschen, I always told you how it would be if you would persist in whirling your duster about so wildly!'

'Alas! gracious Fräulein,' said Lieschen, 'the china is safe. Ah, if it were but the loss of a useless pair of candlesticks!'

There was a depth of woe in the woman's manner, and withal a certain suppressed enjoyment, such as is apt to characterise the bearer of ill tidings, which made Linda's heart beat with a vague dread.

'Papa?' she exclaimed, apprehensively.

'The gracious Herr is well, so far as I know,' replied Lieschen.

'Then what can have happened?' asked Linda; for she could not conceive of any very terrible catastrophe so long as her father was in safety.

But Lieschen could only moan, '*Ach, Herr Je!—Herr Je!*' and turn up her eyes to the ceiling.

'How silly you are, Lieschen!' exclaimed Linda, tapping her foot impatiently on the floor. 'If you have anything to say, do be quick and say it! What is the use of standing there making faces?'

'He with the violin!' groaned Lieschen, thus adjured.

'Well, what of him?' asked Linda, her heart beginning to beat again.

'Killed in a duel with Herr von Oberndorf!' cried Lieschen. 'At least, nearly killed,' she added, in an undertone, as if half-regretting the necessity of thus modifying the horror of her intelligence.

'A duel with Herr von Oberndorf!' repeated Linda, incredulously. 'What nonsense! Somebody must have been hoaxing you, Lieschen.'

'Alas! gracious Fräulein,' said Lieschen, shaking her head, 'it is only too true. Christine met her cousin, Hans Meyer, who is servant to the Freiherr, at the market this morning, and he told her all about it. It seems that the fight took place about sunrise yesterday, close to Tharandt, and that the poor Herr Engländer was carried away all but dead.'

'But it is impossible!' exclaimed Linda. 'What could Herr von Oberndorf and Mr. Mainwairing have to fight about?'

'That Hans did not know,' answered Lieschen. 'But as for me, I can guess,' she added, with a smile, which she speedily repressed, remembering the sadness of the occasion. '*Ach, du lieber Gott!*' she cried, 'what a madman is a man in love! That have I proved myself. There was big Jakob, the blacksmith's son, a stupid fellow enough, but very fond of me. He followed me about everywhere, and would let me have no peace. Well, it was one day last winter that I happened to meet young Eisert, from Pillnitz, in the street, and as we were talking together up comes Jakob, and was for breaking the poor young fellow's head then and there. Now, Eisert, though he is not so big as Jakob

—and for my part, I often say "a big body has small brains"—is no coward. He had his coat off in a minute; and if I had not thrown myself between them, and screamed——'

Linda began to think it was time to check the loquacity of her handmaiden.

'You had better go back to your work now, Lieschen,' she said. 'If there is any truth in this story I shall hear it from Mr. Howard, when he comes in: but most likely it will turn out to be all a mistake. If Christine were not so fond of gossiping perhaps she would not forget her commissions so often as she does.'

For all that Linda was a little uneasy. She recollected the short altercation which had taken place at the Kuhstall; she understood, as well as any other girl would do, the nature of von Oberndorf's sentiments towards her; and this knowledge, coupled with Mainwairing's unaccountable absence, led her to fear that there might be some foundation for Christine's report. The worst of it was that there was no chance of her being put out of her suspense till the approach of the dinner-hour should bring Mr. Howard back from Dresden. If it should turn out that he had heard nothing of the alleged duel at the club, it might safely be assumed that no such encounter had occurred.

In this state of uncertainty the dull, mechanical routine of scales and exercises soon became intolerable. Linda speedily closed the piano and betook herself to the garden, where the lilacs and laburnums were swaying and whispering under a gentle southerly breeze, and the flower-beds, out in the hot sunshine, were all ablaze with the gaudy tulips. Snipping off a dead leaf here and pulling up a weed there, she wandered slowly down to the river-side, in some faint hope of seeing the sharp nose of Mainwairing's boat shoot round the corner, as she had so often seen it do before. For a long time she sat idly on the bank, waiting in vain for the familiar sound of the oars, and more than once she

started when some noise from the distance smote her ear, and listened eagerly for a minute or two; but nothing came to dispel her anxiety. An ugly black barge came slowly sailing down the stream ; a steamer, filled with passengers, bustled past on its way to the Saxon Switzerland, defiling the pure air with its foul smoke, and sending a long swell to break upon the shore ; but no Mainwairing appeared, and Linda's mind became filled with gloomy forebodings.

At length a step on the gravel path behind her caused her to turn her head. It was Lieschen, who, with her hand upheld to shade her eyes, and a countenance expressive of mingled triumph and awe, had come in search of her mistress.

'*Herr von Oberndorf ist im Salon*,' said she briefly, not wishing to weaken the effect of her announcement by any comment thereon.

By Mr. Howard's orders no male visitor, Mainwairing excepted, was permitted to enter his house during his absence ; but Lieschen had thought that the present circumstances were exceptional enough to justify her in departing from her ordinary instructions ; and Linda was probably of the same mind, for she expressed no surprise or disapproval at the admittance of Herr von Oberndorf, but only much relief.

'This will teach you, Lieschen,' said she, 'not to listen to all the silly stories that Christine tells you. If Herr von Oberndorf had just killed one of our friends in a duel do you think he would have ventured to come here to-day ?'

Lieschen said nothing. She thought he certainly would. To her mind nothing could be more evident than that the young gentleman, smitten by remorse, had come to avow his crime and to declare his hopeless attachment to Fräulein Linda, preparatory to putting an end to his own miserable existence. Therefore she followed her young mistress silently towards the house, expectant of a harrowing and dramatic scene.

Linda entered the drawing-room and held out her hand to von Oberndorf, who bowed over it, glancing up apprehensively at the same time, for he did not know what news might have reached Blasewitz, and had been troubled with a painful uncertainty as to the nature of his reception. The conversation which ensued was carried on in English—which was rather hard upon poor Lieschen, who had stationed herself very near the keyhole, so as to be at hand in case her mistress should faint or otherwise require her services.

Linda began by expressing her regret that her father was not at home, and von Oberndorf murmured something to the effect that he had been sorry to hear so much from the servant.

'But I have taken the liberty to ask for you, Miss Howard,' he continued, 'as I have something to say—it was rather particular——'

Linda was a little frightened, but she did not choose to help him out.

'Yes?' she said, smilingly.

'You have not seen—you do not perhaps take in the *Sächsische Beobachter*?'

Linda said 'No.'

'It is a most wicked lie that they have printed,' resumed von Oberndorf, growing angry at the recollection; 'and so soon as I have read it at once I have said to myself, "I must go to Blasewitz and tell them that it is not my fault." Truly I have done my best to keep the affair from being known; but these *Journalisten*, see you, they must have their finger in everybody's business. I do not yet know who has written this falsehood, but I shall find him; and, when I have found him, I shall pull his nose. Yes, by the nose I shall pull him!' And Herr von Oberndorf began to stride about the room, twirling his nascent moustache fiercely.

Presently he calmed down a little and seated himself again.

'You see,' he resumed, 'it is not easy to prevent people from finding out about a duel. There are so many who must know of it; and one cannot keep them all from talking.'

'A duel!' cried Linda, starting up. 'Then it is true that you have fought with Mr. Mainwairing, and wounded him dangerously! The servants told me; but I would not believe it. I wonder that you have the courage to come here after doing such a thing. If he dies, I shall always consider you a murderer.'

The stalwart soldier looked very like a naughty little schoolboy.

'I could not help it,' he murmured.

'Could not help it!' echoed Linda, scornfully. 'Why, what forced you to do it? You ought to have fired in the air.'

'But we have not fought mit pistols,' said poor von Oberndorf, humbly.

'It is the same thing. I am sure Mr. Mainwairing would never have fought if you had not driven him to it. And if you have killed him, I hope—yes, I hope with all my heart that you will be guillotined for it.'

'Oh, but Miss Howard,' protested the culprit. wincing under the unmerited cruelty of this attack, 'you are too severe—indeed you are! It is not so bad as you think; oh! no. A wound in the arm—now, that is no great matter; I could show you on my own arm four or five such scars. It is true that I have found myself obliged to thrust a little stronger as I have meant; but—*Got in Himmel!*—it has never yet been heard that a man should die for such a bagatelle.'

'Is it no worse than that?' asked Linda, breathing more freely. 'Are you quite sure?'

'I would not tell you what was not true,' replied von Oberndorf, with a quiet dignity which made his assailant feel rather ashamed of her vehemence.

'It must have hurt him dreadfully,' she said, after a pause.

Von Oberndorf felt that it was rather too much to expect of him that he should sympathise with the sufferings of his late antagonist. 'It would not have been a difficult thing to hurt him much more,' he said. 'He knows not at all how to use his sword, your friend.'

'Then why did you pick a quarrel with him? It was not generous of you—no, nor very brave either, seeing that you were sure to get the best of it.'

'He has had the choice of weapons,' said the German, doggedly, and a little sulkily. 'And now I must say that I have conceded that to him, though it was my right; for it was he who insulted me.'

'You imagined he meant to insult you,' said Linda, decisively; 'you are always imagining things. I suppose there has been an account of the duel in the *Beobachter*, has there not?'

Herr von Oberndorf scratched his head and moved uneasily in his chair. Fain would he have escaped from the self-imposed task of relating to this impetuous young lady the story published in the Dresden newspaper; but, having gone so far, he could not see his way to retreat; so he produced the mendacious sheet, and read out the paragraph as rapidly as possible, concluding with a repetition of his threat with regard to the unknown author of the falsehood. 'I have not yet had time to discover that rascal,' he said; 'but I shall do so; and, when I do, I shall pull him by the nose!'

'I don't see what use that will be,' said Linda, laughing a little, in spite of her vexation. 'How horrid it all is! Papa will be so angry!'

Herr von Oberndorf, thinking this very probable, said nothing, and stroked his moustache meditatively.

'It is all your fault,' went on the pitiless Linda.

'How could you be so foolish as to quarrel with Mr. Mainwairing?'

'I do not like him,' answered von Oberndorf, meekly.

'So the old woman said, when they asked her what had induced her to murder her son; but that did not save her from being hung. Do you make a habit of going about the world stabbing people who do not happen to suit you?'

'It was no stab; it was a fair sword-thrust,' said von Oberndorf. 'And he insulted me. But it was not that. I had my very good reason to hate him; and I do not think he loves me.'

'What possible reason can you have for hating a man whom you are hardly acquainted with?' asked Linda, with a fine assumption of innocence.

'Oh, Miss Howard!' said the young officer, raising his eyes reproachfully, 'can you ask that? Have you not seen?—do you not know?'

With a presentiment of what was coming, and a strong desire to avoid it, if possible, Linda jumped up abruptly and walked to the window.

'How close it is getting in this room!' she said. 'Shall we go into the garden and talk about something else? Never mind your antipathy to Mr. Mainwairing; I don't care to know the cause of it; and, as you can't well fight him again, it doesn't much signify.'

But von Oberndorf had crossed the Rubicon, and was determined to know his fate now, be the issue what it might. He followed Linda to the window, and said, in a low, grave voice—

'Will you be so kind and listen to me for a few minutes? I hate your friend because he is always with you. He sees you every day, while I must be content with a few words in a week. And he is clever—that can one not deny—and can talk upon any subject you please, whereas I, as you know, am, unfortunately, very stupid. And then he is wonderful upon the violin.

Though I also am musical, and play the French horn,' added von Oberndorf, with comical seriousness, as if it were only justice to himself that he should mention such advantages as he possessed to set against those of his formidable rival.

'I did not think to have spoken so soon,' he went on; 'but now the occasion has come of itself, and I am glad of it, for it is better for me that I should be no more in uncertainty. Miss Linda, I have loved you ever since the first day I saw you, when your father brought me here one evening to dinner. Do you remember it? It was winter, and you wore a grey dress, and had cherry-coloured ribbons in your hair and round your neck; and, after dinner, you sang for us. From that day till now I have known no peace. I know very well that I am not good enough for you; but sometimes I have thought that so much love could not exist without some little return. Oh, Miss Linda, if you could ever become my wife, I would ask nothing better as to serve you on my knees for the rest of my life!'

And he made as though he would at once assume that inconvenient attitude.

It was thus that Miss Howard received her first offer of marriage. At a later period of her life such episodes became so frequent as to occasion her little or no emotion, and in no way to embarrass her for the want of suitable words in which to couch a refusal. But at this time the sensation of being proposed to was a novelty, and by no means a pleasant one, to her. If she had followed her inclinations she would have taken to her heels forthwith and fled; but, as such a procedure was obviously out of the question, she began, in sore perplexity, to cast about her for the least offensive mode of rejection discoverable. That her answer must be in the form of a rejection she did not for one second hesitate to decide. She liked Herr von Oberndorf very much; she had been pleased with his attentions, and perhaps, as she now confessed to herself with

a pang of self-reproach, she had flirted with him a little upon certain occasions; but she had never at any time contemplated marrying him, nor indeed had the likelihood of his asking her to do so ever entered her mind. She had known, of course, that he admired her, but she had not speculated upon the probable result of his admiration; and now that she had to make him understand this, without seeming needlessly brusque or unkind, the task appeared to her, in her inexperience, a hard one.

'I am so very sorry!' she murmured at length, looking down and nervously pulling to pieces a flower which she had fastened in her belt. 'I hope you will not be angry with me; but indeed it is impossible—quite impossible!'

Von Oberndorf saw a fragment of hope in Miss Howard's visible perturbation, and clutched at it eagerly.

'I have taken you by surprise,' he said; 'you have not had time to think—is it not so? You will not dismiss me at once—no! You will make reflection; and to-morrow, or next week, or when you please, you will give me your answer.'

'Oh, no!' exclaimed Linda, greatly alarmed at this proposition. 'Please do not think that that would make any difference. I am very sorry; but I could never marry you: there is no use in talking about it.'

Herr von Oberndorf heaved a sigh so prodigious that the seams of his tightly fitting uniform went near to cracking under the strain.

'Then it is all over with me!' he said. 'I want no more to live.'

The corners of Linda's mouth went down and her eyes grew large with commiseration. She was only eighteen, and she doubted not but that she saw before her a young man doomed to a blighted and joyless existence.

'I am very sorry,' she repeated, under her breath.

'I never had much hope,' said von Oberndorf, despondently. 'It was easy to see how it would end. Before long you will marry this Englishman—and you will not be happy mit him. He is too old for you; you cannot have sympathy together. Besides, he is fanatic for music; he will never care much for anybody or anything else. And it may be that, some day, when you are living alone in a dreary English castle, and your husband has left you to run over the country after a Cremona or a Straduarius, it will happen to you to regret the stupid German who loved every hair of your head more as all the violins in the world.'

Linda was not much touched by this melancholy forecast of her future; and the cool assumption that she was destined to become the wife of Mr. Mainwairing roused her to a less apologetic demeanour.

'I wish you would not say such things!' she exclaimed, impatiently. 'See what trouble you have made already by your foolish jealousy. If you only knew the truth, what a goose you would think yourself! Mr. Mainwairing and I are very good friends; but neither of us has ever thought of—of anything else.'

Herr von Oberndorf shook his head. He was not convinced; but he perceived that further words upon the subject would be offensive as well as useless; and he saw also that, whatever the state of the young lady's affections might be, his own chance of success was worth nothing. It only remained for him to pick up his cap from the floor and make a speedy and, if that could be, a graceful exit. This he accomplished fairly well.

'Adieu, Miss Howard,' he said. 'After this we shall not meet often again. Perhaps I have made a mistake about your friend; but, whether you marry him or another, I hope you will always be very happy. As for me, I have war to look forward to. It will be hard if I cannot find a Prussian bullet to settle my

affair.' And so he took his departure, greatly to Linda's relief.

How, after much patient research, he succeeded in tracing the calumnious report in the *Sächsischer Beobachter* to M. Lepkine; how he actually carried out his nose-pulling threat upon the person of that imaginative gentleman, and received a bullet in his shoulder for his pains; how he subsequently took part in the battle of Königgrätz, where he covered himself with glory and honourable scars; and how he has more recently distinguished himself, fighting by the side of his former foes at St. Privat and elsewhere—all this cannot be related in the present narrative, which will concern itself no further with Herr von Oberndorf and his fortunes. It may, however, be stated that his early disappointment has not cast a permanent shadow over his life, and that he is now the husband of a plump and fresh-coloured little Saxon dame, and the happy father of a rapidly increasing family.

Linda, on being once more left in solitude, threw herself back in a low easy-chair, closed her eyes, and indulged in what was to her a very unusual luxury, that of doing nothing. She did not feel up to work of any kind; and, indeed, a young lady who has just refused her first offer may be excused for being a trifle agitated and upset. It was not, however, this subject that occupied the first place in Linda's thoughts as she sat musing in her arm-chair, while the afternoon wore on and the patches of sunlight on the wall drew nearer to the ceiling. Her mind was much more taken up with Mr. Mainwairing than with Herr von Oberndorf. Would he come and see her, she wondered, as soon as he was convalescent? And, if so, how far would it become her to seem conscious of what had occurred since their last meeting? She felt instinctively that Mainwairing would prefer that the duel and its consequences should be entirely ignored; and no doubt this would be the pleasanter plan, if only it were feasible.

But how could she pass over without comment the interruption of his daily visits? And would it not seem heartless to abstain from commiserating him upon sufferings of which, after all, she was the sole cause? And, worst of all, would any return to the old footing of unrestricted intimacy be possible so long as each of them not only knew of the existence of that unfortunate paragraph in the *Sächsischer Beobachter*, but was aware that the other must also have seen or heard of it? After due reflection Lina came to the conclusion that, in the very probable event of Mr. Mainwairing volunteering no remark upon this or any other circumstance connected with his non-appearance, it would be best for her to let him know, in as few words as might be, that she had been told of what had taken place, to apologise for having introduced him to the pugnacious German, to treat the whole affair as an unlucky but palpable misunderstanding, and then to let the subject be put aside at once and for ever.

She had mentally rehearsed the scene several times over, when Mr. Howard came in, hot and dusty, having returned from Dresden on foot. Linda had never had any secrets from her father. As soon as she had put a comfortable chair for him by the open window, and had got him a glass of beer with a lump of ice in it—which was his substitute for afternoon tea—she proceeded to unfold her tale.

'Herr von Oberndorf has been here,' she began.

'I thought I had told you that you were never to receive visitors in my absence,' said Mr. Howard, frowning.

'Yes, but he was in the room before I could prevent it,' said Linda, somewhat abashed. 'I could not well turn him out when he was once there, could I?'

And then she went on to relate all that had passed between her and the young officer, withholding no single detail; for she had been brought up upon the principle that, next to disobedience, there can be no

offence so heinous as that of concealment on the part of a daughter towards her parents.

Upon the conclusion of her recital Mr. Howard was so kind as to express himself satisfied with her conduct. His inquiries had convinced him that von Oberndorf, though quite unobjectionable as regarded birth and connections, would never be anything but a very poor match; and Linda, being exceptionally pretty, might, her father thought, aspire to a good income as well as a good name. On the other hand, the young man had displayed a laudable interest in the game of écarté, together with a child-like ignorance of the rudimentary principles whereby money may be gained in pursuit of that pastime. Such characters are not to be met with every day; and it was, therefore, much to be regretted that events had been so far precipitated as to put an end to his evening visits to Blasewitz. But this Mr. Howard did not say. He contented himself with remarking that this kind of thing was a great nuisance, but he supposed it was unavoidable; and then went on to remark, carelessly—

'By the way, I saw Mainwairing this afternoon.'

'No! did you really?' cried Linda. 'Was he looking ill? Had he seen the newspaper? Did he seem very cross about it all?'

'Oh, dear, no,' answered Mr. Howard. 'Mainwairing is much too sensible a fellow to bother himself over such rubbish as that. The best way to treat the thing is to laugh at it and forget it.'

Linda was hardly prepared for so philosophic a tone.

'I was afraid both you and he would be very angry,' she said.

'Where's the good of being angry?' returned Mr. Howard, pertinently. 'No man with a grain of sense in his head ever loses his temper with a confounded newspaper. Mainwairing was very much pleased at my looking him up,' he continued. 'We had a little talk together, and I put the matter before him in a

perfectly open and friendly way. "The wisest thing you can do, my dear fellow," I said, "is to get out of this as quickly as you can. If you were to begin to visit us again every day, as you have been doing of late, people would gossip; and gossip I can't and won't have." So he thanked me for my advice, and said he would go away as soon as the doctor would let him—very properly, I think.'

Linda's countenance fell a little. Mr. Mainwairing's readiness to depart struck her as more accommodating than complimentary.

'I suppose we shall see him before he goes?' she said.

'Well, no; I think not,' said Mr. Howard. 'Under the circumstances, we both agreed that it would be wiser for him not to show himself again in Blasewitz for the present.'

'I am sorry for that,' observed Linda, with as much composure as she could muster. 'I should have liked to have said good-bye to him.'

Mr. Howard had strolled out through the window, with his hands in his pockets, whistling out of tune, as his habit was. He looked back over his shoulder to reply,

'Oh, he will be back in the course of the summer. He asked my permission to return when the talk about this affair had blown over; and I saw no objection to his doing so. In the meantime he wants us to take care of his violin. I should be very sorry indeed to think that we had seen the last of Mainwairing, and I quite look forward to having him here again. Taking him altogether, he really is an uncommonly good sort of fellow.'

From which remarks it may be inferred that Mr. Howard had not yet given up all hope of bringing about a match between his daughter and the gentleman in question.

CHAPTER IX

THE KNAVISH TRICKS OF HERR VON BISMARCK

The spring passed away, and with it went the greater part of the foreigners who had wintered in Dresden—Mrs. and Miss Tower among the rest. Before the lilacs and laburnums in Mr. Howard's garden had shed their blossoms the last of these birds of passage had taken wing, and the hotel-keepers set about cleaning and painting their establishments in anticipation of the influx of holiday tourists which might be expected later in the year.

They never came, those wished-for tourists, with their familiar grey suits, their puggarees, their bottle-green veils, their 'Murrays,' and their circular notes. The designs of an inexorable grim-visaged Prussian caused the tide of pleasure-seekers to be turned into other channels than the Elbe valley for that season, and the hotel-keepers had to make the best of a bad business. The summer of 1866 was a sad one for them as well as for the rest of their compatriots. When war was declared between Austria and Prussia there was a natural little outbreak of patriotic enthusiasm, and the honest Saxons, with a sigh over their doomed crops and vines, furbished up their weapons and prepared to do battle for hearth and home. '*Preussen oder Deutschland? Das ist jetzt die Rede!*' cried the *Beobachter*, in a burst of indignant eloquence, and Saxony, from king to peasant, was for answering the question in such a decided manner as should prevent those insolent Berliners from ever bringing it forward again. The question, however, as we all know, would not be answered in the Austro-German fashion, and what popular excitement there had been in Dresden was

soon replaced by silent resignation. The brave little Saxon army marched away southwards, and instead of returning in a week or two, accompanied by triumphant hosts of white-coated brethren on their way towards Berlin, was supplanted by invaders in spiked helmets, who ate very heartily, paid very badly, and were not conspicuous for modesty of demeanour. This was no joke either to hotel-keepers or householders. What with the burden of supporting hungry soldiers, the bad news, or no news, from friends over the frontier in Bohemia, the presence of the conquerors, and the prospect of even worse things in the future, Dresden fell into great sorrow and heaviness. Then the wounded, Saxon and Prussian, began to arrive from the front, and brought conflicting reports with them. Who could tell what the next move might be. Suppose the Austrians were to gain a great victory and march upon Dresden? That, no doubt, would be cause for rejoicing, on public grounds; but, with the enemy lodged in his very house, the most patriotic of citizens may be excused for looking with a grave face upon the approach of his friends.

The English resident colony, already much diminished in numbers, began to pack up its trunks. One by one the foreign families made good their retreat, and the Bürgerwiese, the Grosse Garten, and the English Club knew them no more.

'Rats fly from a falling house,' remarked one conspicuous exception to the general rule, who chose to look upon the exodus of his compatriots with some contempt. 'As for me, I am not in the habit of running away. I have made my arrangements for passing the summer at Blasewitz, and at Blasewitz I shall remain. Let any one of them, Austrian or Prussian, lay a finger on me or my property, and they will find that it is no joke to meddle with an Englishman!'

It was generally felt that these sentiments, which

were pretty loudly expressed, were at once creditable and courageous; and it would be ungenerous to assume that Mr. Howard would have held different language, or acted otherwise, if the state of his exchequer had been more flourishing. It shall not, therefore, be recorded of him that he remained at Blasewitz simply because he could not go away; and it is a fact that he subscribed three thalers in money and a bundle of old shirts for the relief of the wounded, besides expressing verbally an immense amount of sympathy for both sides.

Impartiality, indeed, was a quality the virtue of which became, in those days, increasingly apparent; and Mr. Howard was not slow to perceive this, and to shape his conduct in accordance with circumstances. Thus, when a foolish Briton, who had made himself conspicuous in one of the Dresden restaurants by openly-avowed partisanship on the side of the allied forces, got into serious trouble thereby, was locked up for a couple of days, scolded by the representative of the United Kingdom, and finally hustled out of the country, Mr. Howard took occasion to say emphatically, in public, 'Serve him right!'

'England,' remarked this sagacious observer, 'is neutral in the present crisis. I am an Englishman; therefore I am neutral. I may have my own opinion as to the rights of the quarrel; I may have friends in the one army or in the other, or in both; but propriety forbids me to say anything more than that I am sorry to see my friends at variance. As an Englishman, and as a temporary resident in Dresden, I am bound to show no leaning towards either side. And for that reason, my dear Linda, I will thank you to stop playing the Austrian national hymn, and to refrain from throwing up your nose in the air when you meet a Prussian soldier.'

The truth is that Linda was less discreet than her father, and having, for a variety of reasons, all of which

appeared to her excellent, ranged herself upon the Austrian side, was at no pains to disguise her predilections.

She, together with Lieschen, who naturally shared her mistress's views, was troubled with no doubts as to the righteousness of the Saxon cause and the iniquity of the Prussian. Her argument was a very simple one, and was not obscured by any confusing question of politics. A man's property is sacred in the eyes of the law, and if his neighbour breaks in upon it, and helps himself to whatever he may find there, he is a felon. Very well. Saxony belonged to the Saxons: nobody could deny that. The Prussians had invaded Saxony, and were living upon the people. Therefore the Prussians were thieves and felons—and wore a hideous uniform, and took up the whole of the pavement to themselves into the bargain. Moreover, Linda did not know any of them personally.

Unfortunately, Mr. Howard did. His acquaintance, which was of a cosmopolitan character, included certain of the red-collared, helmeted gentry who then formed the garrison of Dresden, and he did not fail to seek these out and politely beg them to visit him at Blasewitz whenever their military duties left them free to do so. And, to the infinite disgust of Mr. Howard's household, the Prussian officers came. Linda ventured upon a respectful remonstrance, which was received with more good humour than she had expected, but which, of course, failed to produce any effect.

'My dear child,' Mr. Howard said, condescendingly, 'when you are my age you will have found out, if you are wise, that there are good people in all nations. I am very sorry for our friends the Saxons, but they are not the only inhabitants of the world, and I really can't undertake to cut everybody whom they may happen to be at war with. It is not the fault of these young men that they were born Prussians; and, for my part, I

never ask where a man comes from, so long as he is a pleasant fellow.'

And no doubt Mr. Howard spoke sincerely; for when a man's value as a companion depends less upon his social qualities than upon his taste for moderate gambling and his imperfect knowledge of games of skill, it is a matter of secondary importance whether his name be von Oberndorf, or von Podewitz, or Schultze, or Müller.

Life, then, at Blasewitz ran on very much in its habitual groove, though echoes of battle came rolling from beyond the mountains, and the hospitals were choked with wounded and dying men, and figures clad in deep mourning began to creep about the streets. Empires may rise and kingdoms fall, and thousands die silently side by side between the rising and the setting of the sun, but humanity at large must eat, work, and sleep as usual. Mr. Howard read of Nachod, and Trautenau, and Königgrätz as he munched his toast at breakfast; Linda practised her scales, and mended her father's socks, and regulated the household expenditure; and sometimes, in the evening, one or other of the Prussian officers would drop in and take a hand at écarté. The only change was in the uniform of the evening guests, and in the absence of one whose visits had formerly spread themselves over a larger portion of the day.

In those days it not unfrequently happened to Linda to find herself sighing over her solitude and regretting the blank created by Mainwairing's abrupt departure. It annoyed her to think that she missed him, because she had been a little offended by his unceremonious leave-taking, and she did not choose to admit, even to herself, that she could throw off the ties of a passing intimacy less easily than he. She said to herself that it was companionship in the abstract that she longed for—not the companionship of Mr. Mainwairing or of any other individual in particular. But that did not

prevent her from being highly incensed when one of her father's Prussian friends, espying the violin which still lay in the corner where Mainwairing had left it, took it out of its case and drew the bow once or twice across its strings with no unpractised hand.

'Please don't make that noise,' she cried; 'you give me a headache.'

'What! You like not the violin?' said the Prussian, in surprise.

'Not unless it is properly played,' answered Linda, snappishly. And the next time the gallant officer presented himself at Blasewitz he noticed that the instrument had been removed. It was Linda who had carried it upstairs and locked it away in one of the empty rooms, remarking casually, as she did so, that the drawing-room was very damp, and that she had heard that violins were easily injured.

This little episode occurred about the time when hostilities had been suspended, and when Messrs. Bismarck, Benedetti, and other clever people were busy trying to get the better of one another at Nikolsburg. Very likely Linda, as she carefully deposited the violin in a drawer, may have thought it possible that its owner would ere long be returning to claim his property. The difficulty of travelling in a country occupied by hostile armies had been sufficient to account for his non-arrival up to that time; but, now that roads and railways were about to be thrown open once more to the public, Mainwairing's return might be looked for any day.

In due course came the conclusion of peace, the departure of the invaders, the return of the Saxons, and the reappearance of a few members of the English colony. But Mainwairing made no sign. Then it became tolerably clear that he did not intend to come back at all. Whereat Linda was vexed and disappointed, and angry with herself for being disappointed.

'Don't you think it is rather rude of Mr. Mainwair-

ing never to have written to us?' she asked her father at last.

Mr. Howard grimaced, shrugged his shoulders, and observed that Mainwairing had always been an odd sort of fellow. 'Only a second son, after all,' he added, following the train of his own thoughts rather too quickly for his daughter's perceptions.

'Are second sons ruder than elder sons?' asked Linda. 'It seems to me that nearly all Englishmen are rude.'

And after that day she made no further reference to Mr. Mainwairing.

If, however, she had had any means of knowing the mental state of the truant it is probable that she would have judged him with less severity. Mainwairing had left Dresden a few days after his interview with Mr. Howard, doubting not but that, in so doing, he was acting as became a prudent and sensible man. Being well aware that he was in some danger of falling in love with Linda—if, indeed, he had not already, to some extent, committed that folly—and having likewise discerned Mr. Howard's schemes for his entanglement, he was inclined to take some credit to himself, not only for his self-denial in quitting the perilous neighbourhood, but also for the adroitness with which he had contrived so to time his departure as that it should seem the natural outcome of events beyond his control. But this comfortable sense of self-approval turned out more shortlived than he had anticipated, and it was not long before he realised that he was to prove no exception to the ancient rule of *Cœlum, non animum.*

At Prague, which was his first halting-place, he simply thought of nothing but Linda all day long. He had no acquaintances in the place, and his disabled arm deprived him of his favourite occupation. So he made haste to visit the crumbling palaces of the old city on the Moldau, to buy, as in duty bound, some

specimens of Bohemian glass, and to take his ticket for Vienna. But neither did Vienna prove a success. Mainwairing found himself perpetually drawing unfavourable comparisons between the Austrian ladies whose salons he was privileged to enter and Linda. Go where he might, he was persistently haunted by memories of her. The streets, as he wandered through them in his dreamy way, seemed thronged by Lindas; the trees in the Prater whispered her name; the very bands in the Volksgarten joined in the conspiracy, and were for ever playing the airs which she preferred. At the end of three weeks it was evident that this would never do. Oblivion, thought Mainwairing, must be sought at some safer distance from Dresden, or he would find himself, one fine morning or another, at Blasewitz, and at Linda's feet, before he knew what he was about. Then it was that he conceived the brilliant idea of going down the Danube to Constantinople. This, at least, would take him over new ground; and if there was anything in the sight of a Turk to remind him of Miss Howard his case must be a desperate one indeed.

To Constantinople he accordingly went; and it is perhaps needless to say that mosques and minarets, glimpses of glittering sea and solemn cypresses standing out against a sky of melting blue produced no beneficial change in the mind of the wanderer. Sitting disconsolately, one stifling evening, at the window of Missirie's hotel, at Pera, while the howling of vagrant dogs and a cunningly blended mixture of noisome odours rose to him from the street beneath, he turned at bay at last and boldly faced his scruples. He put the case before himself with admirable lucidity. As a bachelor he was comfortably off: as a married man he would be poor. In the event of his marrying Linda he would probably find himself compelled to reside abroad, which, although no great hardship to a man of his tastes, when voluntarily incurred, would, as he was well

aware, present itself in a wholly different light if adopted from necessity. Then, of course, his family would strongly disapprove of the match. Lastly, he would have to put up with Mr. Howard as a father-in-law, and that was the greatest bugbear of all. But, looking at the other side of the question, he reflected that, if a man's love be only true and strong enough, such considerations as these ought not to have any weight with him. A love which hesitates at sacrifices is no love at all, and a love which is real and permanent must needs triumph over all obstacles of a pecuniary and conventional character. Mainwairing began to believe that his attachment for Linda was of this kind. It had been of slow growth; he had fought against it from the outset; and it was, therefore, the more surely genuine. He got up, opened the door, and called his servant.

'Davis,' said he, 'pack up my things. I am going back to Dresden.'

'Yes, sir,' answered the man. 'Beg your pardon, sir, but which way did you mean to go?'

'Which way? Oh, I don't know. Any way. The shortest way, I suppose.'

Mainwairing generally left the choice of routes to Davis, who had had considerable experience of European travel, and was cleverer than his master at unravelling the mysteries of Bradshaw. The man considered for a minute.

'I suppose you wouldn't like to work round by Warsaw and Frankfort-on-the-Hoder, sir?' he said at length. 'Very tejious railway journey, sir.'

'Certainly not,' said Mainwairing.

'Then I don't see 'ow we're to manage it, sir, without we take the Haustrian Lloyd's steamer to Hathens, and the Messageries on to Marseilles, and so git round by way of Cologne and Berlin.'

'My good Davis, what are you talking about? I don't want to go round the world; I want to go to

Dresden, I tell you. We had better go back by the way we came.'

'Can't do that, sir. Fighting agoing on in Bohemia between the Haustrians and Prooshians, if you remember, sir. Likewise in the North of Hitaly; so it wouldn't be no use to make for Venice, sir.'

'Dear me, yes! I never thought of that,' muttered Mainwairing, relapsing into a reverie.

He woke up again after a few minutes and remarked—

'This is very inconvenient, Davis.'

'Yes, sir.'

'Perhaps I had better wait till this war is over?'

'Yes, sir.'

'It almost looks,' continued Mainwairing, musingly—'it really almost looks like a special interposition of Providence.'

'It does, sir.'

'I wish, Davis, you would get out of that tiresome habit of agreeing with everything I say. Have you the least idea of what you are alluding to when you speak of a special interposition of Providence?'

Davis smiled, and then put his hand before his mouth and coughed slightly.

'Of course you haven't,' resumed his master, accepting this as an admission of ignorance. 'What *I* meant was that Providence seems to have determined upon the annihilation of the Austrian Empire. Germany and Italy, Davis, have what you might call a natural and physical destiny to accomplish. Sooner or later they must become united kingdoms; and Austria can only delay this, not prevent it. Therefore I say that Providence appears to be favouring the Prussians, with a view, no doubt, to avert future bloodshed. But to return to my plans. We must go away somewhere, Davis.'

'Where would you wish to go, sir?'

'Well, that I will leave to you, Davis. I will go anywhere, except to England: I don't care about going back to England just yet. There's the Crimea, you know, and Greece, and lots of other places. Think it over during the night, Davis, and let me know in the morning what you think will do best.'

Thus it came about that, on the very morning on which Linda uttered her comprehensive judgment upon the manners of Englishmen in general, Mainwairing was in the Crimea, preparing, in good earnest this time, to set out on his journey to Dresden. The additional breathing-space accorded to him, as he had so piously assumed, by the care of a watchful Providence, had served rather to strengthen than to weaken his purpose; and the victory of love over prudence and selfishness was now complete. With a light heart and a mind relieved from care, Mainwairing shook himself clear of the last clinging remnant of his indecision, and exclaiming '*Jacta est alea!*' set his face northwards. And, in due course of time, he alighted, on a sultry afternoon, at the door of his old quarters, the Hôtel Bellevue, and, having refreshed himself with a bath, started on foot for Blasewitz.

The walk was long, hot, and dusty; but Mainwairing scarcely noticed these inconveniences. His head was full of beatific visions; he seemed as if walking on air, and did not know that he was striding along at a pace which caused the passers-by to turn round and look after him. He would have liked to shake them all by the hand, those honest, stolid peasants, who slouched by with a half-surly '*Guten Abend!*' He was so glad to see the rich fields again, and the swelling hills beyond the Elbe, and the slow, patient oxen drawing their creaking carts, that he almost fancied that the land smiled back a welcome to him and wished him good luck on his errand. Good luck!—had he not deserved good luck? 'I have had a fight with Self and the Devil, and I have conquered,' thought

Mainwairing. And I daresay he felt a little proud of the feat.

Arriving at Mr. Howard's house in this happy and hopeful frame of mind, he paused, for a moment, before ringing the bell. The outer door stood open, and he could see through the doorway the cool, dark entrance-hall, with its polished floor, its whitewashed walls, and its old oak chairs. An indistinct chatter of high-pitched German voices came from the distant regions of the kitchen; but here there was silence unbroken, save for the hoarse ticking of an old-fashioned clock. Mainwairing, who had half expected to be greeted by the well-known sound of the piano, began to fear that the mistress of the house was absent. But now came the rustle of a woman's dress upon the stairs, and presently Linda herself ran down and stood before him.

She wore a black dress; and a ray of sunlight, streaming through a window above her, fell upon her golden-brown hair. As she paused on the lowest step, one hand lightly resting upon the bannister, the white wall behind her throwing out her dark figure, and her lovely face illuminated with joy and surprise, Mainwairing felt a thrill of momentary enthusiasm at the sight of her mere physical beauty, and, if he had followed his impulse, would have fallen at her feet there and then and declared his love without more ado.

Of course he did nothing so preposterous. Conventionality seldom permits us to speak out the actual thoughts that are passing in our minds, and even forbids us to remain silent at times when silence seems as good as or better than speech. Mainwairing took off his hat and said, quite calmly, 'How do you do, Miss Howard?' and Linda said what is usual and correct in reply.

And so presently they were in the old drawing-room together once more; and Mainwairing, becoming

conscious that he was staring Miss Howard out of countenance, allowed his eyes to roam over the room, which, somehow or other, looked a little strangely to him. The sofas and chairs were disposed stiffly against the walls; Linda's work-table had vanished, as had also a number of small ornaments with which she had done her best to beautify the unpretending salon. On the other hand, a few garish chromo-lithographs, some hideous vases, empty of flowers, and a couple of plaster-of-Paris statuettes had been brought forth from the hiding-place in which they had lain since the commencement of Mr. Howard's tenancy, and now occupied their legitimate posts of honour. Strangest of all, there was an empty space where the piano—a hired one—*had* used to stand. Astonished, and somewhat dismayed at these portents, Mainwairing had opened his mouth to ask their meaning, when Linda spoke.

'So you have come at last,' she said. 'You promised you would come to say good-bye.'

'Yes,' he answered, 'I have come; but not to say good-bye, I hope.'

Linda shook her head with a gravity the effect of which was somewhat counteracted by the smile which played about her lips.

'I am afraid we shall have to bid one another good-bye this afternoon,' she said. 'Do you know that, if you had come a day later, you would not have had even that melancholy satisfaction? We start for England to-morrow.'

'*What!*' exclaimed Mainwairing. Here was a contingency which had never formed part of his speculations as to the future.

Linda was not altogether displeased at his consternation. She repeated her announcement, adding, rather unkindly—

'We had quite given up all expectation of seeing you here again. Where have you been all this long time?'

'In all sorts of abominable places, answered Mainwairing, ruefully. 'Constantinople—Sebastopol—I don't know where. I should have been here long ago if it hadn't been for Bismarck. It was no fault of mine that I couldn't get from Vienna to Dresden without going round by the North Pole. But this is rather sudden, isn't it?—your going to England, I mean. Mr. Howard told me you would certainly be here all the summer.'

'That was what we intended,' said Linda; 'but—something very odd has happened. They say that if you only wish for a thing strongly enough you are sure to get it, sooner or later; but I have wished for money so long and so earnestly that one would have thought, if it was coming at all, it would have come sooner. But it has come now.'

She paused, looking before her with an odd, far-away gaze, a joyous smile upon her lips, as though she saw some distant pleasant sight. She remained so long silent that at last Mainwairing, to rouse her, said 'Yes?'

'Yes, it has come now. Did you ever hear me speak of my Uncle Thomas? No, of course you never did. I did not know him myself, and papa unfortunately had a quarrel with him years ago—about some money matters, I believe. I don't think he can have been very nice. Papa had not seen him for I don't know how long, and did not correspond with him. Certainly the last thing we thought of was that we should profit in any way by his death, particularly as he had an only son to whom he was devoted. But it seems that his son was killed last winter, out hunting, and the old man never recovered it. He died about a month ago, and he has left all his money to me.'

'To *you!*' exclaimed Mainwairing.

A momentary cloud passed over the brightness of Linda's face.

'Yes,' she said, 'he has left it to me. I wish he

had made papa his heir; it would have been so very much better in every way; but I suppose he must have borne malice because of that old quarrel. After all, it comes to very much the same thing, doesn't it?'

'Well—to a certain extent, perhaps. Was your uncle a very rich man?'

'Enormously. So rich that I can hardly realise what a change it will make to us. Can you believe that I have got more than 350,000*l.* all of my own, besides a house in London, and carriages, and plate, and I don't know what else?'

Mainwairing said it was a very large sum. He would have given a good deal to have been able to look pleased, and to congratulate Miss Howard heartily upon her good fortune; but, for the moment, his power of self-command was unequal to the emergency. The shock was too sudden, the reversal of their respective positions too complete for him to address Linda with such words of commonplace friendliness as the occasion appeared to call for. He had gone out to Blasewitz that day with the firm intention, indeed, of doing his best to win the heart of this penniless and obscure girl, but with a perfect consciousness of the sacrifice he was making in so doing, and not without a trifling sense of his magnanimity in thus casting worldly considerations to the winds; and now, behold! by this cruel freak of fortune the beggar-maid was transformed into an heiress of the first magnitude, and, according to generally received ideas, her marriage with the second son of a country baronet would be a mere throwing of herself away. Was ever a man placed in a more unexpectedly humiliating position! Under such circumstances any immediate declaration of love was obviously out of the question. Nay, must it not be for ever out of the question? His love was disinterested enough, but would anybody believe it to be so who knew that he had refrained from paying his addresses to Miss Howard during nearly six months of constant inter-

course, and had only come forward after her acquisition of this astounding windfall? Would Linda herself believe it to be so? Heiresses soon learn to be sceptical. Chewing the cud of these bitter reflections, Mainwairing held his peace and kept his eyes fixed upon the ground. Linda, not unnaturally, misconstrued his silence, which she interpreted into a tacit reproof.

'I know you don't care about money,' she said, rather petulantly. 'Perhaps you would, though, if you knew what it was to be without it. You look as if you thought me very avaricious; but I am not—at least I don't think so. It is not so much that I want carriages and dresses and jewellery, and all the other things that money brings, as that I do so hate the misery of being poor. I don't pretend that I shall not like having plenty of money to spend; why should I? What is the harm of enjoying good things when they come in one's way?'

'What, indeed?' said Mainwairing. 'Everybody likes to be rich; and quite right too. I don't in the least wonder at your being glad; and I am glad myself, for your sake, though I have personal and selfish reasons for regretting that your uncle could not have made it convenient to die a few months later. The fact is that, when I arrived in Dresden to-day, I was counting upon passing the remainder of the summer very pleasantly. I thought you would kindly allow me to come and play the fiddle occasionally, as I used to do, and I had visions of hot afternoons spent with you in the shade of the garden, and cool evenings on the river, and a good many other delightful dreams—all of which have now evaporated. So that I am feeling just a little bit disappointed.'

'It is tiresome,' acquiesced Linda, musingly. 'I should so have enjoyed it all! Do you know that I have been literally dying of loneliness since you went away? Why did you not come back sooner?'

'I wish to goodness I had!' thought Mainwairing to himself. Then he said aloud—

'I thought I had better make myself scarce for a time. Of course you heard all about my duel with your peppery young friend, von Oberndorf, and the lesson he was so kind as to give me?'

'Oh, yes,' said Linda, reddening slightly, but speaking without other sign of emotion; 'I heard of that, and I saw the account of it in the newspaper too; but you need not have stayed away so long on that account; it has all been forgotten long ago; the war has put everything else out of remembrance. But I daresay you have been better amused where you have been than you would have been here.'

'No, indeed I have not. On the contrary, I have been bored to death. The only thing that has consoled me has been the prospect of ultimately getting back here. You don't know how I have looked forward to seeing this dear old room again, and you sitting at your piano. But the piano has gone already, and you are going to-morrow; so there is an end of all my dreams.'

'Oh, but you will come to England too?' said Linda, cheerfully.

'Shall I? I don't know. There is nothing particular to take me there, except that I want some clothes; and I can easily write to my tailor to send me them. And, supposing I did go home, I should never get you to play my accompaniments for me again. No, that day is passed. By this time next year you will most likely cut me if you meet me in the street.'

'What do you mean?' cried Linda, indignantly. 'You can't really think I should do such a thing as that. It is not kind of you to speak in that way.'

'Well, perhaps you would not actually cut me,' said Mainwairing, 'because you have been brought up abroad, and it will take you some time to acquire the habits of English society; but, for all that, you will

not be disposed to give up an afternoon to hearing me play the fiddle. You won't have the time, in fact.'

'Why not?' said Linda. 'I think I shall have more time to myself than I have now, because I shall not have the housekeeping to attend to—and, oh, what a blessing that will be!—but, whether I am busy or not, I shall always find time to see my friends.'

'Yes; but perhaps I shall not be one of your friends then. Ah, you don't know yet what the life of an heiress in London is, nor what an astonishing number of friends she has to attend to. If I were there I should only be one of a crowd, and I daresay not the most favoured one. I could tell you exactly what your life will be. You will have plenty of excitement, no end of balls and dinners and concerts and afternoon teas—the usual weary old round—and probably you will delight in it all at first. You will get sick of it in the end like everybody else; but by that time you will have become so accustomed to it that you could not give it up if you wished. On the whole, I can't congratulate you. You have got too much of a good thing, you see: with a quarter of your present fortune you might have been happy enough. I can't help fancying that the time will come when you will wish yourself back in Blasewitz, in peace and quietness.'

'I don't think I shall,' said Linda, gravely. 'It is quiet enough here, certainly; but there is not much peace, in Blasewitz or anywhere else, for people who are perpetually tormented by visions of unpaid bills. I don't think, either, that I shall give up old friends for new ones, as you seem to think I shall.'

'H'm! well, perhaps not. But we are the slaves of circumstances, all of us. What is sadly evident to me is that you and I can never be as pleasantly intimate in London as we have been here.'

'If you are so sure of that, I suppose it must be so,' answered Linda, coldly. She was hurt at the spirit in which Mainwairing had received her news. Why must

he needs prophesy evil things to her? If he had been a woman she would have been inclined to suspect him of jealousy.

There was an interval of silence, during which Linda made a show of occupying herself with a piece of needlework, while Mainwairing traced invisible designs with his stick upon the well-worn carpet. Then he rose, and said—

'I suppose I may as well go now. I hate affecting farewells. Let us say good-bye as quickly as possible, and get the thing over.'

The words were spoken irritably and almost rudely; but, accompanying their apparent roughness, was a certain look in the speaker's eyes which Linda immediately detected, and in some sort understood. She thought he was really sorry to part with her, and with this belief her momentary vexation passed away.

'You have never asked about your violin,' she said. 'I have it, all safe, upstairs. Won't you let me hear you play once before you go?'

'I am out of practice,' said Mainwairing. 'Besides, you have no piano to accompany me upon.'

'So much the better. I want to hear you, not to play with you.'

Mainwairing smiled, for the request touched him in his most vulnerable point; nor was much pressing required to induce him to accede to it. Linda ran upstairs, and returned in a moment, bearing in her arms the precious violin. Mainwairing took it from her, with a word of thanks, and, after screwing up the strings and tuning them as best he could, broke out into the well-known pathetic air, 'Jours de mon Enfance,' from the *Pré aux Clercs*.

Then how he made that violin sing and sob and wail! What eloquence, undreamt of by the talented composer of the *Pré aux Clercs*, he drew from the simple melody! What unspeakable things he made the plaintive notes whisper! The tongue, as everybody

knows, is not the sole means of expression accorded to us mortals. There is a language of the eyes as unmistakable (under favourable circumstances, *bien entendu*) and infinitely more compendious than audible utterances; there is a language of gesture too, and a language of music, expressible by means of strings, or of wood and catgut, as the case may be, which is not hard to read. Mainwairing's tongue was tied by honourable scruples; but, for some reason or other, which it is needless here to analyse, he held himself free to say what he pleased through the voice of his beloved instrument. The rushing bow, the nimble fingers, the trembling, vibrating strings, did they not all combine and blend together to tell, as plainly as could be, the story which the brain that set them all in motion declined to commit to the less delicate medium of articulate speech? Did they not whisper of love, and moan of despair, and sigh Farewell! as clearly as ever yet man spoke?

But language of this kind can only be read aright by such as are in entire sympathy with him who makes use thereof. It is a mere waste of time to send a despatch in cypher to a man who has not got the key to it. Linda, seeing much more cause for jubilation than regret in the surrounding circumstances, could not fall in with Mainwairing's mood, nor understand the melancholy and—if the truth must be told—somewhat lackadaisical expression which had overspread his features. At the bottom of her heart she thought he was making a great fuss about a small matter. It was comprehensible, and even flattering, that he should mourn over the break-up of the Blasewitz establishment; but there was a house in London where, in spite of all his cynical doubts, he would always be welcomed; and, in short, Linda had no conception that she was listening to what was intended for an eternal adieu. As a musician, though, she could not fail to be struck by Mainwairing's splendid mastery over his instrument.

'How could you say you were out of practice?' she cried, when at length he let the violin slip down from his shoulder to his knees. 'You are improved—immensely improved. I never heard you play so well before.'

'If I played as well as Amphion or Orpheus what good would it be to me?' he returned, rather enigmatically. 'The days of miracles are past.'

Then he returned the violin to its case, said he would send for it in the morning, and, a few minutes later, found himself walking away towards Dresden in the warm, scented air of the evening. He would have been puzzled to say how he got out of the house or what had been the manner of his leave-taking. The one idea in his mind had been to get the wrench over as speedily as possible; for, though he believed something had been said about meeting again soon, and though Linda had given him a scrap of paper with her London address—250 Lancaster Gate—written upon it, he was well aware that he should never present himself at the door of that mansion, and that it would be best for his peace of mind that he should see Miss Howard no more. It seemed to him that her riches placed far more insurmountable obstacles between them than her poverty could ever have done. And as he plodded wearily along through the gloaming he fell to apostrophising himself with vituperative epithets.

'Ass! idiot! beast!' he exclaimed, cutting savagely with his stick at the humble little flowers that grew by the wayside. 'You knew you loved her long ago; but because you saw that the old fellow wanted to catch you, and because, forsooth, she was not a brilliant match, you chose to run away. Now you have lost her—and serve you right! She seemed glad to see me too. I wonder—but what's the use of wondering? She is as much out of my reach now as if she were married already. She *will* be married, I expect, before a year is over. I give her about six months to forget my

existence; and I—I shall never forget her as long as I live. Lord, what a donkey I am!'

Picturing to himself the scenes of gaiety and excitement into which Linda's altered fortune must, thenceforth, of necessity lead her, he asked himself ruefully how long an heiress, and a beautiful heiress withal, could remain unspoiled by contact with the world. Seeing, in his mind's eye, a prophetic vision of Linda, magnificently dressed, surrounded by male admirers, and courted by female toadies, the words of a certain melancholy Adieu rose in his memory; and as there was nobody in sight, he solaced himself by repeating them aloud. He was trolling out—

> Adieu! tu vas faire un beau rêve,
> Et t'enivrer d'un plaisir dangereux;
> Sur ton chemin l'étoile qui se lève
> Longtemps encore éblouira tes yeux.
>
> Un jour tu sentiras peut-être
> Le prix d'un cœur qui nous comprend,
> Le bien qu'on trouve à le connaître,
> Et ce qu'on souffre en le perdant.

Mainwairing, I say, was spouting these sentimental stanzas *ore rotundo*, when, turning a corner, he found himself suddenly face to face with an elderly gentleman, who, having had a considerable amount of business to transact in Dresden that day, at his banker's and elsewhere, was now hurrying home to Blasewitz to dinner, with his pockets full of money and his heart full of contentment.

'God bless my soul, Mainwairing! is that you?' cried the elderly gentleman. 'Where the deuce have you sprung from?'

In the midst of all his sorrow Mainwairing could not help feeling some sense of amusement and satisfaction as he noticed the far from cordial tone of Mr. Howard's greeting. 'Oho! my old friend,' thought he; 'times are changed, are they? I was a big enough fish last spring; but now that we have got 350,000*l.*

at the end of our line, we ought to catch something heavier, eh?'

'Been to my place?' inquired Mr. Howard, carelessly, but not without perceptible uneasiness.

'I have,' answered Mainwairing, composedly, quite understanding what was passing in the anxious parent's mind. 'I only returned this afternoon, and I went at once to call upon Miss Howard. I am very glad I did so, as it has given me the opportunity of having a nice long chat with her.'

'Oh!' said Mr. Howard, looking at him with keen grey eyes. 'I suppose she has told you, then, that we are off the first thing to-morrow morning?'

'Yes. By-the-bye, I must congratulate you upon your legacy.'

'Thank you, Mainwairing, thank you. My poor brother's money will be a help to us, no doubt; but wealth brings responsibilities with it—heavy responsibilities. Are you, too, on your way to England?'

'I think not,' said Mainwairing. 'But really I don't know; I have no plans.'

'That's the way to enjoy life!' said Mr. Howard, manifestly comforted by this announcement. 'No plans—no bother—no troublesome duties! Between you and me, Mainwairing,' he continued, with a lapse into something of his old confidential manner, 'I don't feel at all sure that we shall be any the happier for this money coming in. I shall be obliged now to live at home; and really I have got so accustomed to foreign life that I fancy I shall find going back to English society very slow work. Well, well! we mustn't look a gift horse in the mouth. I hope I shall see you at my house in London some day.'

'Thanks,' said Mainwairing. 'Miss Howard was kind enough to give me her address.'

'Oh!' said Mr. Howard again, rather shortly. 'Well, any time you like to look us up, you know, Mainwairing—any time—always delighted to see you!

I won't keep you standing any longer now. Good night.'

Mainwairing looked after the receding figure of his affable friend with an amused twinkle in his eyes. '*My* house in London!' he muttered. 'Poor little Linda! I hope, for her sake, that her money is carefully secured to her.'

Then he returned to the Hôtel Bellevue sadly enough, and spent the evening in wondering what he should do next.

By the time he had got to the end of his fourth cigar he had made up his mind to go to Canada; for his recent experience had not sufficed wholly to destroy his faith in the efficacy of change of scene. 'Canada will, at any rate, be a new country to me,' he thought; 'and I shall get plenty of fishing and shooting there—which will be something. But, oh, ye gods! to think that, if the Austrians and Prussians had put off their quarrel for a month or two, I might have come straight back here from Constantinople and made it all right! I have lost my happiness and peace of mind, and I am driven out of Europe uniquely through the knavish tricks of Herr von Bismarck—whom may Heaven confound!'

CHAPTER X

LINDA ENTERS UPON HER INHERITANCE

'Linda, my dear girl, do exercise a little self-command,' said Mr. Howard. 'It is quite natural that these good people should be sorry that we are going. They lose an easy place, liberal wages, and an indulgent master; and of course they show their grief in their unrestrained, vulgar way; but really it isn't at all the thing for a lady to burst into tears at parting with a couple of servants.'

Linda obediently dried her eyes and endeavoured to gulp down the lump that would keep rising in her throat. She was sitting in the carriage which had come to convey her to the station; the luggage had been piled upon the roof and at the back of the vehicle; her father was preparing to take his place at her side, and she was about to see the last of the old house which had been her home for so many months. Her life there had not—latterly at least—been so cheerful that she need have grieved much over leaving it; but who ever yet quitted a roof which had become familiar to him—did it but cover a Dotheboys Hall or an official residence (and we know, from the repeated public assurances of our rulers, how willingly the tenancy of the latter class of dwelling-houses is always resigned)—without a passing pang of regret? It was not so much to Herr Eichmann's house that Linda was so sorry to bid adieu as to the thousand memories which seemed, at this last moment, to cling about it and identify themselves with it, so that now, for the first time, the girl recognised, with a sort of shock, the absolute and final breaking off from old associations which she was about to accomplish. As to what her future manner of life was likely to be she could form little more than the vaguest surmise; but she knew, at least, that it must differ very widely from that which she was upon the eve of casting off. With a new and uncertain career opening before her, with all present duties, habits, and pleasures dropping into the background, and with Lieschen and Christine boohooing on the doorstep in the most heartrending manner, it was scarcely surprising that she should break down, and display a little of the emotion which her father had denounced as unworthy of a lady.

Linda's distress did not, however, last long. She was herself again before the railway station was reached; and Mr. Howard had no further occasion for complaint during the long journey to London.

What, indeed, could have been more delightful than that journey to a young lady born and bred in penury, but by nature appreciative of small comforts? To travel in a *coupé* specially reserved; to lodge in the best rooms of the best hotels; to order dinner without any uncomfortable misgivings as to the length of to-morrow's bill; to drive to and from the station in a well-cushioned carriage, instead of in the jingling omnibus provided for the conveyance of the humbler order of travellers—all these things may have little value in the eyes of those who habitually enjoy them; but to Linda, who had not as yet learnt to regard such luxuries as matters of course, they were a source of pure and unmixed pleasure. There was an intoxication in this suddenly acquired command over gold, a delirious glee in the wicked extravagance of drinking champagne at dinner every night, which, for the time, went near to turning Linda's head.

Mr. Howard, too, exhibited at this time an amount of amiability quite without a parallel in his daughter's recollection. At Hanover, which was their first halting-place, he presented her with a very handsome carved ivory fan before taking her to the Opera in the evening. At Cologne he took a fancy to a heavy gold bracelet which caught his eye in a jeweller's window and bought it for his beloved child, who, as he fondly said, need now no longer be without the trinkets that women like. And at Brussels he went out to the flower-market, the first thing in the morning, and returned with a huge bunch of fresh, wet roses, which he handed to Linda when she took her place at the breakfast-table.

'Not a valuable present, my dear,' said he, 'with touching simplicity; 'but I remembered that you were fond of roses, and I thought that, by getting up a little earlier than usual, I might secure you a few before they were spoilt by the heat.'

This modest offering affected Linda far more than

the bracelet or the fan had done. It was only the knowledge of her father's dislike to such exhibitions that kept her from bursting into tears of love and gratitude as she threw her arms round his neck and kissed him, thanking him fervently for his goodness.

'Oh, papa, how nice it is to be rich!' she cried.

Mr. Howard looked a little disconcerted. 'I hope you don't imagine that I am more indulgent to you than I used to be because you are an heiress now, my dear?' he said.

It was the first time that any allusion had been made by him to the fact that Linda was the sole inheritress of her uncle's wealth, and the girl felt inexpressibly pained and humiliated by it.

'Oh, papa!' she exclaimed, 'how could you think I could be such a wretch? As if you had not always been as kind as anyone could be! Only, now that you are rich and have not little things to bother you, of course you have more time to think of me. As for the money, what does it matter whether it is yours or mine? Why, you have a right to everything that belongs to me, haven't you?'

'Not exactly, my dear,' answered Mr. Howard—'no legal right, at least. Some people might think there was a—what shall I say?—a sort of moral obligation; but I should be the last man in the world to insist upon that. My only feeling in the matter is that, taking into consideration your youth and inexperience, it might be as well that I should help you in the management of your inheritance—perhaps receive the interest of your money for you, or something of that kind. But these are mere business details which it will be best for me to discuss with Mr. Deane. We need not worry about them just now.'

Mr. Deane, the senior partner of a highly respectable firm of solicitors, had been a friend of the late Mr. Thomas Howard, and was one of the executors to his will. It was Mr. Deane who had written to apprise

Linda of her fortune, who had suggested the propriety of her immediate presence in her native land, and who had thoughtfully forwarded the necessary funds for the journey. Linda declared her willingness to leave the arrangement of her affairs in the hands of this competent person and of her father; and so the subject dropped.

A few days later, the young heiress, standing upon the crowded deck of a Channel steamer, caught her first glimpse of the white cliffs of England rising above the sultry mists of a summer afternoon, and Dover Castle, with the British flag floating above it. Her first impression on landing was one of patriotic pride. The sober celerity with which the operation of transferring the passengers and luggage from the boat to the train was accomplished, the absence of shouting and flurry, and the liberty of movement accorded to the travellers, made her feel that she was in a free and self-respecting country, where love of order was sufficiently innate to render vexatious restrictions and regulations superfluous. The railway-carriages, to be sure, were not as luxurious as might have been expected; but the speed and smoothness with which the train travelled more than made up for this deficiency; and the calm, rich beauty of the Kentish landscape filled Linda with delight and surprise. Mr. Howard pointed out the various objects of interest as they sped onwards.

'All this is So-and-so's property,' he said, with a circular sweep of his arm. 'I remember him very well at Oxford; and a very good fellow he was. He and I were sworn allies at one time. I shall introduce you to him, one of these days, Linda.'

Linda thought how fortunate it was that papa had so many friends in England, and how pleasant it would be to spend a week or so at Lord So-and-so's place. She had heard a great deal about English country houses, and was anxious to see for herself whether the

grandeur of these establishments had been overrated. That she would soon have an opportunity of doing so she did not for a moment doubt; for her father had always given her to understand that nothing but the unfortunate accident of his poverty had prevented him from mixing in the most aristocratic circles; and, now that this barrier was removed, she confidently expected that he would resume his legitimate place in society.

The hop-gardens and the green meadows, the distant blue hills and the sober red-brick farmhouses seemed to welcome the wanderers home; and Linda marvelled at the insensibility of those who had told her that England was not a picturesque country. She had seen many foreign lands, but none that appeared to her more satisfying to the eye than this.

London, however, proved a terrible disappointment. For a certain amount of smoke and blackness Linda had been prepared; but her expectations fell very far short of the reality. When the train glided under a yellowish foggy canopy, which turned the setting sun into a mere dim circle; when, to right and left, row after row of dirty red houses stretched out to meet the narrowed horizon, their monotony broken only by some occasional church-spire of inconceivable hideousness; when, directly beneath the viaduct along which the train ran, the poverty-stricken streets of Bermondsey displayed themselves in all their meanness, squalor, and misery, Linda fairly shuddered in dismay, and, turning to her father, asked whether this could indeed be London.

'Yes, this is London,' answered Mr. Howard, smiling. 'It isn't much to look at, when the wind is in the east; but it's not a bad place to live in.'

'I don't think I could ever bear to live in such a town as this,' said Linda, in an awestruck undertone. 'It is too horribly ugly!'

The contrast between the homely cheeriness of the country which she had just left and the utter gloom of

the huge and grimy city which she was entering impressed her forcibly, and struck her with a vague foreboding. Nor was this feeling lessened when it was discovered, on arrival at the terminus, that neither carriage nor servant was in waiting to receive the travellers. Mr. Howard was a good deal put out by this omission.

'I wrote to Mr. Deane that we should arrive this evening,' he said, as he followed his daughter into a four-wheeled cab. 'I can't understand why he has not sent somebody to meet us.'

'I hope they expect us,' said Linda, despondently.

'Expect us? Of course they do. It was arranged that all your uncle's servants should remain in their places till we returned; and it was their business to see that the carriage was here to take us home. I shall let the coachman know, to-morrow morning, that if he wants to keep his situation he will have to mind what he is about,' said Mr. Howard, wrathfully.

Linda made no reply. Her attention was fully taken up by an eager scrutiny of the streets through which they were now passing, and which did not, by their appearance, in any way mitigate the unfavourable impression she had already received of the metropolis. She could find little to admire in Regent Street and Piccadilly, where the shops were closed, though it was still broad daylight; Park Lane presented no more cheerful an aspect than it is wont to wear on an evening in the latter end of August; and indeed it must be confessed that a progress, in a jolting cab, through the west end of London, at that season of the year, is not calculated to rouse any other sentiment in the breast of a stranger than one of extreme melancholy.

After what seemed to Linda an interminable drive, Lancaster Gate was at length reached, and the cab drove up before the door of number 250, a corner house, and a sufficiently imposing structure. The door was opened

by a portly butler, who tripped down the steps, followed by a footman in mourning livery.

'We should have sent the carriage to meet you, ma'am,' said the former functionary, addressing himself to Linda; 'but we was not sure by which train you was to arrive.'

'I told Mr. Deane that we should reach Charing Cross at 5.40,' interrupted Mr. Howard. 'Didn't he let you know?'

'We have not had no horders from Mr. Deane upon the subject, ma'am,' said the butler, still looking at Linda, and thus manifesting his acquaintance with the intention of his late master's will. He was a man of experience, and he thought it best to avoid misconception at the outset.

Linda, in some confusion, replied that it was of no consequence, and entered her new home, without daring to look at her father.

She was met, in the hall, by the housekeeper, a grave, elderly personage, in black silk, who greeted her new mistress with a curtsey and a swift, scrutinising glance.

'We have got the best bedroom ready for you, ma'am,' said she. 'We thought as perhaps you might not like to ockipy the room where poor Mr. 'Oward died.'

'Oh, no,' said Linda, with a slight shiver; 'I should not like that at all.'

'So we thought, ma'am,' answered the housekeeper, with a faint, superior smile. 'Shall I show you your room?'

'Thank you,' said Linda, nervously; 'but papa—Mr. Howard—I hope you have given him the best room.'

'We have prepared a bedroom and dressing-room close to yours for the gentleman, ma'am,' answered the housekeeper.

'Thank you,' said Linda again, meekly. She would

have liked to say that she wished her father to be treated as the master of the house; but she felt shy and awkward, and was considerably overawed by the respectful solemnity of her new servants. And indeed she never succeeded, either then or at any subsequent time, in establishing the slightest authority over Mrs. Tester, the housekeeper, and Hudson, the butler. These two functionaries were worthy, honest people in the main, and afterwards served Linda as faithfully as they had done their late master; but they were naturally anxious to have it understood, from the first, that they were the real controllers of the household, and that any interference with their liberty of action would bring about their immediate resignation. They occupied a position analogous to that of the responsible ministers of a free country, while Linda filled the easy and simple *rôle* of a constitutional sovereign. As for Mr. Howard, who, to carry out the parallel, must be likened to a King Consort, it is evident that his part was a more difficult one to play; and it cannot be said that he invariably acquitted himself of it in a manner to give satisfaction either to himself or to those about him. On this first evening, however, perhaps because he thought it best to wait until his position should be more clearly defined, or perhaps because he too had been a trifle cowed by the magnificent condescension of Hudson, he showed himself amiable and conciliatory, and made no further allusion to his intended rebuke to the coachman.

After breakfast, the next morning, Mr. Deane made his appearance. He was a merry little fresh-coloured man of sixty or thereabouts, very rich, very prosperous, and very good-natured. The world had always treated him so well that he, in return, entertained an excellent opinion of it and its inhabitants, and was always anxious to be upon the best of terms with everybody. And in this kindly aim he was usually successful. Nevertheless he had not been five minutes in the big, stately drawing-room at Lancaster Gate before he perceived that it

would be a hard matter for him to maintain friendly relations with Mr. Howard.

The very first proposition made by that gentleman. after it had been explained that Linda would not have the right to touch the principal of her inheritance till she should have attained the age of thirty—and not then, if she should have married before reaching that age—caused the worthy solicitor to hold up his hands in amazement and consternation.

'The interest of the money,' Mr. Howard said, quite calmly, 'had better be paid in to my account. That will save all further trouble.'

'To your account!' exclaimed the astonished trustee. 'Really, Mr. Howard, I don't think you can have quite understood the terms of the will. Your daughter is the sole heiress of her uncle's estate, and is the only person entitled to profit by it.'

'It is you, Mr. Deane, who misunderstand me,' returned Mr. Howard, loftily. 'I have no desire to make any personal profit out of the money left to my daughter; but I do claim the right of a parent to administer her affairs for her. I believe I am correct in saying that I am her legal guardian, at least so long as she continues under age.'

'In a certain sense, of course,' assented Mr. Deane.

'In every sense, I should have thought. Indeed, it stands to reason that she is not capable of regulating her own expenditure. Surely she might give me a power of attorney——'

'Quite out of the question, I assure you—quite out of the question!' interrupted Mr. Deane, hastily. 'The executors could never consent to such an arrangement; it would be going entirely against the intentions of the testator.'

In truth the late Mr. Thomas Howard, speaking with the admirable frankness which had been one of the most prominent characteristics of that eminent man of business, had repeatedly referred to his brother, in Mr.

Deane's hearing, as an unconscionable vagabond, whom he would not trust with a five-pound note.

'Do you mean to tell me, then,' said Mr. Howard, planting himself on the hearthrug, with his back to the empty fireplace, and glaring down angrily at his opponent, 'that a mere child, like Linda, is to be given undisputed control over thousands of pounds, and that I am not to have a word to say as to how she is to spend them?'

'I should not put it in that way,' replied Mr. Deane, willing to keep the peace. 'No doubt your advice and assistance would always be valuable; and I am sure,' he added pleasantly, turning to Linda, who had hitherto taken no part in the colloquy, and looked particularly alarmed and unhappy—'I am sure Miss Howard will consult her papa upon all matters of importance. But certainly, in the eyes of the law, the interest of the money is hers to do what she likes with.'

'I never heard of such a thing in my life!' exclaimed Mr. Howard. 'It is utterly preposterous and ridiculous! I never gave my brother credit for much common sense; but at least he knew how to look after his money; and nothing will induce me to believe that he intended to leave it in the hands of a girl just out of the schoolroom, and to deprive me of all authority over it.'

'From my personal knowledge,' replied Mr. Deane, now, in his turn, a little heated, 'I am able to say that that is precisely what he did intend.'

'I never heard of such a thing in my life!' began Mr. Howard again.

But here Linda interposed—

'If I can really do what I choose with the money,' she said, 'I should like to hand it over to papa as it is paid to me.'

Mr. Deane said he didn't think that would do at all.

'But can I do it, if I like?' persisted Linda.

'My dear young lady,' answered Mr. Deane, slowly and gravely, 'there is nothing to prevent you from bestowing every farthing you receive from us upon the crossing-sweeper outside your door, or from throwing it into the Thames; but when I tell you that your uncle, to whose wishes you will allow that you owe some consideration, especially desired that you should retain the management of your income, and when I add that your father could not possibly accept the gift which you propose to make to him without laying himself open to insinuations of the most unpleasant kind, I trust you will see the impropriety of adopting the course you speak of. Come,' he added, more lightly, 'let us look at the question reasonably. I quite understand your feeling. You shrink from the responsibility connected with the possession of a large fortune; you think both you and your father are placed in a false position by the money having been left to you, and not to him. Very natural, I'm sure! Well, but these responsibilities have been awarded to you by Providence; you can't escape from them; and, dear me! there are worse misfortunes than coming into eighteen thousand a-year. Now, I fancy that much of the difficulty of the position might be removed—it is no part of my business to advise you, of course; but perhaps you will excuse me for making a suggestion—I think, in short, that some provision—some allowance might be made——' Mr. Deane paused, diffidently; but happening at this juncture to raise his eyes to Mr. Howard's face, he caught a look which encouraged him to continue with more confidence. 'I should recommend that you make your father such an allowance as, together with his own income, will enable him to live, as it were, independently of you. I think in this way a good deal of awkwardness and uncomfortableness might be obviated.'

Mr. Howard, in a tone of gentle melancholy, regretted that his motives had been so entirely misconstrued. In proposing to take charge of his daughter's

income for her he had been actuated by no other wish than that she should be freed from a task for which neither her nature nor her education had fitted her. After what Mr. Deane had said about unpleasant insinuations, he felt it due to himself to withdraw all claim in that direction; but it would be a satisfaction to him, in the future, to remember that he had done what in him lay to oppose an arrangement which he must still consider most foolish and imprudent. With reference to the question of an allowance to himself, he would only ask Mr. Deane how *he* would like to be put upon an allowance by his daughter?

Mr. Deane smiled, rubbed his hands cheerfully, and said, 'Upon my word, I don't think I should mind: I don't indeed, Mr. Howard.'

'No? Then you must pardon me for saying, Mr. Deane, that you are a little—well, well, never mind. Possibly I may be over-sensitive; but the idea of being pensioned by my own daughter is not agreeable to me. I shall do very well with what I have; and I cannot consent to receive anything more.'

Nevertheless he did consent. At Linda's earnest and tearful entreaty he consented, in the end, to accept the sum of three thousand a year, which, considering that he had the prospect of being fed and lodged in his daughter's house for an indefinite period, might be held to be an ample allowance for clothes, cigars, and *menus plaisirs*. Mr. Deane thought it excessive, and did not hesitate to say so. Nor did he fail to warn Mr. Howard that Linda, being an infant, could enter into no contract binding against herself. But, perceiving that no remonstrances on his part were likely to have the smallest effect, he wisely abstained from further opposition; and, after glancing at his watch, and remarking that he had only just time to catch the train for Croydon, where his country house was situated, he bade a cordial farewell to Miss Howard, and a rather more distant one to her father, and departed.

'The girl is a good little soul,' remarked Mr. Deane, when he was sitting with his wife, that evening, in the garden, after dinner; 'but the old man is a sharp practitioner. He gave me a good deal of bother this morning; and, somehow or other, I rather think he got what he wanted in the end.'

CHAPTER XI

BRIGHTON

One gusty, sunny afternoon in October, a good deal of attention was excited among the walkers and drivers along the sea-front, at Brighton, by the appearance of a brand-new barouche drawn by a pair of showy bay horses, whose harness displayed rather more plating than was quite consistent with good taste. The coachman on the box, and the powdered footman who sat, massive and majestic, at his side, were clad in mourning; but no effort had been spared to render their black liveries as magnificent as epaulettes and a profusion of twisted cord and aiguillettes could make them; and, upon the whole, the appearance of the servants might be said to be worthy of the horses, the carriage, and the elderly gentleman of benign aspect who reclined upon its cushions, holding his cigar between the tips of his lavender-kidded fingers.

Those who did not recognise this sublime personage made haste to inquire who the fine-looking man in the Astrachan-trimmed coat might be; and generally received some such answer as—'Oh, don't you know? That's Howard, the millionaire. Made oceans of money in America, out of petroleum, or something. They say he's going to settle twenty thousand a year on his daughter the day she marries.'

For, though the Howard *ménage* had now been nearly two months established in Brighton, it was not

generally known that the daughter, not the father, was the owner of the fortune in question, nor had the amount of that fortune, or the means of its acquirement, as yet transpired—some asserting that it was the result of sheep-farming, others insisting that it had sprung from oil-wells, while not a few declared that Mr. Howard had begun life with the traditional half-crown, and had arrived at his present pinnacle of prosperity after years of careful and astute financing.

Brighton had, after some hesitation, been selected by Mr. Howard as the most desirable place in which to pass the remainder of the summer and the autumn. Linda, had she been consulted, would have preferred Scotland or Wales; but Mr. Howard had not allowed his authority to be in any way weakened by the conversation with Mr. Deane, recorded in the last chapter; nor, for that matter, did the young heiress desire anything better than that, in this and all other things, her father should follow the bent of his own inclinations. He chose Brighton principally because he hungered and thirsted after display, and longed to exhibit his newly-acquired wealth to an admiring world. It was he who had persuaded Linda to part with her late uncle's old-fashioned carriages and portly coachman, and to substitute for them the barouche and the gorgeous domestics described above.

Linda was a little shy of appearing in this resplendent equipage. Whenever she made use of it, she had an uncomfortable impression that the eyes of all the passers-by were riveted upon her, and that there was as much of satire as of admiration in their gaze. Therefore, if she could discover any plausible excuse for escaping from the daily penance which her father sought to inflict upon her, she gladly took advantage of it. Upon such occasions Mr. Howard issued forth upon his afternoon drive alone. *He* was in nowise afraid of being laughed at. *He* knew that to the well-regulated British mind there is nothing so noble, so

dignified, so worthy of all respect as wealth; and in the security engendered by this conviction, he willingly paraded himself, his fur-trimmed coat, and his daughter's fine carriage and horses before the eyes of all Brighton, by the hour together.

If, after a turn or two, he got tired of his own company, and yearned after congenial companionship, he had no difficulty in satisfying his craving. Acquaintances of both sexes were always ready to accept the vacant seats in the barouche; for when did a moneyed man ever want for friends? Mr. Howard had not been a week in Brighton before this and that one, who remembered to have met him abroad, called, or left their cards at the new and imposing house, which, by his request, Linda had engaged at a ruinous monthly rental, and whither she had transferred her household. These, in their turn, introduced their friends; so that, ere long, Miss Howard's visiting-list swelled itself to a portentous length.

But, despite this increase of acquaintance, Linda was as devoid of intimate friends in her new station as she had been in the old days at Blasewitz. Few of the ladies who called upon her seemed to care about advancing beyond the boundary line of ordinary civility, and such as did frequent the house were rather her father's friends than her own, and, in truth, were scarcely the people whom she would herself have chosen as familiar associates. Chief among them was a certain Mrs. Williams, a rich widow, who, with her two daughters, had known Mr. Howard slightly at Baden, some years previously, and who had now pitched her wandering tent at Brighton for a season. Mrs. Williams was what in these days is called a lady, inasmuch as she was very well off, did not drop her h's, and had been presented at Court; but it would have been difficult to discover in her any further claims to gentility. She was a good-natured, vulgar, over-dressed woman, fond of money and titles, and sincerely respect-

ful to all who owned either of these advantages; lavish of compliments to those who ranked an inch or two higher than herself in the social scale, and honestly rude to such as she conceived to be her inferiors. In a word, a thoroughly commonplace and estimable person, who might have got on better in society had she not been afflicted with a red face, a spherical figure, and an unfortunate propensity to cover herself with jewellery during the daytime. Her daughters were so completely her counterparts in every essential particular, that it seems scarcely worth while to describe them more minutely.

With people of this stamp Linda could have little in common. Her eye was shocked by the horrible gaudiness of their attire as much as her taste was offended by their out-spoken flattery, and their shrill cries of delight over her newly-purchased wardrobe. The real or feigned ecstasies of the young ladies at the sight of her dresses and ornaments seemed to her to savour more of impertinence than of compliment; and she was utterly put out of countenance when their mother, meaning to be agreeable, assured her that she was an uncommonly pretty girl, and that her Pa was the handsomest and best-dressed man in Brighton.

Mr. Howard, however, being of a less sensitive temperament, thought Mrs. Williams a charming woman, and was never weary of her society. Day after day he discovered some pretext for asking her and her daughters to luncheon or dinner; and soon they came to feel themselves so much at home with him that they took to dropping in, between one and two o'clock, whenever they felt so inclined, and without waiting for any formal invitation to do so.

'I do dislike ceremony,' Mrs. Williams would sometimes remark. 'What I always say is, I like to see my acquaintances at dinner, and my friends at lunch. I hope you and your Pa, my dear, will never forget that when you happen to find yourselves near my house in

the middle of the day.' And Maria and Sophy would murmur a chorus of assent to the hospitable wish.

It was upon these not over-refined persons that Linda found herself chiefly dependent for female society during the first few months of her sojourn at Brighton. Visitors of the opposite sex were more numerous, and perhaps of a somewhat higher standing. Heiresses are seldom suffered to remain long in obscurity, or to languish for lack of admirers. A few hard-worked barristers refreshing their jaded systems with the sea-breezes; a Government clerk or two, and half-a-dozen or so of idle men, with expensive tastes and limited incomes, took an early opportunity of seeking out Mr. Howard, and were welcomed by him with his customary geniality. Each of them strove, by means of small attentions, to ingratiate himself with the fortunate Linda, who, for her part, was nothing loth to receive their advances, and thought them all very polite and agreeable young men. The 112th Dragoon Guards, which distinguished corps was at that time quartered at Brighton, hastened to cast itself, so to speak, at the feet of this favoured young lady. Not a man of them, from the colonel, who was still a bachelor, to the youngest sub-lieutenant, but would willingly have sacrificed his liberty, and bowed his meek neck under the matrimonial yoke for her sake. Captain Browne spent a small fortune in providing her with flowers, and making preposterous bets of gloves with her, which nothing short of a miracle could have saved him from losing. Captain Greene put himself to an immensity of trouble and inconvenience to secure for her a pair of ponies of showy action, perfect docility, and warranted safe to drive for a lady inexperienced in the art of handling the ribbons. And poor young Whyte, who, in the despair engendered by a calamitous Ascot and Goodwood, had betrothed himself to a wealthy but ill-favoured Scotch lady, actually went so far as to write to Glasgow to break off his engagement, upon the

hazard of his handsome face finding favour in the eyes of the beautiful Miss Howard. For, as he sapiently observed, when a fellow is going in for that kind of thing, hang it all! he might as well have good looks as well as coin; he didn't see why he shouldn't have as good a chance as anybody else—bad luck couldn't last for ever; and, if the worst came to the worst, there was always the possibility of exchanging into the foot, and going out to India.

It is melancholy to think that so much unselfish devotion should have been utterly thrown away; but so it was. Linda's peace of mind was in nowise endangered by the assiduous attentions of these honest gentlemen, though she liked them all very well, and enjoyed the novelty of listening to their simple ideas and somewhat slangy talk.

As for Mr. Howard, he was delighted with the 112th. He had known the regiment, he said, in former years, and was very glad to meet it again, though all his old friends were either dead or had left the service. He was much pleased at receiving an invitation to dine at mess, and was so late in returning home after that festivity, that Linda had been asleep for hours before he let himself in with his latch-key. She was roused out of her slumbers that night by a prolonged rattle and crash, followed by the sound of imprecations not loud but deep. It was only papa's bedroom candlestick, which had somehow eluded his grasp, and had gone clattering all the way downstairs, leaving him to find his way to bed, as best he could, in the dark. And the next morning, the imperturbable Hudson announced that 'Mr. 'Oward's man had told him that his master would take his breakfast in his own room, as he was feeling rather hunwell.' Linda was for running upstairs at once to find out what was the matter; but Hudson respectfully interposed.

'I think you will find, ma'am,' said he, with an unmoved countenance, 'that Mr. 'Oward would rather not

be disturbed just at present. He will be able to come down by luncheon-time, I dessay.' And Linda humbly resumed her seat.

Hudson, if he had chosen, could have told her that this was not the first time that Mr. Howard had been thus 'hunwell' in the morning, though, as it happened, it was the first time that he had failed to put in an appearance at the breakfast-table. But Hudson was discreet, and kept his own counsel upon many matters.

The truth is that prosperity, which exercises all sorts of different influences upon different natures, had had a somewhat whimsical effect upon Mr. Howard, and one which could scarcely have been foretold in the case of a man of his time of life. After having, for many years and through various vicissitudes of fortune, led a life which, if not irreproachable, was at least methodical and outwardly decent, he had now returned to most of the follies and vices of his youth. Possibly his character may have been of that kind which exhibits itself in its best light during periods of adversity; or it may be that a certain unconscious adaptability of disposition, which had led him, quite naturally, to assume the air and dress of a virtuous *père de famille* at Dresden, caused him, on his return to affluence, to fall back instinctively into the habits which he had been accustomed, in earlier years, to associate therewith. Some people—knowingly or unknowingly—are perpetually playing parts, from their cradle to their death-bed. Very likely they can't help themselves; and ought only to be pitied for having an exaggerated sense of the fitness of things, as others are who find themselves irresistibly impelled to pocket the forks and spoons when they go out to dinner. It is a mental disease, which does not, however, incapacitate the sufferer from holding high offices, and making his mark in the world. Be this as it may, it is certain that no sooner did Mr. Howard find himself once more in England, once more free from restraint and responsibility,

and once more the possessor of a handsome income, than, as if by a natural consequence of the change in his circumstances, he reverted to the very same kind of life which had brought about a breach between him and his father in the year 1825, or thereabouts. He abandoned the sober, respectable frock-coat and stick-up collars which he had adhered to during the whole of his long residence abroad, in favour of a more youthful and fashionable style of dress; he took to drinking brandies-and-sodas and sherries-and-bitters at all sorts of odd hours; he spent the greater part of his time in one of the Brighton clubs; and left his daughter alone for days together in order that he might attend all the principal race-meetings.

It was after one of these periodical absences that Linda, coming down in the morning to welcome her father on his return, found herself confronted by a singular and startling apparition. Upon the hearth-rug, trimming his nails with a pen-knife, stood the exact semblance of Mr. Howard, save that his hair, instead of being grey, was brilliant yellow, that he wore no whiskers, and that his moustache stuck out, on either side of his mouth, in two carefully-waxed spikes. That there was nothing supernatural about this surprising being was presently proved by his exclaiming peevishly—

'For Heaven's sake, Linda, don't stand staring there, like a stuck pig! What in the world are you gaping at?'

Linda could only ejaculate, 'Papa!' in a tone of the most profound amazement.

'I suppose you think I have dyed my hair,' said Mr. Howard. 'I don't know why the deuce I shouldn't, if I like; but, as it happens, I have not. I have simply restored it to its natural colour by means of a preparation recommended to me. It was quite absurd that I should go grey so early in life; but it is in my family, I believe.'

Linda poured out the tea silently. She could not truthfully say that she thought the change in her father's appearance an improvement; nor was it pleasant to be likened to a stuck pig. Times were changed since Mr. Howard had got up early in the morning to buy flowers for her in the Brussels market; changed, too—and not altogether for the better—since the days when he had been a strict and exacting, but not unkind father, rating her sharply for small shortcomings, but never rude and contemptuous, as he had become of late.

The fact was, that Mr. Howard had adopted juvenile habits at a period of life at which the strongest constitution declines to be trifled with. Nature rebelled against the anachronism, and sent swift punishment upon the offender, in the shape of shortness of temper, frequent headaches, and a shaking hand. Linda watched him, as he sat opposite to her drinking his tea, and perceived how much he had aged, in spite of the restoration of his hair to its original tint.

'By-the-bye,' he said, carelessly, when breakfast was over, 'I wish you would oblige me with five hundred pounds, Linda. I have come to utter grief over this Houghton meeting, and upon my word, if I don't manage to get hold of five hundred or so, I shall find myself rather in Queer-street.'

Linda went to her davenport, took out her new cheque-book, and wrote a cheque for the sum required. Then she approached her father, holding out the slip of paper, and looking up into his face, perhaps in the expectation that he would kiss her, as he had sometimes been used to do when she had pleased him; but he did not appear to notice the movement, and, taking the cheque with a brief 'thanks,' thrust it into his pocket, and sauntered out of the room.

Linda did not see him again that day; nor did any visitor appear to enliven her solitude and raise her flagging spirits. She had absolutely nothing to do

with herself; she did not care to drive out alone; and spent a long day principally in pitying herself—not wholly without cause. The novelty of having a fine house, carriages, servants, and an overflowing exchequer had already worn off; and, on the other hand, it seemed to Linda that money had robbed her of her father's affection, and had not brought her one single friend. It was at this time that she began once more to long for the sound of Mainwairing's violin, and to wonder when she should see him again.

CHAPTER XII

'MY BROTHER-IN-LAW, LORD STURDHAM'

'Dear me!' said Mr. Howard. 'Well, really now, Linda, I think we ought to call upon them.'

As he spoke he laid down the Brighton newspaper, in which he had just read the following brief announcement:—

'The Earl and Countess of Sturdham have arrived at the Bedford Hotel upon what we believe is likely to be a lengthened stay in Brighton.'

'What sort of people are they, papa?' asked Linda, when her father had explained to whom he referred. She had frequently heard of 'my brother-in-law, Lord Sturdham,' but she had never looked forward to the possibility of meeting him face to face, nor ever thought of this unknown uncle except as a grand and awful abstraction.

'Well, to tell you the truth, my dear, I don't exactly know,' answered Mr. Howard, candidly. 'There was a coolness between us years ago—at the time when I married your poor mother, you know—and what with that and my living abroad, and all, I have never had any communication with the present Lord Sturdham.

I recollect him, in old days, as a rough-and-ready, hard-riding sort of fellow, who was not over and above civil to me; but I never saw much of him. He was not married in those days, and went very little into ladies' society—where I,' added Mr. Howard, with a glance at the mirror, 'was always a good deal in request.'

'And has he never made any effort to see you since?' asked Linda.

'Oh, no,' replied Mr. Howard. 'Why should he?'

'Then I should not take the trouble to call upon him. Very likely he will only be rude to us if we do go.'

Mr. Howard's slight knowledge of Lord Sturdham's character disposed him to consider this by no means an impossible contingency; but he was not blind to the advantages of having an earl for a brother-in-law, and long habit had made him impervious to small slights. He thought it was at least worth while to try and make friends with his noble relative; so he answered with an air of virtuous dignity all his own—

'My dear Linda, Lord Sturdham can do us neither good nor harm. We are entirely independent of him and his caprices, and can well afford to risk a snub in a good cause. After all, blood is thicker than water; you ought to know your uncle; and I should be sorry to have it said that I had not done my best to clear off old scores.'

This little speech smacked so much more of the papa of old times than of the fast, juvenile-elderly gentleman who had of late occupied his place, that Linda went to obey orders with more than her usual alacrity, and thought to herself, while her maid was helping her with her toilet, that Lord Sturdham must be a vindictive man indeed if he could hold out long against her father's fascinations.

Nevertheless, it was with some feeling of relief that

she learnt from the waiter at the Bedford Hotel (whither she and her father presently repaired in the carriage) that Lord Sturdham was out, but that Lady Sturdham was at home, and would receive her visitors. Two people ought to be able to hold their own against one, thought Linda, as she followed the waiter up the staircase.

The new-comers were received by a frail little old lady, beautifully dressed, who advanced to meet them, twisting the cards that had just been handed to her nervously between her fingers, and who looked far more alarmed than alarming.

She just touched Linda's glove with the tips of her tiny, jewelled fingers, and then made a quaint, old-fashioned bow, which was almost a curtsey, to Mr. Howard.

That gentleman, however, being determined to take the bull by the horns, was not to be put off in this way. He grasped Lady Sturdham's small white hand in his great red one, and pressed it cordially.

'We ought to know each other, Lady Sturdham,' said he. 'I am Henry Howard, poor Helen Blount's husband.'

'Oh, yes; I have heard—I know—I am very sorry Lord Sturdham is out,' murmured the little lady, in a tone which seemed to say, 'You are not *my* relations, you know; and really I think it is hardly fair of you to force your way into my room when my natural protector is absent.' Such, at least, was Linda's interpretation of her meaning.

'Well, well, well,' resumed Mr. Howard, settling himself in an arm-chair, and stretching out his legs comfortably before him; 'it is a long time since I last saw your husband.'

'Yes; it must be a great many years,' said Lady Sturdham, hurriedly. 'Have you been long in Brighton?' she continued, turning towards Linda, and addressing her with that smiling, but laboured polite-

ness which English ladies are wont to display in the entertainment of unwelcome visitors.

'Nearly two months,' answered Linda, who was already beginning to wish herself out of the room.

'It is a pleasant, lively place in the autumn,' said Lady Sturdham; 'but the high winds and dust are terribly trying, don't you think so? Sometimes I cannot leave the house for days together.'

Linda said the east wind was very disagreeable, and a few more remarks of equally absorbing interest were exchanged. Then came a pause, during which Lady Sturdham was obviously wondering what her visitors wanted, and when they would go away.

Mr. Howard judged this moment appropriate for the delivery of a short speech which he had rehearsed to himself in the carriage, on his way to the hotel. He cleared his voice, stroked his waxed moustache, and began—

'I daresay you know, Lady Sturdham, that your husband and I have not hitherto been upon the best of terms. My marriage with poor dear Helen was not approved of by the family, and differences arose which—which I think we should all now do wisely to forget. Unless he is much changed, Lord Sturdham is, if I may say so, of a somewhat stubborn nature. I also am a proud man; and so long as I felt that my circumstances were such that I could not meet my brother-in-law upon what I may call a footing of equality, I shrank from obtruding myself upon him. But now that my poor brother's death has placed my daughter and myself in a position of—er—affluence, I have no longer the same hesitation in coming forward to hold out the right hand of fellowship, and say—let by-gones be by-gones! You, no doubt, Lady Sturdham, possess great influence with your husband; and I count upon your valuable aid to assist me in putting an end to family dissensions.'

'I am so very sorry that Lord Sturdham is not at

home,' began the poor little lady, looking excessively frightened. 'No one is more particular than he about family ties of all kinds. As for myself, really I did not know that there had been any—any quarrel at all. And I am sure,' she added, turning to Linda, who had become rather hot and uncomfortable during her father's harangue—'I am sure I shall be delighted if I can be of any service to you in any way.'

'Thank you, Lady Sturdham. If you can succeed in removing the estrangement which has existed for so long between my dear wife's family and myself, you will indeed have rendered me the greatest of services,' interposed Mr. Howard, before Linda had time to reply.

Very likely he thought that he was speaking with perfect sincerity, and really imagined, for the moment, that his wife had been dear to him, that his desire to be reconciled to his brother-in-law was not influenced by the circumstance of the latter being a peer of the realm, and that he had acted magnanimously in coming forward to tender the olive-branch of peace.

'I am glad we went,' he said, a few minutes later, when he was once more leaning back on the comfortable carriage-cushions, surveying the sparkling sea, and the long prospect of irregular white houses, and the loungers on the pavement, with his habitual air of complacent patronage. 'I am sure it was the right thing to do.'

'But I don't think she was at all glad to see us,' said Linda, dubiously. 'Did you notice how relieved she looked when we got up to go away, and how frightened she seemed to be all the time we were there?'

'Nervousness, my dear—nothing but nervousness. She felt the situation trying perhaps—and no wonder. Delicate health, I daresay; but a good little woman, I should think, as ever breathed.'

'I am sure Lord Sturdham will be very disagreeable,' said Linda, prophetically.

'Oh, dear no! Why should he make himself disagreeable to us? We are not going to ask him to lend us money,' said Mr. Howard, whose experience had perhaps led him to take too restricted a view of the origin of human unfriendliness. 'Besides,' he resumed, 'we have nothing to fear from Lord Sturdham, or anybody else. We have done the civil thing; and if we are not met in a friendly spirit, why we shall go on our way, and not break our hearts over it.'

This was doubtless a very proper and philosophical way of looking at the matter; but it was not reassuring to Linda, who was too young and too sensitive to contemplate a slight with equanimity. She had a presentiment that Lord Sturdham would be rough and overbearing, and was prepared to receive that nobleman with extreme *hauteur* if, as she anticipated, he should return her father's call in person.

What she was not prepared for was that he should come without his wife, and that—Mr. Howard being absent on one of his frequent expeditions—she should have to receive the dreaded visitor alone and unsupported.

Linda was no coward; but it must be confessed that when Hudson flung open the drawing-room door, and, with a curt and cruel impassibility, announced—'Hearl of Sturdham,' her heart began to beat very fast, and she regretted most intensely that the laws of politeness precluded her from exclaiming, 'Not at home!' in reply.

She rose slowly from her chair, drew in her breath, and, taking her courage in both hands, awaited events.

A short, thickset old gentleman walked, or rather trotted, into the room, glanced quickly about him, and then, catching sight of Linda, made a dive at her, dropping his hat and stick on the floor, and grasped her hand with so much warmth that she would fain have shrieked for mercy.

'How do you do?—how do you do?' he cried.

'Very glad to welcome you back to England! I must apologise for Lady Sturdham; she has one of her bad headaches to-day, and can't leave the house. Papa not at home, eh? Never mind—see him some other time. And so you are Linda Howard? Dear, dear, dear!'

He had seated himself by this time, and was gazing at Linda with a broad smile on his good-humoured face, while she, too much taken aback to utter a word in reply, returned his scrutiny with interest. She saw before her a stout, bald-headed man, not very much past middle-age, whose homely features, old-fashioned garb, and healthy red-brown complexion seemed to belong rather to a well-to-do farmer than to the representative of one of the oldest families in England. The reality was so absurdly unlike the creation of her fancy, that she could not keep her face from dimpling into an answering smile as she exclaimed, half involuntarily—

'And you are Lord Sturdham?'

'Yes, yes; I am your uncle Sturdham. You have a look of poor Helen, though she was never what you could call a pretty woman. Well, you have led a mighty wandering life, but now I hope you are going to settle in the old country.'

'Oh, yes, we shall live in England now,' answered Linda.

'And how do you like it? Not a bad country, is it?'

'I think it is a little dull,' said Linda. Lord Sturdham's unexpected cordiality, and his apparent forgetfulness of the long-standing animosity between his family and Mr. Howard, had quite set her at ease with him.

'Dull? Not a bit of it! Brighton is rather dull, I grant you; but Brighton isn't England.'

'It is all that I have seen of England, though,' said Linda, 'except a week of London. And I don't think that was much better.'

'Much worse, I should say. I hate London. No;

you must go to the country if you want to know England as it really is. Some day or other I hope you will pay us a visit at Beechlands. I often go down of an evening to the wire fence at the end of the shrubbery there, where you can get a glimpse of the barley fields, and look at the old trees in the park, and listen to the rooks cawing and fighting in the elms, and wonder whether there is anything in the world to hold a candle to it, in its own quiet way. I don't pretend to be artistic, or to understand much about landscape, and so on; but I know what I like; and I declare I don't think there is a country in Europe fit to compare with England, take it all for all. There are no flower-gardens worthy of the name abroad, for one thing; and they are killing off their singing-birds as fast as they can; and then look at their houses! I did the grand tour when I was a lad, and saw a good many of their châteaux in France, and Germany, and Italy; but I assure you, though some of them were fine enough places to look at, there wasn't one that I could have lived in and made a home of.'

'You are a regular John Bull, aren't you?' said Linda, smiling. 'You think there are only two species of inhabitants in the world—Englishmen and foreigners.'

'Well, and that is quite true,' said Lord Sturdham, good-humouredly. 'I wouldn't give a fig for a man who didn't think his own country and people superior to any other. I know that England is the first country in the world, but I don't want Frenchmen and Germans to think so. Let them be contented with their own lot, and fancy themselves fine fellows, if they like. Their life wouldn't suit me, but I dare say it suits them; and, depend upon it, God would never have created them Frenchmen and Germans if they had been fit to be anything better. Come, now, tell the truth; aren't you proud of being an Englishwoman?'

'I suppose I ought to be,' said Linda; 'and yet I

don't quite know how I am the better for it. I daresay I should have enjoyed myself much more if I had been born something else. I think England is a more amusing country for gentlemen than for ladies. Papa likes it; but then he is always away, and that makes it dull for me. In Dresden we used to go to concerts or to the theatre; and then there was always the band on the Brühlische Terrasse; but there is nothing of that kind here.'

'Well, there's the band of the 2nd Life Guards going to play this afternoon,' said Lord Sturdham; 'and an uncommonly good band it is too—as good as anything your snuffy foreigners could show you. Why don't you go and hear it?'

'I have no one to go with,' said Linda, with a little sigh.

'No one to go with? Why, no more you have, poor child. I'll tell you what: if you don't mind taking an old fellow like me for escort, we'll go together. What do you say to that?'

'I should like it very much,' answered Linda, brightening up at the prospect of escaping from her luxurious prison. 'But I don't want to drag you there against your will. It would be a great bore for you, wouldn't it?'

'Not a bit of it,' said Lord Sturdham, heartily. 'I enjoy a good band as much as anybody. Go and put on your bonnet and shawl, and we shall get there in time to hear them play the first tune.'

Linda waited for no second invitation, but went off at once to her room, and, having 'put on her bonnet and shawl'—or, at least, gone through the modern equivalent to that process—set out with her new friend; and this oddly-matched couple went to hear the band together, remaining from the beginning to the end of the programme, and deriving a great deal of innocent pleasure therefrom.

Lord Sturdham was delighted with his niece, and

told her so with perfect ingenuousness. Indeed, anyone who was young, and fresh, and natural, might safely count upon delighting this simple old nobleman. Childless himself, he had a great love for young people, and since the joys of paternity were denied him, his pent-up affections found a vent in the direction of his numerous nephews and nieces, by whom he was adored, as uncles munificent in tips and presents usually are. 'Don't call me Lord Sturdham,' he said to Linda later in the afternoon. 'Call me Uncle Jim—that is my name with the other young ones.' And Linda willingly promised to do as the others did. Having been, all her life, accustomed to regard herself as alone in the world with her father, it was a novel and pleasurable sensation to her to hear herself classed as one of a large family, and the mention of her cousins roused in her an emotion with which people more abundantly favoured in this respect than she had been might possibly find it difficult to sympathise. Linda knew nothing of the claims of poor relations, and the unpalatable patronage of rich ones: she had never been called upon to listen to the good advice and the benevolent freedom of criticism which it is at once the duty and the privilege of those bound together by family ties to interchange; whereas she had often been oppressed by a sense of her loneliness. There is a very palpable desire on the part of the lower domestic animals to belong to somebody, were it but a drunken costermonger; and signs of a somewhat analogous disposition are not wanting in the human race.

It having transpired, in the course of conversation, that Mr. Howard's absence would be prolonged until the following day, Lord Sturdham insisted that his niece should return to dinner with him at his hotel. There they found Lady Sturdham nursing her headache on a sofa, with the blinds drawn down, and a bottle of smelling-salts at her side. Her husband stepped up to her on creaking tip-toe, and asked her how she felt in a tone of hushed commiseration which was redeemed from

absurdity by its evident earnestness. Lady Sturdham replied 'that she was a little better now, thank you, dear; and that she hoped to be able to come down to dinner.' She then welcomed Linda very pleasantly, and with much more ease of manner than she had displayed on the occasion of Mr. Howard's visit.

'Here is a quiet little niece for you, my dear,' Lord Sturdham said, 'whose voice will not be loud enough to make your head ache.'

It was pretty to see how tenderly the bluff old man treated his fragile little wife—how he lowered his loud voice almost to a whisper in addressing her; with what exaggerated care he re-arranged her pillows, and how cautious he was lest by any sudden movement he should agitate her nerves. She, on her side, seemed to have merged her identity in that of her husband, and to have no other opinions or wishes than his. Throughout the evening she was continually beginning her sentences with—'James thinks'—or 'James has been proposing'—and it was not until Linda had been for some time acquainted with her uncle and aunt that she discovered that James's views were not unfrequently suggested in the first instance by the meek little lady who professed herself so submissive to them.

'I am so glad that you and your Uncle James have made friends, my dear,' said she, when the ladies were alone together after dinner, and Lord Sturdham, with his silk handkerchief over his head, was enjoying a post-prandial nap in the dining-room. 'He has taken a great fancy to you, do you know.'

'He is very kind,' said Linda, not quite knowing what reply to make.

'Yes, but he is a little difficult to please in the matter of young ladies. He does not like the girls of the present day—and, indeed, no more do I. Sometimes they quite frighten me with the things they say and do. James says it cannot go on, and that we are on the brink of a social revolution, which will make things

either worse or better than they are now. I hope you will never be a fast girl, my dear.'

Linda said she had no inclination that way, and Lady Sturdham continued—

'I am so glad of that! James thinks his nieces are sometimes a little too free in their manners with gentlemen—too much disposed to say the first thing that comes into their heads, you know. I daresay they mean no harm, only in my young days it was so different. My dear mother used to say that a lady should always know how to be courteous and agreeable without being familiar; but nowadays familiarity seems quite to have taken the place of courtesy, and I don't think anyone studies the art of conversation.'

The old lady prattled on in this strain for a considerable time, forgetful of her headache in the pleasure of hearing her own voice. For, in spite of her apparent shrinking timidity, Lady Sturdham was disposed to be loquacious when she could get hold of a good listener, such as she had now obtained. Linda was quite content to accept this modest *rôle*, and to take no more than a monosyllabic part in the conversation. There was something very attractive to her in this pretty grey-haired lady, who seemed to carry an atmosphere of refinement about with her, and whose silks, and laces, and jewels harmonised so fitly with her whole being that unobservant people would hardly have noticed how expensively she was clad.

Yet, much as Linda admired her delicate, beautiful aunt, she thought, upon the whole, that she liked Uncle Jim the best of the two.

CHAPTER XIII

POOR DEAR ADA

The interest which Linda's relations had taken in her from the outset soon ripened into affection. Lady Sturdham liked her because she was so pretty, so quiet, dressed in such perfect taste, and was so thorough a little lady, although differing widely, in appearance as well as in thought and manner of expressing herself, from any of the ordinary English types. Lady Sturdham had a refined and cultivated taste, and appreciated rarity and beauty in the human race, as much as in old lace and china. The same causes, no doubt, had their effect upon 'Uncle Jim;' but he had taken to his niece, in the first instance, because he had at once discerned her to be unaffected and truthful; besides which, there was something pathetic in her solitude and in her wealth which touched his kindly heart. He noticed that the girl often looked tired and sad; and more than once he fancied he could detect a redness about her eyelids, as if she had been crying. At such times he never enquired the reason of Linda's distress (for there was a substratum of tact beneath his rough exterior); but he would immediately begin to cast about him for some means of entertaining her, and diverting her thoughts from her trouble, whatever it might be, into some more lively channel.

As a rule his well-meant efforts were crowned with success; for Linda, though at this time she had various reasons for being anxious and ill at ease, was still young enough to be able to cast off her burden for an hour or two, and forget all about it till the time came for resuming it again.

'Are you fond of a circus?' Lord Sturdham asked

her, abruptly, one evening, when she was preparing to return home after dining with her uncle and aunt.

'Yes, I think I am,' answered Linda, smiling—'at least, as far as I can judge from the only one I ever saw.'

'So am I,' said Lord Sturdham, confidentially. 'I don't say so to your aunt, you know—she would consider me too old for that sort of amusement—but, between you and me, I think a good circus is capital fun. I see they are going to have one here to-morrow; and I shall try and get leave for two schoolboys whom I know, and take them there for the afternoon. I thought perhaps you might like to come with us.'

'I should, very much,' answered Linda.

'Very well; then I will call for you on our way.'

So Linda went; and if she found the performance a little disappointing, derived, at all events, a good deal of pleasure from watching the delight of the small boys, and the undisguised glee of their grey-headed entertainer, who declared each successive feat of horsemanship to be 'marvellous, I do assure you—perfectly marvellous!' and who was thrown into convulsions of merriment by the time-honoured pleasantries of the clown.

Simple as he was in his tastes, Lord Sturdham was by no means a fool. He rarely spoke in the House of Lords; but when he did he was always listened to; for what little he said was clear, sensible, and to the point, and he never spoke without knowledge of his subject. He managed his estates well, had a good practical knowledge of farming, and a fair smattering of law, and, upon the whole, did his duty well in that state of life into which it had pleased God to call him. He liked a circus, however, and avowed his liking honestly. Why not? Who did not enjoy such exhibitions once upon a time? And if we can no longer feel pleasure in seeing a young woman jump through a paper hoop, and if some of us find it a hard matter to derive

amusement from anything at all, I don't know that we have any reason to think ourselves intellectually Lord Sturdham's superiors on that account.

Linda, who was of a quietly observant disposition, came to love and respect her uncle more every day; and gradually there sprang up between them a tacit mutual understanding and friendship which is not likely to be disturbed on this side of the grave, and which, as one hopes, will last beyond it.

It need scarcely be said that Mr. Howard viewed this intimacy with unqualified approval. Nothing could be more satisfactory than that Linda should find herself upon such friendly terms with those of her relations who, by reason of their high social standing, ought to be able to obtain for her that position in London society which Mr. Howard was, very properly, desirous of securing for his daughter. And, if it had been within the range of his powers, we may be sure that he would have spared no pains to place himself upon an equally amicable footing with his brother-in-law. But unfortunately Mr. Howard's capabilities of producing a favourable impression were somewhat limited, and the greater the efforts he made to achieve this end, the less likely did he seem to succeed in it. His innate vulgarity was speedily perceived by Lord Sturdham, who had never had reason to think well of his sister's husband, and whose early impressions were confirmed by certain reports which had reached his ears since his arrival in Brighton. Lord Sturdham disliked fast men—*a fortiori*, he abhorred fast old men; and Mr. Howard, with his dyed hair, his insinuating manner, his doubtful reputation, and his waxed moustache, struck him as one of the most objectionable persons he had ever come across.

Lady Sturdham entirely concurred. By ill luck it happened that, upon the occasion of her first visit to Linda, Mrs. Williams had been lunching with her friends, and was seated in the drawing-room. Mrs.

Williams had had four glasses of sherry; she was a good deal flushed; her bonnet had somehow got pushed on the extreme back of her head; she wore a purple silk dress, and round her fat throat was a gold necklace from which depended a row of lockets enriched with precious stones. Previously to Lady Sturdham's entrance, she had been a little disposed towards a siesta; but the advent of a real live countess roused her at once.

'I think we ought to know each other, Lady Sturdham,' said she, after she had been introduced to the august visitor. 'We met last season, if you remember, at Lady ——'s, and again at that delightful garden party at Chiswick. I think I had the pleasure of being introduced to you; but really I am not quite sure. One makes so many acquaintances in London, doesn't one?'

'I do not,' answered Lady Sturdham, frigidly. 'I go out very little, and only among my old friends.'

'Ah, how pleasant that must be!' said Mrs. Williams, with a fat sigh. 'I wish I could make some rule of that kind; for really I find my acquaintance gets so large that it is almost unmanageable. But there's my girls, you see. They are mad after balls and assemblies and concerts, and what not; and I do assure you I don't believe I could get them to spend a quiet evening at home, if I was to beg them ever so hard. I often say to them, "Well, girls, I couldn't get on without you now; but I declare to goodness, I sometimes envy people who have no children"—I do, indeed, Lady Sturdham. If one had never had any, one wouldn't miss them, you know.'

The remark was an unfortunate one. Lady Sturdham made no answer to it, unless a forced smile and a slight quivering of the head could be taken as a reply. She turned her shoulder a little more towards Mrs. Williams, and, addressing Linda, said—

'My dear, it is so mild this afternoon that I am

going to take a short drive. Would it weary you very much to come and keep me company?'

Linda said what politeness required, and departed without further delay, to put on her hat. She was not long absent; but there was a sufficient interval between her leaving the room and returning to it to enable Mrs. Williams to express loud admiration of every article of clothing Lady Sturdham had on, from her bonnet to her gloves; to ask the address of her modiste, and to enquire, with a great show of interest, after the health of 'his lordship.'

'My dear, what a very dreadful person!' exclaimed Lady Sturdham, as soon as she had regained her carriage. 'I hope you do not make a friend of her.'

'No; not particularly,' answered Linda. 'That is, I don't like her very much myself; but papa does—and of course all his friends are mine.'

'Your papa'—began Lady Sturdham; and then broke off.

What was she going to say? Linda did not enquire, though perhaps she may have guessed, in what manner her aunt had intended to finish the sentence. It was, indeed, sufficiently evident that Mr. Howard was neither liked nor esteemed by his relatives; and of this Linda was perfectly aware. To change the subject, she asked some question about a Convalescent Home, in which she knew that her aunt, who was charitable and benevolent in an easy-going way, was interested; and Lady Sturdham, once started upon this congenial topic, pursued it gently and unceasingly for half-an-hour, or more, the jog, jog of her fat horses beating a sober accompaniment to her talk.

Linda meanwhile thought her own thoughts, putting in a 'Yes' or a 'No' when it seemed to be expected that she should say something, and watched the sea-gulls circling and screaming over the tumbling green waves, and the tall houses with their windows ablaze from the sunset, and the wind-swept sky, and the

parties of clattering equestrians, and the carriages, with their funnily-dressed occupants. To Linda's unaccustomed eyes the spectacle of her fellow-countrywomen's costumes was a source of never-failing astonishment and amusement.

Presently her own showy equipage dashed past at full speed. Mrs. Williams was sitting beside Mr. Howard, and Maria and Sophy occupied the opposite seat. The whole party nodded and kissed their hands repeatedly. Linda, while returning these amiable signals, stole a side-glance at her companion's face, and saw there a certain demure gravity and tightening of the lips of which it was not difficult to interpret the meaning. That look said, as plainly as looks can speak, 'I tolerate your father, my dear, for your sake; but really you must not expect me to recognise all his vulgar friends.' And Linda, understanding this, sighed; for she foresaw that, sooner or later, she would have to take up the cudgels on her father's behalf; and she greatly feared that, when that time came, there would be an end to her intimacy with Lady Sturdham and kind old Uncle Jim. She was sorry to think that it should be so; but between her father and her new friends she could not hesitate, and she was fully prepared to resent any slight on the part of the latter towards the former. No such slight had as yet been offered, Lord and Lady Sturdham having been uniformly polite, though anything but cordial, to Mr. Howard; but that it would eventually come Linda had little doubt; and it was this conviction, among other things, that made her life less enjoyable to her than, according to all ordinary theories, it ought to have been.

But her great trouble was the change which had come over Mr. Howard of late—a change to which Linda, much as she would have liked to do so, could no longer shut her eyes. He never displayed any sign of affection to his daughter now; he avoided being alone

with her, and did not even address her when he could help it. His old pomposity of manner had disappeared, or only strutted forth on public occasions; and he was at no pains to conceal his mode of life, which was scarcely of a nature to reflect credit upon a sexagenarian. In truth, it is a hard matter for a father to borrow money continually of his child for the liquidation of gambling debts—and that 500*l.* of which mention has been made was not, unfortunately, the only sum recorded in Linda's cheque-book as having been made payable to the same person—it is barely possible, I say, for a father to accept such advances, and at the same time to preserve the sentiment of self-respect. It was not because Mr. Howard knew himself to be a dissipated old scoundrel that he cast off hypocrisy, and appeared in his true colours—gentlemen of his habits, who still contrive to hold their heads high in the family circle, are not such rare phenomena—but, from the peculiar nature of his case, it was inevitable that his daughter should, to some extent, share that knowledge; and this it was that degraded Mr. Howard in his own estimation, and led him on towards a more undisguised indulgence of his desires than he might have ventured upon if he had still had a character to keep up.

I have heard it said that churches in which plates are used as a means of collecting the offertory, generally reap a larger harvest than those where bags have been substituted. The people who do good by stealth, and blush to find it fame, have always been in a very small minority in this humbug of a world; and who knows what temptations most of us might not have given way to, but for the wholesome dread of being found out?

Mr. Howard had not been altogether found out by his daughter—that pain has, happily, been spared to her up to the present time—but she knew that he often drank more wine than was good for him; she knew that he played for heavy stakes with his friends of the 112th Dragoon Guards; she saw that, in spite

of his painted cheeks and his dyed hair, he grew older-looking and more shaky every day; and she had to put up with a good deal of rudeness, unkindness, and occasional brutality from him.

All this did not lessen her love for her father; but it did, as a matter of course, diminish her belief and confidence in him; and many a night did she lie awake, the slow tears trickling down upon her pillow, while she bitterly deplored the stroke of so-called good fortune which had robbed her of what she valued far more than anything that money could bestow.

It was about this time that Lady Sturdham announced, one day, that she expected a young friend to stay a few weeks with her.

'I don't know whether you will like her, Linda,' said the old lady; 'James thinks her dreadfully fast; but if you would try and amuse her a little I should be so much obliged. What to do with her here I don't know; but I could not refuse Mrs. Tower—she is such a very old friend of mine. She is obliged to go to one of her married daughters, who is ill, and there was a difficulty about disposing of Ada during her mamma's absence——'

'Ada Tower!' interrupted Linda. 'That must be the Miss Tower who was in Dresden last winter.'

'In Dresden? Yes, to be sure, she was in Germany with her mother, I remember. So you knew them in Dresden. What a curious coincidence!'

'I didn't know them,' said Linda; 'but I often saw them.'

The coincidence struck her as more curious than agreeable. She was quite sure she should dislike Miss Tower, and had no desire to meet her. At the same time, she was not free from a natural, feminine exultation in the thought that that free-and-easy contemptuous young lady would now have to acknowledge her as an equal. Later in the evening, when, as usual, she was left to her own society and cogitations, she

composed several politely sarcastic little speeches in anticipation of any impertinence in which Lady Sturdham's guest might see fit to indulge.

None of these, however, were called into requisition. Miss Tower, when she made her appearance, was so cordial in her manner, so unaffectedly friendly, and apparently so unconscious of having given cause for previous offence, that it was impossible long to cherish the memory of affronts which, after all, as Linda now felt, might have been in great measure fancied. She was pleased to say that she recollected perfectly having seen Miss Howard in Dresden.

'I always wanted so much to know you,' she added, with that calmness of mendacity which nothing but a soothing assurance of immunity from detection can bestow; 'but mamma is so lazy about paying visits; and when we first went to Dresden we only meant to stay a week or two. We remained on, month after month, I don't quite know why; for it was as deadly dull a place as I ever was in in my life. How did you manage to kill time there? I don't remember seeing you at any of the Court balls.'

'No; I did not go out at all there,' answered Linda.

'Didn't you? I daresay you were right. Nothing could have been more slow than the native entertainments, I'm sure. Only one can't sit at home, twiddling one's thumbs, every night—at least I can't. When I find amusement is not to be had at any price, I go in for fatigue as being the next best thing; and nobody can say German balls are not sufficiently fatiguing. It seemed to me that they used to begin in the middle of the afternoon, and go on until late the next morning—but they were better than nothing. Some of the men were rather a joke, too, in their way. Did you know any of them—the officers, I mean?'

'One or two,' said Linda—'friends of papa's. We saw very few people. The truth is we were not well

enough off, in those days, to entertain; and papa thought it was better not to accept hospitality which we could not return.'

'I am glad everybody does not think like Mr. Howard,' observed Miss Tower, with a short laugh. 'What would become of us paupers if we had to pay back everything we received? But you need never hesitate to accept invitations any more. Lady Sturdham tells me you are rolling in riches.'

'Not quite that,' said Linda, modestly. But Miss Tower went on, without noticing the interruption—

'How fortunate you are! I should think you can have nothing in the world left to wish for. A woman who can get all her dresses from Worth—and pay for them—must be very hard to please if she is not contented. By-the-by, do you know your hair is done in the fashion of the year before last? I am rather good at hair-dressing—poor people like me have to learn these things—and if you like to send your maid to me, some morning, I shall be most happy to give her a lesson. You don't mind my telling you, do you?'

'I don't mind at all,' said Linda. 'It is very kind of you to give me some hints.'

And it was the more magnanimous in Linda to reply thus submissively because Miss Tower happened to be mistaken with regard to that hair-dressing question.

This conversation took place on the evening after Miss Tower's arrival; Linda and Mr. Howard having been invited to dinner to meet her. Linda was not ill-disposed towards her new acquaintance. She was somewhat loud, it is true; she was a little too free-and-easy, and had an embarrassing way of putting direct questions when she wanted information; but these drawbacks were to a great extent made up for by her good-nature and her frank *bonhomie*.

'I think we shall be great friends,' said she, as she

bade Linda good-night; 'and I hope we shall see a great deal of each other.'

To which Linda replied, with corresponding warmth, that she hoped so too. For it requires nothing short of personal experience to convince the majority of mankind of even the most elementary truths; and though nothing is more universally admitted than the rarity of disinterested friendship, I suppose that few girls of Linda's age—and, for that matter, not many young men either—would hesitate to believe in the existence of such a phenomenon as displayed towards themselves. Miss Tower, between whom and unsuspecting youth intervened six London seasons and a vast accumulation of worldly knowledge, had made herself agreeable to Linda for three reasons. Firstly, because she had discovered that it always pays best, in the long run, to be civil to everybody; secondly, because a friend with a house in London and a generous disposition is likely to turn out useful in many ways; and thirdly—but Miss Tower's third motive will, in due course, become apparent.

Lady Sturdham was delighted to see that the two young people took to each other so naturally.

'Poor dear Ada!' she said. 'James says her merits are her own, and her faults are those of the age. I really think, my dear, there is a great deal of good in her, though, of course, I should be sorry to see you quite like her.'

The old lady thought it incumbent upon her to warn her niece that 'poor dear Ada' was not in all respects a model to be imitated; but, having thus discharged her duty, she was only too glad to encourage an intimacy which promised to relieve her from the irksome task of entertaining a visitor whose tastes differed so completely from her own.

Miss Tower soon became Linda's most constant companion. She drove with her: she rode with her over the downs; she shared with her the attentions of Captains

Browne and Greene (who, for their parts, found her society much more to their taste than that of the quiet little heiress); she was fascinating to Mr. Howard, gracious to Mrs. Williams, and, in short, made herself an indispensable part and parcel of Linda's household.

At the end of a week Linda took courage to put a question which had been trembling upon her lips ever since her first introduction to this popular lady.

'You used to know a Mr. Mainwairing in Dresden, didn't you?' she asked.

'George Mainwairing? I should think so! I have known him ever since we were children together, down in Staffordshire, a hundred years ago. Why do you ask?'

It was a grey November afternoon, and the two ladies were sitting alone together over their tea. The daylight was fast fading away; but by the light of a blazing fire Linda could see Miss Tower's blue eyes were fixed upon her with a steady scrutiny which was rather disconcerting.

'We saw a good deal of him last winter,' she answered, as carelessly as she could. 'I thought perhaps you might know what had become of him.'

'I had a letter from him,' said Miss Tower, deliberately. 'Let me see—was it last week or the week before? I think it was last week.' And she paused to see what the effect of that shot would be.

'Oh!' said Linda, poking the fire. 'And where was he then?'

'He was then in Canada, and likely to stay there some time, I fancy,' answered Miss Tower, mentally scoring one.

'In Canada!' echoed Linda, blankly. Conscious that Miss Tower was surveying her enquiringly and with a faint ironical smile upon her handsome face, she would have given a good deal to be able to receive this information with a greater show of equanimity; but the blow was too sudden and unexpected. For the moment she

could control neither her features nor her voice; so she sat silent, and contemplated the glowing coals.

'Did you not know?' asked Miss Tower, at length.

'No,' said Linda; 'I thought he intended to come home. The last time I saw him he talked of returning to England.'

'Did he? But George is such an erratic being. You never can tell one day where he will be the next. His going off to Canada was quite a sudden freak. He is always rushing about the world, as if the devil was after him—it is his idea of pleasure. I am afraid his going has been a disappointment to you in this instance,' she added meaningly.

'Yes,' replied Linda, steadily, raising her eyes, and looking her interrogator fairly in the face; 'I am very sorry he has gone. I liked him so much; and he was one of the very few real friends I have in the world.'

'Really!' said Miss Tower, raising her eyebrows; 'I should not have thought you would have had time to develope an undying friendship in so few months. But George is so absurdly impulsive.'

This ungracious speech did not seem to call for a rejoinder; and a long pause ensued, during which Linda had leisure to couple the circumstance of Miss Tower being in correspondence with Mainwairing with that of her always mentioning him by his Christian name, and to draw what conclusions she pleased from these facts. Her meditations were brusquely interrupted by the sound of Miss Tower's high-pitched voice.

'What is the good of our beating about the bush?' said she. 'Don't let us try to humbug one another. I heard all about your flirtation with George—he is such a susceptible fellow!—and the duel, and the account in the newspaper, and all the rest of it. Honestly, now—you have known me long enough to be able to trust me—have you any real *tendresse* in that quarter?'

Linda blushed, more with anger than with confusion; but she answered, calmly enough—

'There never was any flirtation between Mr. Mainwairing and me. The duel was provoked by Herr von Oberndorf, and the story in the newspaper was too ridiculous for anyone to notice. Mr. Mainwairing used to come to our house to practise his violin, because I knew how to play his accompaniments; and he was very kind, and I liked him very much—that was all.'

'Of course you need not trust me unless you like: it is always safest to trust nobody,' said Miss Tower, in a would-be injured tone, through which an undercurrent of relief was discernible.

'I was telling you nothing but the truth,' said Linda, a little wearily. 'I daresay people may have thought that, because Mr. Mainwairing came to see us so often, he meant something more than mere friendliness; but it was not so. Indeed,' she added, thinking perhaps that it was time to carry the war into the enemy's country, 'I used to think that, some day or other, he would marry you. I remember telling him so once.'

'And what did he say?' enquired Miss Tower, taking up a hand-screen to shelter her face from the fire.

'I don't exactly recollect,' answered Linda, across whose memory Mainwairing's actual words had suddenly flashed with a vividness that confused her a little. 'I think he said Mrs. Tower would not consider him a sufficiently good match, or something of that kind.'

Miss Tower laughed, and fanned herself lazily with her screen.

'He was not far wrong there,' she said. 'Poor old George! Mamma wants me to marry money: she says I should never do for a poor man's wife; and I entirely agree with her. The misfortune is that rich men of domestic tastes are not quite so plentiful as one could wish them to be. It will end in my dying an old maid, I daresay.'

'But if Mr. Mainwairing were rich'—suggested Linda, after an interval of silence.

'That would alter the case, of course. Nothing is more absolutely essential than that I should secure an establishment of some kind. My mother is not immortal; and when she dies, I shall be much worse off than I am now. At my age, the matter is simple enough. I must take the first man with a reasonable income who is fool enough to propose to me.'

Linda made an involuntary movement of disgust.

'It is a sordid view to take of matrimony, isn't it?' said Miss Tower, coolly; 'but it is not the more so for being honestly stated. Everybody has to swallow a certain amount of dirt in his life; and I don't know that pretending it was not dirt would make it taste any better. I can't afford to pick and choose. If I could——'

'You would choose Mr. Mainwairing.'

'Well—perhaps.'

There was another pause of a few minutes. Then Miss Tower resumed, speaking in a half-laughing, half-confused manner very unusual with her—

'I don't know why I should tell you, except that I feel inclined to be confidential this evening, and—and I know you will not repeat it; but the truth is I am fonder of George Mainwairing than of anybody else in the world. He did like me once, I think—long ago, when we were still almost children. He used to give me presents, and dance the whole evening with me, and that. It was only calf-love, I suppose; but, somehow or other, I have never quite got rid of it. Sometimes I think I should not mind giving up everything and everybody, and starving with him on his bachelor's income down in some little hole in the country, with no society but the squire's wife and the parson's daughters, and nothing to do except to keep house and darn his socks.'

'If I cared for him so much as that,' said Linda, quietly, 'I should never marry anyone else.'

'Ah, but he has not asked me, you see, and who knows whether he ever will? He is just the sort of man to take a sudden fancy to some Canadian girl, and marry her out of hand. You know he really was smitten with you in Dresden; and indeed I don't know that you are not a little bit dangerous yet. I suppose prudence restrained him from committing himself in those days; but when he comes back to England, and hears what a first-rate match you have become, he may find you irresistible.'

'You seem to forget that he would have to consult me,' said Linda, coldly. 'And why should you suppose him so mercenary?' she continued, with more warmth. 'I don't think he cares in the least for money.'

'All men are mercenary, my dear,' replied Miss Tower, in a tone of calm conviction; 'and so are nine women out of ten. It is our fallen nature.'

'And yet you say you would marry him, poor as he is.'

'I don't say positively that I would; I might. Besides, his brother will never marry, and there is a good prospect of his dying before long. He is a poor, delicate creature, who is always damaging himself with scientific experiments,' said Miss Tower, naïvely. 'George has a very fair chance ——. Oh, how do you do, Captain Browne? If you search about in the dark on the other side of the fireplace, you will find Miss Howard somewhere in an arm-chair. She will be delighted to see you, if she is awake; but we have been boring one another so exquisitely for the last hour, that I am not quite sure whether she has not dropped into a refreshing slumber.'

'No, really?' said the gallant plunger whose entrance had caused this sudden interruption to Miss Tower's confidences. 'How do you do, Miss Howard?

Upon my word, now, I shouldn't have thought it would have been possible to be bored in the society of either of you.'

And then, having got through what he conceived to be a neat speech, Captain Browne sat down, pulled out his wristbands, stroked his moustache, and prepared to be entertained—conversation not being his strong point.

Some time later, when both her visitors had departed, Linda walked slowly into her bedroom, locking the door behind her, and sank into a chair beside the newly-lighted fire, with a sigh of exhaustion. She had had to put a strong restraint upon herself for two hours or more, and now that it was removed her strength seemed suddenly to give way. She began to cry quietly and noiselessly, the big tear-drops running down her cheeks and leaving a stain upon the front of her pale grey silk dress. It did not matter. She had plenty more silk dresses; and, in her present mood, it would have been pretty much the same thing to her if she had not.

What was she crying about? That was exactly the question which she asked herself, with some indignation, as she dipped her face into the basin and essayed to wash away the traces of her tears. Was it because Mr. Mainwairing had seen fit to cross the Atlantic? Certainly not. Was it because Miss Tower's unpleasant insinuations had annoyed her, and made her feel that there must needs be an awkward restraint between her and the violinist when they met again—if they ever should meet again? Well, perhaps. It is hard that one should lose one's friends on account of the gossip of silly people—'and I have so few real friends,' thought poor Linda, sadly. Yes, it was partly that; and partly that England was dull, and the weather wretched, and papa cross, and everything generally vanity and vexation of spirit.

'I suppose no one would believe it,' said Linda, as

she dried her face; 'but I wish—I do wish, with all my heart—that Uncle Thomas had left his money to a hospital.'

CHAPTER XIV

LADY GRASSMERE

It was a great grief to Linda when Lady Sturdham's doctor pronounced his patient sufficiently restored to health to be able to leave Brighton.

'The best of friends must part, my dear,' said Lord Sturdham when he came to say good-bye; 'but we shall meet again in London in the course of a few months, and when the summer comes I hope we shall get you to come down and stay with us at Beechlands—you and your father. You will find it very dull, Howard: we are quiet people, and live in a very quiet way.'

Mr. Howard protested, in his most urbane manner, that the society of Lady Sturdham and his brother-in-law must of itself suffice to prevent any place from being dull; and he was going on to say with what melancholy interest he should visit the scenes amid which poor dear Helen's childhood had been passed; but Lord Sturdham cut him short with a grunt.

'Well, good-bye, Howard,' said he. 'Glad to have seen you. Good-bye, my dear, and God bless you.'

And now for the first time since he had made his niece's acquaintance, Lord Sturdham bent forward, and saluted her with a resounding and stubbly kiss upon the forehead. After which, he picked up his hat and stick, and vanished with his usual precipitation.

Mrs. Williams, who happened to be present at this little scene, was deeply impressed by it.

'It is of the greatest importance to a girl entering society,' said she, solemnly, 'to have a few really good

introductions. Lord Sturdham is in the very best set—quite the inner circle, you know—and he seems to have taken a great fancy to Linda and you, Mr. Howard. I do hope you won't let him forget you. You must get Lady Sturdham to present you at Court, my dear. I should have been glad to do that for you myself, but perhaps it would be more suitable that you should be introduced by a relation. And I am not a countess,' said Mrs. Williams, modestly. 'Her Majesty kisses countesses when she receives them,' added the loyal lady, in a tone of much awe and reverence.

'Odd custom, isn't it?' remarked Mr. Howard, standing with his back to the fire, and rubbing his hands. He was not ill-pleased at Mrs. Williams' manifestation of proper respect to the aristocracy of the land, and liked to think that he had near connections in that august body.

'Perhaps, one of these days, you may be a countess yourself, Linda, and arrive at the distinction of being kissed by the Queen,' he said, pleasantly.

Linda did not notice the remark. She had seated herself in the bow-window, and was gazing after the rapidly diminishing figure of a stout old gentleman who was hurrying away along the pavement. 'Dear old man! how sorry I am he has gone!' she exclaimed, aloud; and both Mr. Howard and Mrs. Williams echoed her regret, though it cannot be said that Lord Sturdham's absence was likely to create so great a void in their daily lives as in that of the niece, whose constant companion he had of late become, and who had learnt to lean upon his unspoken sympathy more than she herself suspected until the moment of parting came.

Ada Tower was but a poor substitute for Uncle Jim. Still she was better than nobody—better, also, than the Williams family, whom she pitilessly snubbed, and who generally fled, on her approach, like chickens before a

fox. If Miss Tower had no other merit, she had at least that of being able to drive away these unwelcome visitors. When, therefore, shortly before the day fixed for the departure of the Sturdhams, she had kindly offered to stay a week or so with Linda, the self-invited guest had been welcomed with alacrity. She came, bringing with her a formidable supply of trunks and portmanteaus, and stayed longer than a week or so, as it turned out. Brighton was more amusing to her than the country at that season of the year, and her hostess was very glad to keep her as long as she chose to remain.

Perhaps, if she had known it, Linda's chief pleasure in the vicinity of the fair Ada lay in the opportunity thus afforded to her of asking questions and receiving information with reference to the absent Mainwairing. Just as if you are afflicted with an ache or a pain in any part of your body, a perverse impulse will perpetually prompt you to lay your finger upon the painful spot till you wince under the pressure, so Linda found a mixture of pleasure and pain in constantly recurring to a subject which she would have done more wisely to let alone.

Had Miss Tower been a little less self-engrossed, her original jealousy of Linda might probably have been re-awakened; but, happily for both parties concerned, Ada was not suspicious, nor, throughout her lengthened stay, did anything occur to disturb the alliance between the two ladies.

It was a great boon to Linda to have a companion to drive and walk with her, and to assist her in making small-talk for the entertainment of her visitors; and if Miss Tower was not precisely the one of all others whom she would have chosen for a familiar friend, she was perhaps not much worse off in that respect than the rest of the world. If we only made associates of those who realised our ideal, how very little some of us would see of our fellow creatures, and how few opportunities

we should have for exhibiting that fine quality of toleration for the infirmities of others which most of us flatter ourselves that we possess!

Miss Tower must have been very tolerant, for she not only put up with Mr. Howard, but was at some pains to ingratiate herself with him, listening, without apparent fatigue, to his egotistical anecdotes, and often delighting him with little doses of flattery, such as his soul loved. Indeed, she was generally good-humoured with people who did not rub her the wrong way, and sometimes even with people who did. Mrs. Williams, it is true, met with scant mercy at her hands; but then there was nothing whatever to be gained, in the present or in the future, by being polite to Mrs. Williams.

'I don't know what ails the girl,' sighed that ill-used lady one day; 'but she is always setting me down, or turning me into ridicule. I declare I daren't so much as open my lips when she is in the room. Why can't she let me be?'

Linda, who was the recipient of this plaint, said she was very sorry.

'Oh, don't you trouble yourself, my dear!' retorted Mrs. Williams, with a toss of her feathered bonnet. 'I can take very good care of myself, thank goodness! Miss Tower may think herself a mighty fine lady; but I am not one to put up with airs—and so you can tell her, my dear, whenever you please. Those who don't mind swallowing impertinence may receive her if they like; but she don't enter *my* house till she mends her manners—that's flat!'

Nevertheless, when Mrs. Williams sent out cards for a large ball, shortly afterwards, she included Miss Tower among the number of the invited. 'I couldn't well leave her out without being rude to the Howards,' she remarked apologetically to her eldest daughter, who was addressing her envelopes; 'but if she has any delicacy of feeling she will decline.' She did not de-

cline, however; she went; and probably cared very little whether her hostess thought her wanting in delicacy of feeling or not.

The ball was a very grand one, and a success, in so far as unlimited expenditure could make it so. It was Linda's first ball—an event to which she had looked forward ever since she had first learnt to dance, years back, at Signor Rosati's class in Florence, where she had been at once the best waltzer and the most shabbily-dressed member of that accomplished gentleman's squad of pupils. Many and many a time had Linda, building Spanish castles in her solitary rambles among the sunny avenues of the Boboli gardens, or during the long evenings when, for economical reasons, she sat in semi-darkness beside the wood fire, pictured to herself her *début* in the ball-room, the crowd of partners who would doubtless flock to inscribe their names on her card, the simple elegance of her toilette, and the triumph of being engaged for every dance. That was in the old days, when she had had nothing but her own charms to count upon as a means of securing admirers, and when a white muslin dress, prettily made and trimmed, would have satisfied her utmost ambition. But now that the long-wished-for occasion had arrived, and that muslin might be replaced by corded silk and Brussels lace, and that partners were not likely to be lacking—behold! she had no heart for dancing, and would fain have escaped from the ordeal of showing herself in public, had escape been by any means attainable. Truly it is a disappointing world; and few mortals get what they wish for in it, or care about it when they have got it. Linda, who had obtained the object of her desires, and found it to be something altogether different from what she had expected, was too low-spirited, at this time, to take any interest even in the charming costume which a fashionable London dressmaker had sent her down for the occasion, and submitted herself to the hands of her maid, to be dressed

for Mrs. Williams's ball, with no other sensation than an intense longing to go to bed.

But this was only a transient feeling. She had no sooner made her way into the improvised ball-room than the hot, scented air, the multitude of wax lights, the music, and the crowd of well-dressed people began to affect her senses with a pleasurable excitement; and, by the time that she had come to the end of her first waltz with Captain Browne, she was forced, rather unwillingly, to admit to herself that the world was not, after all, quite the utter desert she had imagined it to be. Of course her card was filled up before she had been ten minutes in the room. It would have been so if she had been old, ugly, and repulsive; but as she was young, pretty, exquisitely dressed and a perfect dancer, let us hope that there were a few disinterested people among Mrs. Williams' guests who would have been equally eager to engage her had she been only the daughter of the penniless Dresden adventurer instead of the great heiress about whom all Brighton was talking.

Linda was easily depressed and easily elated. The music, the rhythmic movement, the Babel of voices, the silly, halting compliments of her partners—all these acted upon her nerves, and excited her, as a little wine will affect the brain of one who has been long fasting. Her eyes sparkled, a faint flush appeared on her cheeks, and she began to talk and laugh with a vivacity which rather surprised Miss Tower, who, with languid curiosity, had kept an eye on the *débutante*.

'I should like to go to a ball every night of my life!' she exclaimed, towards the close of the evening.

'Would you?' said Captain Browne, who happened to be her companion at the time. 'That would be rather too much of a good thing, wouldn't it?'

'To you, perhaps, because you have so many other ways of amusing yourself. Men have the best of it in everything. But we have it, to some extent, our own

way in a ball-room. You allow us to take part in some of your other pleasures as a favour; but you have to ask us to dance with you; and sometimes we are able to decline.'

'Ah, I expect you like that,' grumbled the dragoon. 'You are always declining to dance with me I know.'

'I would as soon dance with you as anybody else,' said Linda, simply; 'but one can't dance the whole evening with one person. I have given you three dances; isn't that enough?'

'Not half enough. I should have liked a couple of dozen. Give me one extra one—that only makes four —at the next dance you go to—will you?'

'When and where will that be?' said Linda, laughing. 'This is the first time I have danced in Brighton; and I should think it will probably be the last. You shall have your four dances, and welcome, if you will find me an opportunity of giving them to you.'

'I will get our fellows to give a dance,' said the accommodating Captain Browne. 'It is time we did something, upon my honour.'

And he was as good as his word. The 112th ball, which took place shortly afterwards, is still remembered at Brighton as one of the most brilliant military entertainments ever given in that gay town; and it is memorable as regards the persons treated of in this history, inasmuch as the occasion was thought fitting by Captains Browne and Greene for the declaration of those sentiments which they had long been seeking for an opportunity to express to Miss Howard.

It is needless to say that neither of these gentlemen received the answer which he had hoped for; but Linda's chance of becoming a soldier's bride was not finally lost; for, within a week, she received an offer of marriage from the colonel of the regiment, and also from young Whyte, who, having unfortunately been turned out of his dog-cart on his way back from some local steeplechases, and so cut about the face as to be

unpresentable in ladies' society, was fain to avow his passion by letter.

Miss Tower laughed when she heard of these disinterested proposals. 'This is only a preliminary canter,' she said. 'When you get to London the serious running will begin. By next June you will be getting, I should say, something like half-a-dozen offers a week. But with your face and your fortune, you oughtn't to look at anything under the eldest son of a duke.'

'It will be very much the same thing to me who proposes to me,' answered Linda, composedly. 'I don't mean to marry at all.'

Whereat Miss Tower laughed again.

Before the month of February was over, Ada, with many assurances of regret and friendship, took leave of her dear Linda. She had several engagements to stay at country-houses, she said, which could no longer be postponed. So she went; and was more missed than perhaps she deserved to be. Miss Tower, if not a devoted friend, had at least been good company; and even had she been less good-humoured and less amusing than she was, she would still have been welcome to a solitary little maiden lady, who could not eat her dinner alone in comfort because of the embarrassing presence of a butler and footman, and who was too much given to brooding over the troubles of this life when no one was at hand to rouse her into forgetfulness of them.

After Ada's departure, Linda soon got heartily sick of Brighton, and longed to return to her own home. Nor had she long to wait for the desired permission. Towards the end of March, Parliament being in full wrangle, and the first drawing-room of the season announced, Mr. Howard conceived that the time had come when fashionable people might with propriety be seen in the metropolis, and issued an edict for the breaking up of the Brighton establishment accordingly.

Linda re-entered her spacious and somewhat gloomy

mansion at Lancaster Gate much as a boy arrives for the first time at a public school. She was upon the threshold of novel experiences, and her curiosity to see for herself that London society which was as yet only known to her by hearsay was tempered by a trembling doubt as to how she should manage to acquit herself in it. Ada Tower had often laughed at her, not unkindly, for certain little foreign tricks of language and gesture, and had advised her to get rid of them before making her *début* in London, assuring her of what, indeed, was confirmed by her own observation, that the English, though the greatest travellers in the world, are of all nations the most prejudiced, and the least tolerant of what they are pleased to consider solecisms in manners. Mindful of this friendly counsel, Linda resolved that she would maintain an attitude of observant caution until such time as she should feel herself able to satisfy London by a close imitation of the demeanour of its inhabitants.

What she was not at all prepared for was that London should ignore her altogether. Ever since her arrival in England, the importance of her position as one of the great heiresses of the day had been so persistently dinned into her ears that she had, very excusably, taken it for granted that, in some unexplained manner, she would find herself in a whirlpool of gaiety from the moment she reached the capital. So vast, however, is the extent of the British metropolis, and so imperfect are its means of communication, that even a young lady of prepossessing exterior and a fortune of eighteen thousand a year may lie concealed in its hospitable bosom for weeks together. It is true that such concealment is not likely to be permanent; but of this Linda had no reason to be convinced; and when a fortnight had elapsed without producing any visitors except the inevitable Mrs. Williams, who had taken a house at South Kensington for the season, she began to resign herself to the prospect of an even more complete

solitude in London than she had experienced in Brighton.

The move did not cause Mr. Howard to become more domestic in his habits. He usually left the house immediately after breakfast, and seldom showed himself again before the dinner-hour. Not unfrequently he dined at his club, where he had a few acquaintances, picked up at Newmarket, and elsewhere, in the course of the past summer and autumn. To Linda and her pursuits, he appeared to be absolutely indifferent; nor, though she tried by various little harmless stratagems to keep her father more at home, was she in any instance rewarded by success. Once she asked him to take her to a concert at St. James's Hall; but he consented with so bad a grace, and was so snappish the whole afternoon, that she did not repeat the experiment.

'Of course he likes better to be with other men than with me—that is only natural,' she said to herself. But she sighed as she said it. Time was when Mr. Howard had taken her to concerts without grumbling.

The late owner of the house in Lancaster Gate had furnished his dwelling-place with a view rather to splendour than to comfort. He himself had lived almost entirely in three rooms, and had never been in the habit of entering his gorgeous drawing-room, save at such times as he had had a score or so of city magnates and their wives to dine with him. The consequence was that when Linda entered upon her inheritance, she found this vast apartment a triumph of magnificent upholstery, but inconvertible into a comfortable or pretty sitting-room by any amount of shifting and re-arranging of furniture. The simplest plan would have been to dismantle the room and furnish it over again; but Linda's economically-educated mind revolted against such drastic reforms; and indeed the sofas and chairs were quite smart and new, and must have cost a great deal of money.

So Linda established herself and her small belongings in a windowed recess, which she beautified by means of flowers, and there dwelt, as in an oasis, surrounded by a waste of crimson brocaded satin and ormolu, and three-pile Axminster. Here she would sit by the hour together, sometimes working a little, sometimes reading a book; but very frequently doing nothing at all, her hands lying listlessly on her lap, and her half-conscious eyes gazing out at the tossing branches of the trees in Kensington Gardens, and the clouds of dust swirling along the road before the east wind, and the never-ending stream of cabs, omnibuses and carriages.

Now, it came to pass that, while Miss Howard was thus wasting her time, one chilly April afternoon, she was astonished to see a brougham, drawn by a pair of high-stepping horses, dash up to her door. A powdered footman got down and rang the bell, and shortly afterwards a lady emerged from the carriage, and entered the house. Linda was conscious of an agreeable expectant thrill. Had London society become aware of her existence at last?

Presently Hudson's voice was heard from the far end of the long drawing-room, announcing, 'Countess of Grassmere.'

While the lady thus announced was slowly and composedly making her way towards the window, Linda had time to wonder whether by any chance the stranger had made a mistake, and found her way into the wrong house; but it soon appeared that there was no ground for this apprehension; for Lady Grassmere at once held out her hand, saying, 'How do you do, Miss Howard?' and, having settled herself in a low easy-chair, began to talk about the weather, in a slow, languid tone, as though her presence required no explanation.

She was a handsome woman, dressed in the height of the fashion, with a gracefully rounded girlish figure, an abundance of brown hair, which she wore in little curls, low down on her forehead, and a complexion too

beautiful to be altogether natural. Her age might have been anything. After studying her closely in a strong light, Linda set her down at a trifle on the wrong side of forty, and was astounded at discovering, by a subsequent reference to the peerage, that her ladyship was in her fifty-seventh year.

It was not until the conversation had lasted five minutes or so, that Lady Grassmere thought fit to mention casually that she had heard of Miss Howard's arrival in London from her friend, Lady Sturdham—'who is your aunt, I think, is she not?'

'Yes,' said Linda. 'Did she ask you to come and see me? How kind of her! Will they be coming to town, soon?'

'I don't think they will be up for a week or two,' answered Lady Grassmere. 'Lord Sturdham has had the gout, and will have to keep quiet for a time. In the meantime, if you should ever want a chaperon to take you anywhere, I am sure I shall be most happy——'

'Oh, thank you,' said Linda; 'you are very kind. But I never go out. I know nobody in London,' she added, with a little sigh.

'I daresay you will have plenty of going out by-and-by,' said Lady Grassmere. 'Are you fond of that kind of thing?'

'Yes,' said Linda—'that is, I hardly know. The first ball I ever went to was at Brighton, the other day.'

'Ah! Didn't Lady Sturdham tell me you had been educated abroad? In a convent perhaps?'

'Oh, no; we are Protestants. I believe one side of our family is Roman Catholic; but they are only distant relations,' said Linda, in perfect good faith.

A momentary gleam of amusement swept across Lady Grassmere's impassive countenance, and vanished.

'I am glad you are not a Catholic,' she said, gravely. 'Not that I have any sectarian prejudices myself; but I think mixed marriages—I mean, as you will probably

marry a member of the Established Church, it would be as well that you should belong to the same religion as your husband. You are not of age yet, are you?'

'Only nineteen,' answered Linda, smiling. She was beginning to wonder whether it was the fashion in London society to catechise new acquaintances in this unreserved manner. But at this juncture the entrance of Mr. Howard put an end to Lady Grassmere's questionings.

Mr. Howard greeted his daughter's visitor with respectful cordiality. 'He had had the pleasure,' he said, 'of meeting her ladyship's eldest son, Lord Keswick, at the Windsor steeplechases, where he rode uncommonly well, and must have won, if that awkward brute hadn't knocked up against him.'

'Did any one knock up against him?' asked Lady Grassmere, languidly. 'I did not hear of it; but he is always coming to grief in some way, poor boy! Young men, Miss Howard, are always in trouble of one kind or another. Some of them sit up all night playing cards; others make love to their neighbours' wives; others, like my son, ride in steeplechases, and break their bones. A nephew of mine, who has just left Oxford, is breaking his mother's heart by ritualistic practices. He illuminates texts all day long, says a Latin grace before dinner, and has fitted up an oratory—with flowers and lights and things, you know—in the cupboard which opens out of his study. They tell me that he had lit all his candles, the other day, and was going to have a grand function in honour of some departed saint, when the whole thing took fire, and blazed up, and the house was within an ace of being burnt down. It is the enthusiasm of youth, I suppose, which is sure to manifest itself in this form or in that. I don't know that steeplechasing is more dangerous than other pursuits; and it is certainly healthy. How beautiful your flowers are! Don't you find it difficult

to get them at this time of year? We have ours constantly sent up from the country. Would you like me to send you a basketful to-morrow?'

Linda thought Lady Grassmere very kind and obliging. It did seem a little odd that so much interest should be displayed in a total stranger; but that might arise from affection for Lady Sturdham, or perhaps be merely the outward sign of a naturally benevolent disposition. Linda would have been not a little astonished if she could have overheard a short colloquy which took place on the staircase, a few minutes later, between her respected father and the amiable countess.

Said the latter, directly the drawing-room door had closed behind her—'I am quite enchanted with your daughter. So pretty and ladylike and natural, and—er—innocent!'

Mr. Howard replied gravely that his daughter had been very carefully brought up, and that she inherited the sweet disposition of her mother, Lady Helen Blount, to whom, indeed, she was considered to bear a strong personal resemblance.

'Ah, yes—really?' said Lady Grassmere, who perhaps did not feel any vivid interest in the late Lady Helen. She paused on the landing, and, resting in a graceful attitude, with one beautifully-gloved little hand on the banister, approached a subject more important in her estimation.

'You were speaking, just now, of my son,' she said. 'He is the best boy in the world; but he has been very extravagant, I am sorry to say, and has had losses which—which make it especially desirable he should marry a fortune. You, of course, would wish your daughter to make what is called a brilliant match. Now, does it not seem as if an arrangement might be made which would meet both your wishes and ours admirably in every respect?'

Mr. Howard was not squeamish; but the coolness

with which this bargain was offered staggered even him for a moment.

'Really, Lady Grassmere, this is very sudden,' he said.

'So it is; and I ought perhaps to apologise. Only it is so very important to initiate matters of this kind in time.'

'I don't see the necessity for hurry so far as my daughter is concerned,' observed Mr. Howard.

'Well; you will think it over; and I hope we shall meet again soon. I have merely thrown out a *sugges-tion*, you understand—nothing more; and I need not say that I have spoken in strict confidence, and that not a creature knows of my little scheme. Pray don't trouble to come downstairs. Good-bye.'

And Lady Grassmere drove home, and reported to her husband that the girl would do very well, and that the father was not so objectionable as he had been made out to be.

As for Mr. Howard, he stuck his hands into his pockets, betook himself to the library, and sat down to consider the matter dispassionately. Linda's marriage, whenever and with whomsoever it took place, must be disadvantageous to him from a pecuniary point of view; but he had never entertained the notion of inducing her to remain single; nor did he now greatly desire that she should do so. He thought that, with careful management, he could always count upon receiving three thousand a year from his daughter; and this comforting assurance, combined with the working out of a certain project which, at this time, was beginning to mature itself in his mind, disposed him to look not unfavourably upon Lady Grassmere's proposal. He took down the peerage from its shelf, and turned to 'GRASSMERE, Charles James Fitz-Rupert, K.G., 9th earl. Born 18—; succeeded his father 18—' &c. &c. &c. Mr. Howard skimmed rapidly over the record of the different high offices held, from time to time, by Lord

Grassmere, and went on to the small print. '*Son*,—Charles de Grey, Viscount Keswick, born 18--; was educated at Eton; entered the Royal Horse Guards, as Cornet, 18—; Lieut. 18—; retired 18—; is a Captain in the Royal South Cumberland Yeomanry Cavalry. *Town residence*, A. 120, Albany, Piccadilly, W.'

There was not much information to be got out of that; but it was reassuring to find it stated lower down that Lord Grassmere possessed three estates in different parts of England, besides an Irish castle and a house in Belgrave Square.

'H'm! one might do worse,' soliloquised Mr. Howard. 'Evidently the young fellow is hard up; but they are well-known people—very well-known people. Anyhow, it is well worth considering.'

He dined at home that evening, and rejoiced Linda's heart by his good-humour and kindliness. Already he saw in her a potential viscountess, and respected her accordingly.

CHAPTER XV

LORD KESWICK

A YOUNG man whose friends have accustomed him, from his youth up, to regard sovereigns merely as a convenient species of counter, obtainable whenever and in whatsoever quantity desired, cannot reasonably be expected to have any definite ideas as to the means of confining his expenditure within the limits of his income; and should the father of such a young man find long bills coming in to him for articles supplied to his son, he ought to pay them without a murmur, remembering that he has only himself to thank for this annoyance. Parents, however, are not, as a rule, disposed to impute blame to themselves any more than

the rest of humanity, and Lord Grassmere, when he had paid away nearly twenty thousand pounds on his son's behalf, was sufficiently illogical to consider himself a hardly-used man.

As an Eton boy, Lord Keswick, when he happened to take a fancy to anything, immediately ordered it to be sent to him at his tutor's, and put his hand into his pocket to pay for it. If, by any chance, he found nothing there, he wrote to his father mentioning the fact, and the deficiency was supplied. Later in life, when he was serving her Majesty as a cornet in the Blues, and had a banker's account of his own, he simply wrote a cheque for any sum that might be required of him, and thought no more about it. He was a handsome, merry little fellow, with a round boyish face, whom everybody knew, everybody liked, and whom, it is to be feared, not a few people swindled. Being of a free and generous nature and of extremely expensive tastes, it is probable that he might have found himself in difficulties very early in life, if it had not been for the accident of a rich relation dying suddenly, and leaving him the undisputed control of a very comfortable fortune. There was no reason why this unexpected windfall should have caused Lord Keswick to leave his regiment at the early age of three-and-twenty; but he did so, thinking that, upon the whole, it would be better fun to be completely his own master, and that the liberty thus acquired would afford him more leisure for the supervision of his racing-stud, which was then in course of formation.

He spent a good deal of his capital in the purchase of yearlings, which afterwards, in the most unaccountable manner, turned out to be utterly valueless; but what was still worse was that he never could be convinced of the worthlessness of his own animals till he had heaped his money upon them, and lost it. It may have been bad judgment, or it may, as he himself always declared, have been bad luck; but certain it is

that Lord Keswick's turf career was a most disastrous one; and it soon came to be a standing joke among his intimates that not one of Keswick's horses had ever been known to be placed in any race whatever. Keswick himself took the joke in good part, and laughed good-humouredly over his defeats—as, indeed, he was always ready to laugh upon the smallest provocation.

The best of jokes, however, is apt to lose something of its flavour by constant repetition; and a man must be possessed of an immense fund of animal spirits who can see cause for merriment in the annual loss of many thousands of pounds. By the time that Lord Keswick had been a little over four years upon the turf, he had made away with the whole of the fortune bequeathed to him, was in debt to a considerable amount, and was solemnly assured by his father that his position was no laughing matter.

Lord Grassmere, who, if he had examined his past conduct, would have seen that he was himself the person chiefly responsible for these calamities, took this opportunity of informing his heir that, though his estates were large and his manner of living magnificent, he had very little command of ready money. He had younger sons to provide for, he said, and a wife and daughters to clothe; and, in short, Charlie would please understand that, for the future, he must contrive to keep within the very handsome allowance accorded to him.

The young man really behaved very well. He sold his stud, and put down his drag. As for keeping out of debt, you might as well have asked him to solve the *pons asinorum*. In laying down a rule of conduct it is as well to understand how far your subordinate is capable of obeying you, and to remember that what is practicable to one man is impossible to another. Many people will tell you that a carriage of some kind is a mere necessary of existence; others, to descend a little

lower in the scale of wealth, are honestly convinced that they could not dispense with a man-servant; and, in a similar way, Lord Keswick never even thought of depriving himself of certain luxuries, which to less exalted mortals might appear distinctly superfluous. Thus it came about that, at the end of another twelve-month, he was again compelled to approach his father with a request for further advances. Lord Grassmere paid, and growled. But a few months later the same thing occurred again. This time there was what Lord Keswick called a regular shindy. A family conclave was summoned 'at which it was unanimously agreed that this kind of thing could not go on; that there must be an end of it; that there was only one way out of it; and that Keswick must marry some girl with heaps of money forthwith.'

The poor little viscount received this decision with manifestations of the most comical dismay. Anything but that, he said, he could stand. Let them send him out to Australia; let them pay him a lump sum down, and get rid of him; but for the Lord's sake, don't ask him to marry!

Lord Grassmere, the recipient of this pathetic appeal, said he couldn't for the life of him see what there was to make such a fuss about. Marriage might be a nuisance in some ways—far be it from him to say that it was not; but it was what everybody in a certain position in life had to go through, sooner or later; and, after all, the pill would be a gilded one.

'But I'm not a domestic man, you see,' said Lord Keswick, plaintively.

'Am I a domestic man?' retorted his father, in a tone almost of indignation. And, to tell the truth, he certainly was not.

'The fact is, Charlie,' continued this affectionate parent, 'it is pretty much a case of sink or swim with you. I can't go on paying your debts at this rate; and if you don't marry a rich woman, hang me if I know

what's to become of you! Your mother will find you some cotton-spinner's daughter who will set you on your legs again—and you needn't see much of her: you go your way, and she goes hers, you know.'

'Yes, and some fine morning I shall find she has bolted with some other fellow. That wouldn't suit me at all, thank you,' said Lord Keswick.

'*My* wife hasn't bolted,' replied Lord Grassmere, with dignity. 'Of course, we aren't going to ask you to marry a woman who would do anything scandalous. Hang it all! Charlie, I've been devilish liberal with you, and never interfered with you in any way, and now I think you owe it to me to do what I ask you, and save me from expenses which, upon my word and honour, I can't afford.'

Lord Keswick gave way in the end. He was too easy-going to fight long against anybody or anything. But regarding matrimony, as he did, with a sort of holy horror, he did not think himself bound to further his parents' designs by showing any special attention to the various heiresses submitted to him for approval; and the consequence was that the majority of these prizes were carried off by others. Once, indeed, he was very nearly being done for. Miss Guldenthaler, the daughter of the eminent financier, who was understood to be anxious to ally herself with a scion of the British aristocracy, was strongly taken up by Lady Grassmere during a whole season, and Lord Keswick was so vehemently urged to offer his hand to this lady, that he could hardly see his way to disobey the behests of his relatives. One evening, late in July, Lady Grassmere, returning from her drive in the park, was astonished to find her drawing-room cleared of all its furniture, which had been heaped pell-mell against the walls, while her eldest son was performing a fantastic break-down in the middle of the room, to the great delight of the Ladies Edith and Maude Fitz-Rupert, one of whom was playing a lively accompaniment upon the piano to her

brother's performance. Lady Grassmere surveyed the scene with languid disgust.

'Really, Charlie,' said she, 'I think you might keep these exhibitions for the low companions of whom you are so fond. What pleasure can you possibly find in dancing in that ridiculous way, on a hot summer-afternoon?'

'I dance because I am happy,' says the young lord. 'I have done my duty, mother; I have proposed to Miss Guldenthaler.'

'I don't see any cause for such exuberant joy in that,' returned Lady Grassmere, coldly. 'Of course you knew she would accept you.'

'That's just what she hasn't done,' cried her son, with a delighted grin. 'Miss Guldenthaler is a trump, mother: she has refused me!' And he recommenced his dance with fresh vigour.

What could a fond mother do with so impracticable a son as this? 'He is turning my hair grey with his folly and obstinacy,' she sighed, later in the evening. To which her husband sardonically replied that that would not matter much, since nobody would ever know now what its real colour was.

But to a lady of firm will and well-defined principles, obstacles and difficulties exist only to be triumphed over. Lady Grassmere soon recovered from her disappointment with regard to Miss Guldenthaler, and set about searching for a substitute for her with that energy which is ever inspired by the consciousness of a noble aim. Her delight on learning of the advent of a marriageable young lady, uniting in her own person the advantages of great wealth, beauty and (on the mother's side at least) good birth, may be easily imagined, as may also be the facility with which all necessary information was extracted from the unsuspecting Lady Sturdham. Lady Grassmere was not one to lose time about grasping any good thing that fortune might place within her reach, nor was she unaware of the

advisability of being first in the field where any great prize is to be won. We have seen how promptly she hastened to pay a visit of inspection to Lancaster Gate, and with what engaging candour she exposed her hopes and wishes to Mr. Howard.

Matters having been thus satisfactorily initiated, the next step was to bring about a meeting between the two persons principally concerned. With this end in view, Lady Grassmere, as soon as Mr. and Miss Howard had left their cards in Belgrave Square, sent a friendly note to the latter, inviting her and her father to dine, 'quite *en famille*,' at an early date. At the same time Lord Keswick was given to understand that his presence would be required at the paternal board on the day named.

The Grassmere *ménage* had always been conducted upon a scale of lavish hospitality which the present head of the house would gladly have reduced, had he possessed the requisite strength of mind to set his face against old traditions. To fill your country-house with friends, at certain seasons of the year, was all very well; it was the proper thing to do; everybody did it; the newspapers reported it; and your guests departed with a proper sense of having been more or less honoured or favoured by their invitation. But Lord Grassmere, looking at life from the standpoint to which comparatively straitened circumstances had, of late years, brought him, did feel it a little hard that he should be expected to provide a so-called quiet dinner, night after night during the London season, for relatives and intimate friends, varying in number from twelve to twenty. These good people were in the habit of dropping in without notice, having been casually invited by one or other member of the Fitz-Rupert family, and did not consider that they incurred any obligation by so doing; while, on the other hand, they would have held themselves seriously aggrieved had the dinner set before them been otherwise than first-rate, or the wines of an inferior

quality to those supplied on the most festal occasions. To a man engaged upon the difficult task of reducing the expenses of a large establishment such unremunerative hospitality as this may well have seemed burdensome. But with Lord Grassmere and his difficulties we are not here specially concerned. It is sufficient to say that, up to the time of which we are writing, he had not succeeded in curtailing the friendly gatherings in question, and that, whatever the sentiments of the entertainer may have been, they were thoroughly enjoyed by the entertained.

An excellent dinner, at which you meet the very people you want to meet, where there is no formality, and from which, if so minded, you can escape without returning to the drawing-room, is a blessing which everyone must appreciate, and for which, if it were not an ungrateful world, everyone would be thankful. Such were the daily feasts provided, as a matter of course, by Lady Grassmere at her residence in Belgrave Square; and to such a one were Miss Howard and her father bidden in the manner already recorded.

Linda, who had not expected to meet more than half-a-dozen people, was rather dismayed, on her entrance, to find herself in the presence of a tolerably numerous assemblage. The room was a large one, and was in semi-obscurity; for no candles had been lighted, and the sun had set some time before; there was a confused Babel of voices; and a score or so of ladies and gentlemen were distinguishable, scattered in groups here and there.

From one of these groups Lady Grassmere now detached herself, and came forward, in her usual languid, deliberate way, to welcome the new arrivals. She was followed by a tall old gentleman, with an iron-grey moustache and whiskers, who shook hands without waiting for an introduction, and whom Linda rightly conjectured to be Lord Grassmere. He stood talking to her for several minutes, keeping his eyes so steadily

fixed upon her the while that she was very glad when he introduced to her a fat man with a bald head, and moved away.

The stout gentleman was in no way formidable. He was a brother-in-law of Lady Grassmere's, and knew perfectly well who Linda was, and why she was there; but his interest in the heiress was not so profound as to lead him into the discourtesy of staring her out of countenance; and, as he was a good-natured man, and thought very likely the girl might feel shy at being thus introduced into a crowd of inquisitive strangers, he did his best to set her at her ease by keeping up a steady flow of small-talk till the time came for him to take her down to dinner.

Lady Grassmere enjoyed a deserved celebrity for her informal dinners, of which form of entertainment she had made a special study, taking care of the ease and enjoyment of her guests in other matters besides the essential ones of meat and drink. Linda was a good deal struck with the aspect of the dining-room, nothing like it having hitherto come in her way. The table was oval in shape, and the master and mistress of the house sat, opposite to each other, halfway down it, instead of at the head and foot; no dessert was displayed, no silver, and, upon the present occasion, no china; glass and flowers were the only forms of decoration used; and the shaded light from above was thrown strongly upon the table, leaving the faces of the guests in shadow. All of which arrangements were in advance of the fashion then prevalent, and were much admired for their novelty.

Linda was able to form a tolerably shrewd guess as to the person destined to occupy the empty chair on her right hand. Some oracular allusions which had fallen from Mr. Howard in the course of the few preceding days had served to enlighten her, in some degree, with regard to Lady Grassmere's designs; and though, at this time, she was convinced of nothing

more profoundly than of her determination to live and die single, yet she was not without a natural curiosity to see the young man whose coronet was considered to be an equivalent for her guineas. She was a little disappointed when the first two courses had been disposed of, and no Lord Keswick appeared. But just as she had given up all hope of him, the vacant chair was drawn back by an attendant footman, and the truant slipped quietly into it. Linda's stout friend glanced up, saying, 'Hullo, Charlie'—and then added, 'I don't think you know Miss Howard. Miss Howard, let me introduce my nephew, Lord Keswick.'

Lord Keswick bowed and smiled, and called over his shoulder to somebody behind him, 'Bring me some clear soup, please.' He did not appear to think it incumbent upon him to make conversation to his neighbour.

While he was eating his soup, Linda stole a furtive glance or two at his smooth, close-cropped head, his clear, healthy complexion and fair moustache, and thought him a handsome, gentlemanly little fellow, and not at all like his father or his mother. Then he looked up, and she saw that he had bright blue eyes and a pleasant, honest smile.

'Have you seen the evening paper?' he asked.

Linda said, 'No.'

'Oh, well, I have just got back—that's what made me late. Vauban won.'

'Did he?' said Linda. 'Who is he? and what has he won?'

'Why, the Two Thousand, to be sure,' answered Lord Keswick, in a tone of some surprise. 'Do you mean to say you didn't know it was run to-day?'

'I not only did not know that,' said Linda, smiling, 'but this is the first time I ever heard that there was such a thing as the Two Thousand. It is a race, I suppose. The only race I know of is the Derby; and I have no idea when that takes place.'

'What a funny thing!' murmured Lord Keswick, looking down at the table-cloth with a wondering smile, much as an ordinarily well-informed person might do on being casually told by the lady whom he had chanced to take down to dinner that she was aware that there was a Prime Minister in England, but was not quite sure of his name. 'Never heard of the Guineas! Never heard of—— But some people don't care about racing, I know,' he broke off, not wishing to seem too hard upon anybody's ignorance.

'I should like to see a race very much,' said Linda; 'but I have only been a few months in England, so I have hardly had a chance yet. Papa is very fond of anything of that kind. I think he has scarcely missed a single race since he has been in this country.'

'Really? Is that your father on the other side of the table? Of course it is, though. I know everybody else in the room.'

'Yes. I think he said he had met you at some steeplechases in which you were riding, I forget where.'

'Ah, I daresay—I don't remember. One meets such a lot of people in that way.'

'It must be very exciting to ride your own horse in a race,' said Linda, thinking it best to pursue the subject which seemed most interesting to her companion.

'I don't know that it makes much difference,' said Lord Keswick. 'You'd do all you knew to win, don't you know, whether the beast belonged to you or to another fellow. I don't ride my own horses now, for the very good reason that I haven't got any to ride. I had a fairish stable of my own once upon a time; but I've given it up.'

'What made you do that?' asked Linda, in the innocence of her heart.

'Broke,' replied Lord Keswick, laconically.

Not being quite sure of his meaning, Linda held her peace.

Lord Keswick, too, kept silence for a short space, and went on with his dinner.

'After all, it don't much matter,' he resumed presently. 'You remember the story about that fellow —I forget who he was—some big swell, a hundred years ago, when they used to play so uncommon high. He said the next best thing to winning was losing, and the next best thing to losing was looking on. There's a good deal in that, when you come to think of it. I suppose everybody would like to have a horse in the Derby; but if you can't have that, at all events you can go and see the race run, and have something on it, if you like. I always try to make the best of things so far as I can.'

'So do I,' said Linda; 'but it is not always easy. Some troubles are all bad; there is no best to be made out of them.'

Her eyes turned involuntarily, as she spoke, towards her father, who was entertaining a sleepy-looking lady, in ruby velvet and Brussels lace, with bland volubility.

Lord Keswick noticed the look, and wondered what it meant, but he showed no consciousness of it in his reply.

'Such as having a tooth out,' he said; 'I admit you can't make the best of that—that is one of the things which one has to grin and bear. Do you see that man with the hook nose at the other end of the table? Well, he has got some awful thing in his inside, which must kill him in a year or two, and may snuff him out any day, I believe. You wouldn't think it to look at him, would you? He's always like that—always jolly, and ready for any fun that's going; and if he ever feels down in the mouth, he don't let anybody see it. That's what I call real pluck. I don't know how I should bear a thing of that kind; but small

annoyances, such as being hard up, and that, I can manage to put a pretty good face upon.'

'You don't think money so absolutely essential as most people do, then?' said Linda, interrogatively.

'Don't I though! Half the troubles in the world come from the want of money, and nearly all the pleasures from the possession of it.'

'Ah!' sighed Linda, 'so I used to think once.'

'When you were a girl, eh?' said Lord Keswick, rather amused. 'And since when have you altered your mind about the value of money?'

'Since I have had it,' replied Linda, simply. 'This time last year I was quite, quite poor—oh! ever so much poorer than anybody you ever knew, I suppose—and then I used to think how perfectly happy I should be if somebody would leave me two or three thousand a year, and what I would do with it, and what fun papa and I would have together. Now I have got a great deal more than that, and things are altogether different from what I expected—altogether different!'

There was a perceptible quaver in Linda's voice as she spoke these last words, which caused her good-natured little neighbour to glance at her with pity not unmixed with alarm. She recovered herself immediately.

'I believe you are right, Lord Keswick,' she said with a smile; 'there are certain things which one must grin and bear—or bear without grinning, and certainly without crying out. No one has a right to obtrude his personal grievances upon his fellow-creatures. That is your theory, isn't it?'

'Oh, I don't know that,' said the young man. 'My fellow-creatures often bore me most confoundedly; so why shouldn't I give them a turn, if I feel inclined? That isn't what I mean. All I think is that, on perfectly selfish grounds, it is more sensible to get what enjoyment you can out of life than to go about groaning.'

'You have a wisdom beyond your years, Lord Keswick,' said Linda, gravely. 'I quite agree with what you say; and I am going to try and enjoy life henceforth to the best of my ability. How should you advise me to set about it?'

Lord Keswick was at no loss to find a string of amusements suited to a lady of large means. He suggested, in turn, dancing, the opera, Ascot, yachting, and riding in the Row (in those days polo, rinking, and lawn-tennis lay still concealed in the bosom of futurity)—and had so much to say upon each of these topics that he was not at the end of his list when Lady Grassmere rose slowly from her chair.

'That's a very nice little girl, Charlie,' remarked Lord Keswick's stout uncle, as soon as the ladies had left the room.

'Very,' answered Lord Keswick, shortly, filling his plate with strawberries. 'You have heard all about the Guineas, of course.'

'I saw the telegram in the club. Were you on Vauban?'

'Backed him for a place ever so long ago,' replied the young man. 'Wish I'd backed him to win, this morning, but I fancied he looked a bit over-trained.'

'Now, Charlie,' said the fat man, pouring himself out a glass of claret, 'you're one of the knowing ones: can't you put me on a good thing for the Derby?'

'Well, I'll tell you what,' said Lord Keswick, drawing his chair nearer to that of his interrogator, and speaking in a low, confidential voice, 'I can tell you of a real good place investment. From what I heard to-day, I can name a horse that's *bound* to be in the first three if nothing happens to him between this and then; and he's a horse you can get a very good price about, too.' And so forth, and so forth.

In this way Linda escaped further comment among the gentlemen.

Meanwhile she was receiving a great deal of flatter-

ing attention upstairs, in the drawing-room. All the ladies there assembled were in some way related to or connected with one another, and all were benevolently interested in poor 'Charlie's' welfare. It was well known to them that the family finances required recruiting, that this end must be achieved in some way or another, and if through the medium of a quiet, ladylike and well-dressed girl, why so much the better—and so much the greater reason for civility to a young person who had the good taste to be a pleasing object to the eye as well as a necessary accompaniment to the required specie. One by one, each of these excellent dames took an opportunity of saying something kind to the little heiress; all promised to call upon her, and hoped to see her at their next ball. I do not say that they would have been rude to her, or even that they would have left her alone with a photograph book in a corner, if she had been poor and insignificant; but it is certain that, in the latter case, they would never have thought of calling upon her. They had nothing personally to gain by Miss Howard's marriage with their cousin, nor could their motives for showing her attention be properly called mercenary. In acting as they did, they simply obeyed the natural impulse which prevails among all classes and estates of mankind, bidding them bow down below wealth, which is one form of power, as genius, beauty and rank are others.

Linda, perfectly understanding this, was neither unduly elated nor foolishly indignant at the prominent position assigned to her. It was nothing more than she had always been led to expect; and it was some comfort to her, in her present rather despondent state, to find that, if a large fortune is powerless to bestow happiness, it is at least able to throw open the gates of society.

It was not Lord Keswick's usual habit, when he dined at his father's house, to show himself in the drawing-room after dinner; and that he departed from

his ordinary custom on this particular occasion was hailed by his watchful mother as an auspicious omen. Her joy was increased when she saw him immediately seek out Miss Howard, and, after a few minutes of conversation, retire with her to a distant part of the room, upon the evidently shallow pretext of showing her a portfolio of old engravings, in which both of them appeared to become speedily engrossed. Lord Grassmere's lined and anxious visage, too, relaxed at this pleasing sight, while Mr. Howard was radiant with sherry and complacency.

So here we have an honest and well-meaning young man driven to simulate an affection which he does not feel, in the hope of securing a wife with an income sufficient to defray the cost of his amusements; a father, a mother, and a chorus of affectionate relations egging him on towards the accomplishment of his clumsy fraud; and another father, who, understanding the whole scheme, is yet ready and willing that his only daughter shall play her part in it, and sacrifice herself, her liberty, and her future, in order that she may, some day, have the right to style herself Countess of Grassmere. There is nothing especially novel in this spectacle; nor is it an unexampled phenomenon—though it must for ever remain a queer one—that none of these people should have imagined themselves to be aiding and abetting in the commission of a dishonourable action, or doubted for a moment but that their conduct was in harmony with a high moral standard. Yet, in the course of his duties as a magistrate, Lord Grassmere must have had many a poor rogue brought up before him, charged with obtaining money under false pretences; and I daresay that his lordship would not have allowed such a miscreant to slink away to the just punishment in store for him without some stern and appropriate comments upon the enormity of his offence.

CHAPTER XVI

LINDA BECOMES KNOWN TO THE WORLD

Linda's admission into fashionable society was now an accomplished fact. From the day of Lady Grassmere's dinner, visits and invitations poured in upon her with unfailing regularity; and when, a few weeks later, Lady Sturdham arrived in London, she found that she had been forestalled in her amiable intention of introducing her niece into exclusive circles.

This discovery occasioned Lady Sturdham some passing irritation; for she thought that Lady Grassmere's conduct in the matter had been slightly precipitate and unceremonious, and she had looked forward, no without secret pleasure, to the importance of having a well-dowered *débutante* on her hands to establish; but, as a set-off to this disappointment, there was the relief of being freed from the troublesome duties and responsibilities of a chaperon; and, whatever might be thought of Lady Grassmere, in a private and personal capacity, the loftiness of her social position was beyond dispute. No girl could desire to enter the world under more unexceptionable protection; nor could any lady in England feel otherwise than honoured by an offer of marriage from Lord Keswick. Such was the deliberate opinion of Lady Sturdham, a virtuous, charitable, and, upon the whole, unworldly woman; and if it be an honour *per se* to be admitted into intimacy by persons of a higher rank than your own, without regard to the causes by which such admission may have been brought about, then, no doubt, her judgment was justified.

'Uncle Jim,' however, was less amenable to reason, and was inclined to be very wrathful when the projected alliance, and the prompt measures which had been taken with a view thereto, were first disclosed to him.

'Upon my word, that woman is the coolest hand I ever met with!' he exclaimed. 'What!—go and call upon a total stranger, without rhyme or reason, and say, "Oh, I hear you have got a large fortune; my son happens to be in want of an article of that kind; would you be so obliging as to let him have the refusal of it?" I never heard of such a thing in my life! What is the world coming to?'

'Oh, but James,' interposed Lady Sturdham, deprecatingly, 'she did not put it like that. In fact, I don't think Linda has been spoken to on the subject at all.'

'My dear Selina, however it was put, it was a very great piece of impertinence; and I shall take care to put Linda on her guard against the Grassmeres and any other fortune-hunters.'

'Of course, James, I should not think of encouraging a match which you disapproved of,' said Lady Sturdham, submissively; 'only I do think the poor child ought to be married, and taken away from that terrible old father of hers as soon as possible. It must be so very bad for her to live with him.'

'She has lived with him all her life, and it doesn't seem to have done her any great harm as yet,' remarked Lord Sturdham.

'But I don't think he can always have been as bad as he is now. And then he has such dreadful friends! You remember that Mrs. Williams and her daughters at Brighton—and no doubt there are others. If Linda is left to him, I feel sure he will marry her to some horrid low man whom we should not be able to acknowledge. Lord Keswick is at least a gentleman, and I don't think you can call him exactly a fortune-hunter. I hope you will not set Linda against him before you have thought it all over a little. They tell me he is really a very nice young man, and that he has never got into any serious mischief.'

'He has never done any serious good that I know

of,' growled Lord Sturdham. 'However, it is not Lord Keswick whom I object to, but the way in which his people have behaved—as though the girl's wishes and happiness were of no importance at all.'

'Girls so seldom know what is for their own happiness,' sighed Lady Sturdham. 'But if she did wish it—you would not object then, James?'

'My objecting would not make much difference, I suppose; I have no authority over Linda. But I should hope that her own good sense would keep her from marrying a man who is so evidently in love with her money, and not with herself.'

'I think you are too hard upon him, James, I do indeed,' said Lady Sturdham, roused by opposition into championship of Lord Keswick, whom she had not seen half-a-dozen times in her life, and knew hardly anything about. 'It would be absurd to pretend that he is indifferent to money—nobody is that—but he may love Linda for her own sake as well; and, from all I have heard of him, I fancy he will make a good husband.'

Lord Sturdham had a good deal to say in reply; but the upshot of it all was that he came round, as usual, to his wife's way of thinking—in so far, at least, as that he was prevailed upon to adopt a neutral attitude, and promised that, if he would do nothing to further the scheme under consideration, he would, at all events, abstain from thwarting it. So that Lady Sturdham, happening to meet Lady Grasmere at a dinner party the next evening, was able to announce that, 'James quite approves of our little plan, and hopes it may turn out successfully.' To which the other conspirator, with a languidly gracious bend of her head, replied that she was charmed to hear it.

'I am sure Miss Howard will be glad to have her uncle's approval if the match ever does come off,' she said, 'though I believe she is entirely her own mistress. Nothing is settled as yet, you know, dear Lady Sturd-

ham; and perhaps, for the present, it would be as well not to talk about it, don't you think so?'

For Lady Grassmere was now tolerably confident of achieving her end, and felt herself in a position to dispense with extraneous aid.

Peace and contentment reigned in the breast of that fond mother, and reacting through her upon her weary and harassed lord, made the big house in Belgrave Square a pleasanter place to visit at than it had been for some years past. For Lord Keswick had been pleased to declare himself entirely satisfied with the bride selected for him, and had committed himself to a distinct promise that he would enter into a formal engagement with her before the expiration of the season. The possibility of his offer being declined had scarcely entered into his calculations—not because he was in any degree a coxcomb, but so prosaic an affair as marriage had always been represented to him as an arrangement concluded between two worldly-wise persons for their common advantage; and, so far as he had given the subject a thought, he honestly believed that his title and prospects were a fair set-off against Miss Howard's wealth. That heiresses were occasionally perverse, and chose to throw away their chance of using a coronet on their note-paper and on the panels of their carriages, his own experience had taught him; but these, he imagined, were very exceptional persons; and, indeed, there seemed to be no ground for anticipating any such disappointment in the present case. Seeing that Miss Howard was constantly with his mother, that she had made friends with his sisters, and seemed kindly disposed towards himself, he very naturally concluded that she understood and approved of the destiny marked out for her; and, secure in this conviction, he awaited, with tranquil resignation, the final sealing of his doom.

Lady Grassmere, while sharing her son's confidence as to ultimate results, would yet fain have made assur-

ance doubly sure by getting the preliminary form of proposal and acceptance over without further delay; but here Lord Keswick proved recalcitrant. A few more weeks of liberty, he said, he must and would have; and the countess did not care to overdrive a willing horse. A gold-digger who has once got firm hold of a nugget may take his own time about converting his treasure into coin of the realm; and Lady Grassmere was of opinion that her nugget was now secure. When her husband, who was growing a trifle testy and querulous under the pressure of increasing years, worries and embarrassments, asked her, one day, why the dickens she didn't get the thing settled and done with, she replied, with a calm trustfulness in the integrity of human nature which could hardly have been expected from a lady of her experience, that nc girl could accept the kindness which Miss Howard had accepted from her, and then leave her benefactress in the lurch.

'It is a generally understood thing,' said her ladyship, 'that the marriage is to take place; and though of course there has been no formal announcement, I look upon the thing as virtually settled.'

It must be admitted that Linda had innocently given some foundation for the impression which Lady Grassmere had truly stated to be prevalent amongst her acquaintances. She had no intention whatever of marrying Lord Keswick, and therefore she would doubtless have acted more wisely had she shown herself less often in public under his mother's wing. She sat beside Lady Grassmere in ball-rooms; she was constantly seen with her in the park; she accompanied her to concerts and botanical fêtes and such other public resorts as were frequented by ladies in the days when Prince's and Hurlingham were not; and wherever she went Lord Keswick, who had not hitherto favoured society with a large share of his patronage, was to be seen at her elbow. The little world in which

Linda's lot was at this time cast drew its own inferences, and remarked, in its good-natured way, that the heiress was making the running uncommonly strong; and thus did Linda secure for herself not only the outlook of eternal hatred on the part of the whole Grassmere clan —which must needs follow upon her rejection of Lord Keswick's suit—but likewise the laughing commiseration of outsiders at the failure of her supposed design.

Of all this, however, she suspected nothing. Her life, at this time, was not particularly happy; but it was busy, full of excitement, novelty, and fatigue, and, by virtue of these attributes, in a great measure exempt from anxious thought. That Lord Keswick would sooner or later ask her to be his wife Linda could not but be aware; but she had not troubled herself with speculations as to the probable effect of her refusal upon him or his relatives, well knowing that, in the eyes of them all, she was but a necessary, and perhaps troublesome, appendage to her fortune. She had become quite accustomed to declining matrimonial offers now, and had ceased to believe in the phenomenon of a broken heart.

If, indeed, Linda had had time and inclination for worrying herself, troubles less remote than these were not wanting to her. The young heiress found herself confronted every day with a crop of small annoyances—vexations too numerous and too trivial to be recorded here, and which, if set down, would seem absurdly slight; but which were not the easier to bear by reason of their pettiness. Pitiful quarrels between Mr. Howard and the servants; references to her, as mistress of the house, by one or other of the disputants, making her feel keenly the falseness of her position; unpleasant interviews with Mr. Deane, who in his anxiety to protect his young charge from imposition, was sometimes disposed to usurp rather more of the functions of a guardian than he was entitled to; irrepressible repetitions of gossip from the servants' hall, retailed by her maid or

the housekeeper—such were some of the small burdens which were heaped daily upon Linda's shoulders, and which at first made her thoroughly miserable. But, as time went on, she learnt to put up with the tiny concomitant stings of riches, as she had formerly learnt to support those of poverty—only the responsibility laid upon her in the new station of life seemcd heavier than it had been in the old. She had an impression that she ought to be doing some good with her money; but she knew not how to set about this; nor had she anyone to advise her in the matter. Lady Sturdham, to whom she mentioned her wish, responded by eagerly producing a list of various charities, by means of which it appeared that all sorts of odd, out of the way classes of humanity were taken in hand, and saved from destitution; and to these Linda had, for the time, to content herself by subscribing, though so easy and simple a method of benevolence hardly satisfied her aspirations. In some quieter future time, she thought, she would give the subject more consideration, and try to discover some way of making herself useful in the world. For the present it seemed best to drift on with the stream of fashionable life; to hear, see and enjoy as much, and to think as little, as possible, since all reflection appeared to be more or less fraught with bitterness.

So Linda, under the competent guidance of Lady Grassmere, entered the very best of London society; was presented at Court; was subsequently duly impressed by the refinements of modern civilisation as exhibited by the guests at one of Her Majesty's state balls; was introduced to statesmen and great noblemen and ambassadors and financiers: saw many famous men and one or two well-dressed women; received numerous proposals, and acquired some startling experiences of the baser side of human nature. A wholesome fear of being accused of exaggeration restrains the chronicler of Linda's career from entering into particulars as to the number, rank and age of those who,

at this time, entreated her to share their lot, and as to the duration of acquaintanceship which they considered necessary before making their flattering propositions. But if perchance he have the honour to number among his readers a *bonâ fide* eighteen-thousand-a-year heiress, he would respectfully ask that lady whether exaggeration in such a matter be in truth a possibility.

It will, at all events, be readily believed that Miss Howard had no lack of suitors during her first season; and doubtless she would have had even more if it had not been so palpably evident that she was destined to espouse Lord Keswick. The young man did his courting to the best of his ability, riding with Linda and his sisters in the Row, dancing with the former two or three times in the course of an evening, and sending her bouquets whenever his servant, to whom he had entrusted this part of the business, did not forget the commission. Further than this a certain obstinate honesty of character forbade him to go; and Linda liked him the better because, after the first evening, he never assumed the semblance of a lover-like manner in addressing her.

One of the many unwilling extravagances into which poor Lord Grassmere was annually coerced by the mere force of immemorial custom was the hiring of a house at Sunninghill for the Ascot race-week, and the filling of the same with his friends and those of his wife and sons. It was an expensive business, not to be compensated for by any haphazard betting upon the course, and indeed more often worsened than improved by such endeavours; but to abandon it required an effort of will greater than his lordship felt equal to; so, in this, as in many other matters, he went on in the old way, looking principally, in these latter times, to Miss Howard, as to the life-buoy thrown him by Providence as a means of escape from the rising waves of embarrassment with which he feebly battled.

It need hardly be said that the young lady upon

whose caprice such momentous issues depended was among the guests invited to partake of Lord Grassmere's hospitality on the occasion of the Ascot meeting to which the course of this history has now brought us. Nor could Mr. Howard be with propriety excluded from the list, though Lord Grassmere had already developed a very strong antipathy towards that urbane gentleman —a feeling which, it may be mentioned to his credit, was neither perceived nor reciprocated. 'Grassmere and I always get on well together,' Mr. Howard would remark to any of his club acquaintances who cared to listen to such gratifying intelligence. 'Other people find him dull and silent; but the truth is there isn't a better fellow going, if you take him the right way. His liver is all wrong—that's what's the matter with him—and he want's cheering up and rousing. Very often I go and look him up, and find him as dull as ditch-water, and I can assure you, before I have been with him five minutes, he is walking up and down the room roaring with laughter.'

So Mr. Howard went down to Ascot, and enjoyed himself as a man must needs do who believes that he is conferring a benefit upon his fellow-creatures while in pursuit of his own amusement. Linda, too, was glad to escape for a time from the heat and noise and smoke of London. For everything there is a season; and in all countries except our own, the season for dancing and feasting and the wearing of gay and uncomfortable apparel is the winter. The English usage, which finds its justification in the fact that, all things considered, it would be more inconvenient for the moneyed classes to be in London during the cold than during the warm months, may well appear to a stranger to be a perverse waste of the small amount of fine weather with which we are favoured in these islands. Linda, who had heard the nightingales sing, in the Cascine, on starry May nights, and had sat in the cool, shady glades which surround the Villa Borghese, while

the sleepy hum of the city beyond came faintly through the warm air, found Kensington Gardens, with its nursemaids and perambulators and smoke-grimed trees, a poor substitute for those pleasant foreign retreats, and longed for a glimpse of the green English landscape of which she had heard so much, but with which she had not as yet been permitted to make any personal acquaintance.

Moreover, she had a great curiosity to see a race; and she was assured on all hands that she could not make a better beginning than by going to Ascot. Certain persons whom circumstances prevent from reaching the course by other means than those afforded them by nature and the South Western Railway Company—who too often fail to meet with the luncheon they have a right to expect at the hands of their friends, and are fain to fight for a stale sandwich and a nauseous, tepid drink in the Grand Stand—who, after a breathless run along a dusty road, are hustled into a third-class carriage and politely told that they are lucky to get a place in the train at all—such persons, I say, may, as time goes on, have formed their own opinion as to the amount of enjoyment derivable from a visit to the Royal race-course on the Cup day; but with that class of society we are not concerned. Our heroine has soared to a height where such discomforts as these are unknown; she will be driven to the course every morning on the box-seat of Lord Keswick's drag, or in an open carriage, as her fancy may dictate; upon her arrival she can take her choice between remaining on the top of the drag and crossing the course to Lady Grassmere's box; she will have as luxurious a repast set before her as if she were at a party in London; she will see every race, from start to finish, without any trouble, and she will return in the evening without having had a moment of annoyance from heat, dust or crowd. Truly there are times when wealth has its conspicuous advantages.

Life at Lord Grassmere's temporary residence at

Sunninghill had, among other charms, that of a perfect and unfettered independence. Neither host nor hostess made any attempt whatsoever at entertaining their guests; they were far too exalted personages for that. They simply intimated to such members of their household as it concerned that a certain number of people would be in the house during the Ascot week, and there was an end of the matter. Breakfast was to be had at any hour in the morning at which it might be required; carriages were provided for those who might wish to proceed to the races afterwards; but no one was obliged or expected to appear at any given moment or place, nor was he in the least likely to be missed if he chose to absent himself. In the afternoon there were croquet and Aunt Sally in the garden; dinner took place at eight or half-past, and the day concluded with billiards and cards, or tea and gossip, according to the taste and sex of the visitor.

Linda at the races was like a child at a pantomime, and her delight at the scene would have been a treat to Lord Sturdham if he could have witnessed it. Not that the sport interested her greatly. She understood very little about that, and cared less. The horses seemed to her to move much more slowly than she had expected; each of them looked very like the other, except for a shade of difference in colour; she could never make out which had won the race, nor whether he had won easily or not; nor was she any the wiser when the name of the winner was announced. But she never wearied of studying the vast and varied human concourse which, actuated by divers motives, is drawn together, every month of June, upon the Berkshire heath. The scarlet liveries and clumsy state-carriages of the Royal procession; the Master of the Buckhounds in all his glory; the crowds of fashionable ladies and ladies who wished to be thought fashionable; the long line of coaches and landaus and waggonettes, and every other description of vehicle, drawn up on the opposite

side of the course; the vociferous betting men, in their eccentric costumes: the British public, in its hideous holiday garb; Mr. Howard, in a grey frock coat and a white hat, darting busily in and out among the bookmakers; Lord Grassmere standing, as usual, apart, and nibbling the top of his pencil-case in frowning silence; Mrs. Williams and her daughters, hot and good-humoured, waving their plump hands in undisguised glee at recognising their young friend in such high company—all this Linda looked out upon from her cool corner in Lady Grassmere's box, and found fully as diverting as any play.

She was free to gaze her fill without any fear of interruption; for Lady Grassmere was by nature an intensely indolent woman, and did not care about making conversation for the benefit of little girls, unless there were some distinct advantage to be gained by doing so. 'One need not be upon terms of ceremony with one's daughter-in-law,' thought her ladyship when, during an interval in a flirtation with one of her middle-aged admirers, she noticed Linda sitting silent and alone. 'It is Charlie's business to amuse her now; I have done my part.'

Lord Keswick was conscientiously doing his part also; and not doing it badly. The scene being a race-course, it was not to be expected that he should spend the day at Miss Howard's elbow, to the detriment of his own affairs, which required constant personal supervision; but, whenever he found time, he ran up to his mother's box, and stationed himself behind Linda's chair. The task was not altogether a distasteful one to him. He had now quite made up his mind that, since marry he must, he would far rather marry Linda Howard than anybody else; and though he was not in the least in love with her, he was not insensible to her beauty, nor unaware that, as his wife, she would do him infinitely more credit than Miss Guldenthaler could ever have done. Her profound ignorance of all matters

connected with racing, which in a man would have appeared to him nothing less than despicable, rendered her, if anything, rather more attractive in his eyes. Imagine an artist opening the mind of the lady of his choice to appreciate the genius of Cimabue, Giotto, and Perugino, or a musician explaining to his intended bride the latent beauties of Herr Wagner's most bewildering passages. With little less enthusiasm did Lord Keswick expound to Linda the noble pedigree of Bonbon by Shooting Star from Toffee by Greased Lightning, and demonstrate in the clearest manner that he, and he alone, could win the Gold Cup.

'The favourite *isn't in it*, Miss Howard,' said he, earnestly. 'Don't you believe what people say, but take my word for it, and back Bonbon for all you're worth.'

'Have you backed him for all you are worth?' Linda asked.

'That wouldn't be very much,' replied Lord Keswick, composedly. 'No, I haven't—not yet. I've taken seven ponies to one about him; but I shall put on a little more presently, I daresay, as soon as I have seen a man who ought to be able to tell me whether it's a certainty. By the bye, you haven't been in the Paddock yet, have you? Come along and see them before they start, and I'll get my tip at the same time.'

Linda, not being quite sure what the Paddock was, or whether it was a proper place for ladies to visit, asked permission of Lady Grassmere, who answered—

'Oh, yes, go by all means, if you don't mind being grilled.'

So she went. Lord Keswick piloted her past the hubbub of the Ring and up the course, which was now thronged with loungers, till they reached a small gate in a park-paling guarded by a couple of policemen. Passing through this, Linda found herself in a crowd scarcely less dense than that which she had just quitted. A few ladies were to be seen here and there; but tall

hats were in a large majority; and under each hat was an eager pair of eyes anxiously fixed upon the string of horses which were being slowly led past for inspection previous to the great race of the week.

Lord Keswick recognised them all, and detailed their names and achievements to Linda as they approached. There was the winner of the last year's Leger; yonder was the three-year-old who had run such a good second for the Derby of the present year, and who, as some people thought, might add the Ascot Cup to the large collection of racing trophies which already graced his owner's sideboard. That white-faced chestnut was the famous Belisarius whom the prophets had pronounced to be invincible, and who had been made a hot favourite for the forthcoming contest.

'Here's one that can show him the way home, though,' said Lord Keswick, as a great black horse came sidling to the front and lashed out once or twice with a freedom which caused a precipitate backward movement on the part of the bystanders. 'That's Bonbon; and as far as looks go I think you'll admit there ain't much fault to be found with him.'

'I shouldn't like to have to ride him,' was Linda's comment upon the appearance of this fiery steed.

'Oh, he's all right,' said Lord Keswick; 'he only wants a little humouring. If they can only get a good start, you'll see——'

He broke off to catch by the elbow a little smooth-shaven, oldish man, in very tight clothes, who was hurrying by.

'Well, Wright,' said he, 'are you going to pull it off?

'We ought to, my lord,' answered the man, pushing his hat off his forehead, and glancing to right and left with sharp, beady eyes. 'I don't see nothink here to beat us.'

'Then you'd advise me to get on it, eh?'

'I don't advise nothing nor nobody, my lord—

couldn't do it with a nervous horse, and such a course as this here; but I'll go so fur as to say this—I believe we must win, *bar accidents*.'

'I don't quite know what to make of that,' soliloquised Lord Keswick, as his oracular adviser bustled away. 'Wright is such a deuced cautious old bird. That was Wright,' he added, explanatorily, to Linda—'the father of the man who is to ride Bonbon. He was a famous jockey himself, in his day, and he's pretty wide awake. I almost think I'll risk it. No, I won't either—I'll leave it to you. You tell me whether to go a big thing on Bonbon or not, and I'll abide by what you say.'

'How can I possibly tell you?' said Linda, laughing. 'I know nothing whatever about it.'

'Of course not. It's only for luck, don't you see? —like tossing up. Now, then; yes or no—which is it to be?'

'Well—yes!' said Linda; and then immediately repented of her decision. 'No—I think, after all, I would rather say No,' she concluded.

'It won't do,' said Lord Keswick; 'second thoughts are always wrong. Besides, I am quite sure your instinct made you say yes against your will—which shows I am in for a little bit of luck. Now, if you don't mind, we'll be off. I shall only just have time to get this thing on.'

The course was already being cleared when they emerged; and they were hastening back over the dusty brown grass, when Linda was startled by a smart tap on her shoulder from the handle of a parasol, and turning round found herself face to face with Ada Tower.

Miss Tower, always a striking figure, had surpassed herself in brilliancy this sunny June day. A costume, fresh from the hands of the great M. Worth, exhibited to perfection the symmetrical lines of her stately person; a bonnet, the price of which must have made a formidable breach in her quarter's allowance, crowned

her rippling golden locks; a delicate and most artistic bloom showed itself upon her fair cheeks, and her eyes sparkled with merriment and joy and goodwill towards all mankind.

'My *dear* Linda,' cried she, with great warmth, 'how delighted I am to see you! I have been so fearfully busy ever since we came to town, or I should have found you out before this. I have ever so many things to talk to you about. Mamma is on that drag over there; do come and be introduced to her, and stay till after the race, will you? You will see just as well from there as anywhere else.'

'I should like it very much,' answered Linda. 'Lord Keswick, you are dying to get away, I know. Please go; and I will find my way back when the race is over.'

Lord Keswick did not wait for a second permission; but, hastily raising his hat, ran off in the direction of the Ring. Miss Tower looked after him with a knowing smile. 'Now that you have got rid of your cavalier, my dear,' she remarked, 'I will dismiss mine. Take yourself off, Mr. Plowden; you are not wanted any more for the present.'

The subject of this unceremonious command was a short, red-haired man, rather over-dressed, and wearing a conspicuous bouquet in his buttonhole, whom Linda had not hitherto noticed. He took his *congé* in anything but a meek spirit, becoming very red in the face, and blurting out, 'I hope, Miss Tower, I am not in the habit of stopping where I am not wanted.' After which he strutted away with such a comical display of indignation that Linda could not repress a smile, while Miss Tower laughed aloud in her usual hearty and unreserved manner.

'Did you ever see such a fool in your life?' said she.

'He seems to get angry very easily,' remarked Linda.

'Oh, yes; he is a mere savage—quite ignorant of all the manners and customs of society. But I am taming him by degrees,' said Miss Tower, complacently. 'This is his drag, by the way; and there is mamma on the box-seat. Mamma, I want to introduce you to Miss Howard.'

Mrs. Tower's venerable features became wreathed in smiles. Her bow expressed something more than friendliness, and she put out her hand as though she would have grasped that of her daughter's friend—only difference of level rendered this an impossibility. Mrs. Tower was not much at home upon the box-seat of a coach; nor would she ever have placed herself in such a situation of her own free will; but, upon the present occasion, it had seemed to her her duty to incur present peril and discomfort in view of certain future equivalents. She was not a bad mother—according to her lights—and, to do her justice, she would have consented to ride a donkey round Hyde Park, with her face to the tail, if by that means she could have attained the end which she had contemplated in accepting Mr. Plowden's kind offer to drive her and her daughter from Windsor to Ascot.

'I am so very glad to meet you, Miss Howard,' she said, as soon as the latter had been helped up to the seat behind her. 'I have been wishing so much to thank you for all your kindness to Ada at Brighton.'

'It was Ada who was kind to come and keep me company,' answered Linda; and she thought to herself, 'I wonder whether she remembers that evening on the Brühlische Terrasse, when she took Mr. Mainwairing away, and whispered at me so rudely!'

Mrs. Tower recollected the incident perfectly; but if Linda imagined that the remembrance was in any way disconcerting to that lady, she was very much mistaken. There may, perhaps, be some people in the world who, having treated a girl with contempt when she was poor and unknown, might feel a tinge of shame

in welcoming her when fortune had made her rich and sought after; but, if such there be, it is certain that Mrs. Tower was not one of them. Circumstances alter cases, all the world over. An heiress and a pauper are two separate creatures, demanding a separate form of treatment; and if, by any chance, the one turn into the other, what can be more reasonable than that she should be looked upon as what she is, and not what she formerly was? It was as natural to Mrs. Tower to worship prosperity and turn away from adversity as to admire a butterfly and shudder at the sight of a nasty creeping caterpillar. Therefore she took almost as much trouble to entertain Linda as if the girl had been a duchess, and would have been quite contented to go on talking to her for half an hour, if Miss Tower had not abruptly interrupted the interview by breaking in with—

'Now, Linda, I didn't bring you here to exchange polite speeches with mamma. Come to the back of the coach: I want to talk to you.'

Linda followed her imperious friend to a place out of range of Mrs. Tower's ears.

'Have you anything particular to talk about?' she asked.

'Yes; I want to know what you think of Mr. Plowden?'

'What I think of him?' repeated Linda, hesitatingly.

'Yes. But never mind. Of course you think he is ugly and common-looking; and so he is. Also he has thirty thousand a year, which he is ready to put at my disposal whenever I like. His father was an iron-master, and his grandfather was Heaven knows what—I'm sure Mr. Plowden doesn't. Now, what do you think of that?'

'Do you mean to marry him, then?' asked Linda, replying to the question by another.

'That is exactly what I have not made up my mind about. And you know why.'

'Because of—of Mr. Mainwairing, you mean.'

'Just so. Thirty thousand a year, and a husband as good as another in one scale, and George and starvation in the other—in which will you throw the weight of your influence?'

'I cannot choose for you,' answered Linda, coldly. 'I suppose you know best yourself what is likely to make you happy.' She could not help adding (for it struck her that Ada was more offensively flippant than usual): 'are you quite sure that the choice rests entirely with you?'

'You think George may not ask me,' replied Miss Tower, not at all offended. 'There is that possibility to be considered, certainly. And yet he answers my letters very regularly now, though he used to be a bad correspondent. He mentions you, by-the-bye, in his last.'

She produced a letter from the velvet bag which hung at her side, and handed it to Linda, who took it after a moment of hesitation, and read the last paragraph, which Miss Tower pointed out to her.

'How strange that you should have fallen in with the Howards at Brighton,' it said. 'I was sure you would like them if you ever got to know them well. Please remember me to Miss Howard when you see her. I suppose we shall soon hear of her marriage to some big swell or other.' Then followed a few messages to people with whom Linda was not acquainted; and the letter was signed, 'Yours very sincerely, G. M.'

Linda handed it back without a word. Her heart was full of wrath and bitterness. Why did he speak of her as if she were a mere chance acquaintance? Why did he imagine that she was going to be married immediately to 'some big swell'?—as though she were of a nature to be dazzled by big swells. And what business had he to discuss the probability of her marriage at all? 'I believe there is no such thing as

real friendship in the world!' exclaimed this young misanthrope, *in petto.* 'Everyone is altogether selfish and heartless.'

'If I were you,' she said, addressing Miss Tower in a somewhat tremulous voice, 'I would marry Mr. Plowden. At least he is rich—and that is something. Perhaps you may manage to get more happiness out of money than I have done.' Then she turned away, because she felt that her cheeks were burning, and that there was a gathering mist before her eyes.

'Yours very sincerely, G. M.' A gentleman must be upon very familiar terms with a lady before he can venture, in writing to her, to sign himself by his initials only. And 'Yours very sincerely,' too. Years back, when Linda had been a little girl at Florence, her father had engaged for her a daily governess, a prim, English maiden lady of the old school, who had instructed her in Lindley Murray and deportment. Polite letter-writing had been one of this lady's *spécialités*, and her formula for the proper conclusion of an epistle addressed to one of the opposite sex had remained distinctly impressed upon her pupil's memory. '"Yours truly,"' she used to say, 'is to be used in communicating with a comparative stranger. "Yours very truly," or "Yours sincerely," is polite, sufficiently cordial, and, in almost all cases, the correct expression for a young lady. But "Yours very sincerely" is next door to "Yours affectionately," and should only be adopted in the case of relations or persons of advanced years—lest dangerous misconceptions should arise.'

While Linda, mindful of this absurd old rule, was repeating, half-unconsciously to herself, '"Yours very sincerely" is next door to "Yours affectionately,"' there came a sudden thundering of hoofs, a flash of bright-coloured jackets, a prolonged roar from the crowd beneath—and the Ascot Gold Cup was lost and won.

'That's fifty pound to me; and fifty pound is better

than nothing,' observed somebody behind her, in a deliberate voice.

She turned, and saw Mr. Plowden, who was restoring his glasses to their case.

'Is it over? Has Bonbon won?' she asked, anxiously.

'Lor' bless your soul, no! The favourite won. Bonebone bolted clean off the course—didn't you see?'

'And I told Lord Keswick to bet upon him!' ejaculated Linda, letting her hands fall with a gesture of despair. 'How dreadfully unfortunate I am!'

But she was a little reassured when Lord Keswick made his appearance, looking as smiling and unconcerned as usual.

'Did you back him, after all?' she inquired eagerly.

'What, Bonbon? I should rather think I did—worse luck! So did the governor. I shouldn't advise you to go near him for the next hour or two, unless you want to get sworn at. But you ought just to have a look at him from a safe distance. My word! what a face he has got on him!' And Lord Keswick laughed in the most light-hearted and undutiful manner at the recollection.

'Has he lost a great deal of money?' asked Linda, in some trepidation.

'Oh, dear, no, not half as much as I have. But he always takes things dismally.'

'He is not like you, then,' remarked Linda. The young fellow's courage and good temper pleased her; and perhaps it may have been for this reason that she was more friendly with him for the rest of the day than she had ever been before. She drove home beside him; she walked with him in the garden after dinner; and when she bade him good-night she gave him a rose which she had worn in her dress all the evening.

Lady Grassmere saw this, and was content; Lord Grassmere saw it, and a long breath of relief escaped his heavily-laden breast; Mr. Howard saw it, and

chuckled, and displayed such exuberant and offensive spirits in the smoking-room, at a later period in the evening, that his host subsequently confided to the wife of his bosom that he should never, to his dying day, be able to understand why he had not chucked the fellow out of window.

As for Lord Keswick, I am sorry to have to record that that young gentleman, while preparing to go to bed, said to himself that things were going on a deuced sight too fast, by Jove; and that if he didn't pull in a bit he should be an engaged man before he knew where he was. Which would not suit his book at all.

CHAPTER XVII

MR. HOWARD TAKES A BOLD STEP

'LINDA,' said Mr. Howard, looking up suddenly from his newspaper, one morning about a fortnight after the Ascot week, 'was Keswick here yesterday?'

'No, papa,' replied Linda from the other end of the long breakfast-table.

'Nor the day before?'

'Not that I know of.'

'Nor the day before that?'

'Let me see. No, I don't think he was. He must be out of town, I suppose.'

Mr. Howard grunted, and returned to his *Times*. He had seen Lord Keswick playing loo at the club the night before, and knew, therefore, that he was still in London. What was the meaning of this conduct? For some time past the young man's attentions had been perceptibly falling off in assiduity. More than once, lately, he had excused himself from dining at Lancaster Gate, and his visits were far less frequent than they had been earlier in the season. Could he be

meditating treason? It hardly seemed likely; and yet there is many a slip 'twixt the cup and the lip. It was certainly time that Lord Keswick declared himself more plainly; but by what means he could be compelled or induced to do so was not very clear. What, under the circumstances, ought a wise and thoughtful father to do?

Mr. Howard debated this question for some time without arriving at any solution of it satisfactory to himself; but, after a further half-hour of reflection, over a cigar, in the privacy of his study, he decided at length upon taking a bold step. He took his hat, gloves, and stick, and leaving the house, made his way across the Park and down Grosvenor Street and Bond Street, and so to Lord Keswick's rooms in the Albany. He walked with a firm, steady step, as one who has a purpose before him; and as it was not yet twelve o'clock when he reached his destination, he was rewarded for his promptitude by finding the object of his search at home.

Lord Keswick, in his shirt-sleeves and with a short black pipe in his mouth, was seated before an open bureau on which lay a heap of papers.

'Hullo, Mr. Howard!' cried he, cheerily, as his visitor entered. 'Sit down, and have a weed. Jolly hot morning, isn't it? What will you take to drink—brandy and soda?'

'Nothing, thank you; I have had my smoke already, and it is too early for brandy and soda,' answered Mr. Howard.

'Gin and seltzer, then? Or, I'll tell you what—I'll get my fellow to mix you a brandy cock-tail; he's a rare hand at it.'

'Nothing whatever, I thank you,' repeated Mr. Howard, closing his eyes and waving his hand. 'It is too early in the day—far too early, really, for anything of that kind.'

Mr. Howard had come down prepared to play the

rôle of the heavy father, and for the life of him he could not help acting up to the part. He never could assume a character by halves.

'No smoke and no drink!' ejaculated Lord Keswick. 'Well—as you like. I'll just get these papers straight, if you don't mind; it won't take me half a second. I'm arranging my bills, you see,' he continued, after a momentary pause. 'I always pay my tradespeople upon a system of my own.'

'Oh, indeed,' said Mr. Howard.

'Yes. I keep all my bills upon a file; and after every race-meeting or night at cards, or anything of that sort I take them out, and see who's first on the list. If I've had a good time of it, I pay the top fellow, and sometimes the next two or three; if I've lost my money, the man at the top loses too, and goes down to the bottom of the list. It isn't a bad plan, is it?'

'It would be a much better plan to pay them all off and have done with it,' observed Mr. Howard.

'Oh, but that's out of the question, of course. What I mean to say is, it's a really impartial system. No man can say he hasn't had his chance. Of course there's a certain amount of luck about it, just as there is in everything else—some of them get their money a good deal oftener than others; but that can't be helped. Now, here, for instance' (holding up a long strip of blue paper), here's Wilkins, saddler—deuced unlucky chap, Wilkins, I must say! He hasn't been paid for—let's see—six years, and now here he is at the top again just after I've had a bad night at loo.'

'You had better leave him where he is till next time, I should think,' suggested Mr. Howard.

'Oh, dear, no, that would never do,' said Lord Keswick, seriously. 'Make a rule, and stick to it. If you once begin to allow exceptions, where are you to stop, you know? No, no, Wilkins; fair's fair. You've had your chance, and down you go!' And the strip of

blue paper disappeared beneath a superincumbent mass of similar documents.

'Nothing,' said Mr. Howard, impressively, 'is more wearing and harassing than an accumulation of unpaid bills——'

'Not to me,' interrupted Lord Keswick, airily, re-filling his pipe. 'I never allow myself to be bothered with such things.'

Mr. Howard shook his head and smiled sadly. 'You are young,' he said, 'and you think to-morrow may be left to take care of itself. When I was your age I too thought as you do; but a time came when I had to face facts—stern facts; and then, when it was too late, I bitterly repented my heedlessness. You may drift on for a time with your eyes shut; but what will the end of it be? What, I ask you, will be the end of it?'

'Upon my word, I don't know,' said Lord Keswick, staring. And he might have added, what was upon the tip of his tongue, 'And I don't know what business it is of yours either—' only he was too good-natured to be uncivil to anybody.

'Then,' said Mr. Howard, straightening himself in his chair, and emphasising his words by tapping the palm of his left hand with the forefinger of his right, 'I will tell you. It will end in the Bankruptcy Court! From what your father has let fall in the course of conversation with me, I have very little doubt that he would allow it to come to that, rather than pay your debts again.'

Lord Keswick's patience began to give way a little. 'I daresay you mean kindly, Mr. Howard—and that,' said he; 'but you must excuse my saying that I have a prejudice in favour of being allowed to go to the devil in my own way.'

'My dear boy,' said Mr. Howard, affectionately, 'why should you go to the devil? Why should you not get rid of embarrassment and bills, once for all, by

means of a good and suitable marriage? I believe that you might make such a marriage, if you chose. I believe—though, mind you, I am only giving you my own impression; I have no authority for saying this—that, if you asked her this very day, you might have for a wife a girl who is neither the poorest nor the plainest in London. I have been sorry not to see you at my house of late, Keswick.'

'Mr. Howard,' said Lord Keswick, who had grown somewhat red in the face during this speech, 'did you come here to ask me my intentions?'

'And if I did, Lord Keswick?' replied Mr. Howard, with quiet dignity. 'If I did come here in order to discover whether you propose to defer any longer the offer of marriage which I—and I may add Lord and Lady Grassmere too—have been expecting you to make to my daughter for some time past? Can you not understand that, however repugnant such a course may be to my personal feelings, you may have driven me to adopt it? You cannot suppose that your attentions to my daughter have not attracted general notice. The matter has gone on long enough—too long, indeed; and I must tell you now that unless it is brought to a conclusion within the present week, I shall be compelled to forego the pleasure of seeing you at my house again for some time to come.'

'This is plain speaking anyhow,' observed Lord Keswick, with a rather forced laugh.

'I never lost a friend by plain speaking yet. If I have seemed blunt, you must forgive me; it is my character to be so,' replied that outrageous old Howard. 'My daughter,' he continued, 'is dearer to me than anyone else in the world; and when her happiness may be at stake I should be wrong indeed to allow any false feeling of delicacy to prevent me from saying plainly what is in my mind.'

'Well, but,' said Lord Keswick, who did not seem much impressed by this fine display of paternal tender-

ness, 'what's the use of being in such a confounded hurry? I am ready to agree to anything; but I must have time—hang it all! a fellow must have time.'

A sensitive man might not have relished this tone as adopted with reference to his daughter; but Mr. Howard was not foolishly sensitive. He only shook his head gently, and said—

'Time, my dear Keswick, is, unfortunately, the very thing that I cannot give you. And why should you wish for time? I do not desire that your marriage should take place immediately; I only want to be assured that it either is or is not going to take place at some time. In the event of my daughter accepting your offer—which, I beg you to observe, I do not by any means promise that she will—I shall be quite satisfied to know that the ceremony would be concluded —well, let us say before Christmas.'

'Oh, well,' said Lord Keswick, brightening considerably, 'I don't mind that. Only it really would have been very inconvenient to me to be married just at present.'

'I understand—I understand,' said Mr. Howard, benignly. 'Bachelors' arrangements—bachelors' establishments—I shan't enquire too closely into anything of that sort. Lord bless you, my dear boy, I have been young myself.'

'I don't know what you are talking about,' replied Lord Keswick, surveying his future father-in-law with a face expressive of anything but respect. 'What I meant was that I have arranged to go down to Goodwood and Doncaster with some fellows, and I don't want to throw them over—that's all.'

'Quite so—quite so. May I understand, then, that you will speak to Linda some day this week?'

'To-morrow, if you like. Let us get the thing over, and be done with it,' answered the young man, rather gloomily.

'To-morrow let it be. And now, as I have an

appointment to keep, I will bid you good-morning,' said Mr. Howard, rising. 'And I wish you every success.'

'Thanks. Sure you won't have anything to drink before you go? Good-bye, then,' said Lord Keswick, relieving his feelings by shaking his fist at his respected friend's back.

'So I am in for it now,' he soliloquised, as the door closed. 'Hang it all! I wish it was over. I never felt such a d——d scoundrel in my life. If I didn't want money so badly I'd throw the thing up—hanged if I wouldn't! It's one thing to talk about marrying a girl for her money, and another thing to do it. Anyhow, I won't have any humbug about it, like that old sweep. I shall put the case to her in plain black and white, and she can take me or leave me as she pleases.'

In the meantime Mr. Howard, a trifle elated by his small victory, and in nowise harassed with doubts as to the integrity of his purpose, made his way back to Lancaster Gate, where he had another interview to go through—an interview which he feared was likely to be less agreeable than that which he had just brought to a successful conclusion. He fortified himself with two glasses of sherry before he entered the drawing-room, where, as he knew, his daughter was sure to be found at this hour of the day.

The Mr. Howard who threw open the door and sauntered up to Linda's work-table, with his hands in his pockets, chewing a toothpick, was a very different person from the Mr. Howard whom Lord Keswick had received an hour before. There are circumstances in which a man does well to behave himself with gravity and sternness, and there are others in which a jaunty demeanour best becomes him. Mr. Howard now found it appropriate to assume the latter carriage.

Linda looked up from her work as he approached with mingled surprise and pleasure. 'Have you come home to luncheon, papa?' she asked. Indeed, it was

very rarely that she had the honour of her father's society between the hours of breakfast and dinner.

'Why not, my dear? I have no doubt you will give me a much better lunch than I should get at the club,' said Mr. Howard, good humouredly.

'I will tell them to get something more,' said Linda, anxiously, moving towards the bell.

But Mr. Howard waved her back. 'My dear child,' said he, 'what is good enough for you is good enough for me. Don't think of troubling yourself to order anything extra.'

There was a short silence, during which Linda wondered how much papa wanted this time; for, alas! she had learnt of late that amiability from her father usually heralded a request for a loan of money. Then Mr. Howard, who had thrown himself into a low arm-chair, and was staring up at the ceiling, announced that he had a piece of news for his little girl.

'Come, I'll give you three shots, and bet you six-pence you don't guess what it is,' said he, with charming playfulness. Linda, without knowing why, began to feel frightened; but as she had never ventured to dis-obey her father in the smallest particular, she dutifully attempted a suggestion.

'You have won a heap of money at cards?' said she.

'Deuce a bit!' replied Mr. Howard. 'Try again.'

'Is it good or bad news?'

'That depends upon how you look at it. I should call it good.'

'We are going away from London?' hazarded Linda.

'Wrong again!' exclaimed Mr. Howard, clapping his hands. 'My dear, let me remind you that you have only got one more shot.'

'I don't know what to guess. Has somebody left us some more money?'

'No such luck!' said the facetious Mr. Howard.

'You owe me sixpence. Well, as you won't guess, I suppose I must enlighten you. Don't laugh. I am going—ha, ha!—I am going to be married. What do you say to that?'

Linda could say nothing. She turned pale, and her work dropped from her hands. Then, with a despairing hope that her father might be playing her a trick, she exclaimed, 'It is a joke, papa, isn't it?' Oh, please say it is a joke!'

'It is as serious as your face, my dear; and I can't say anything stronger than that,' answered Mr. Howard, still nervously jocose. 'Come, don't you want to hear the lady's name?'

Linda sat motionless and horrorstruck; so Mr. Howard, after waiting for some encouragement, and getting none, proceeded cheerfully—

'The lady is Mrs. Williams. I hope my choice meets with your approval.'

'Oh, papa—that dreadful woman!' was all that Linda could say.

'I am quite sure, Linda,' observed Mr. Howard, calmly, 'that when you use the expression "dreadful woman" you forget that you are speaking of my future wife and your future stepmother.'

Linda did not notice the remonstrance nor reply to it. She sat silent and woebegone, and presently the tears which had been gathering in her eyes overflowed and rolled down her cheeks.

'Do you love her, papa?' she asked at length.

The question was almost too much for Mr. Howard's gravity.

'My dear child,' he answered, 'allow me to appeal to your common sense. Is it even remotely possible that any human creature should be in love with Mrs. Williams? You hasten to say No. Very well. I grant you that Mrs. Williams is fat and plain, and that the end of her nose is red at times—particularly after dinner. You must, however, have observed that pre-

cisely the same thing might be said with truth of an immense number of matrons of between fifty and sixty, who, for aught we know, may have been beauties in their youth. Now, if I had married Mrs. Williams thirty years ago, or even if your dear mother had been alive now, it would not have been at all surprising, but, on the contrary, quite natural and proper, that my wife should be elderly, stout, and ugly. At my age a man does not fall in love. If he did he would be eminently ridiculous. No; what he wants is a home: and what a woman wants is a protector. Mrs. Williams and I have exchanged ideas upon the subject of our several necessities, and the result has been that we have agreed to set up house together. Now that's what I call very rational.'

'You have a home here, papa,' said Linda through her tears. 'In the dear old days when we were poor and happy you used sometimes to say that I was a good housekeeper, and made you comfortable! Oh, how I wish Uncle Thomas had left his horrid money to some one else! We have had nothing but misery since we have been rich; and sometimes I think it is a judgment upon me because I used to grumble at being badly off. I know you don't like the way we live here, because you never come in to luncheon, and not very often to dinner; but if you will only tell me what you would like, I will try to manage better—I will indeed. I will send away Tester if you wish it. Only don't marry that dreadful Mrs. Williams and leave me! You are all I have to love in the world, papa, and if she takes you away from me what shall I do?' And Linda buried her face in her handkerchief and sobbed.

Mr. Howard was a little touched. In his way he was really fond of his daughter, and, in common with the rest of mankind, the sight of a woman in tears made him excessively uncomfortable. Naturally, therefore, he began to bully.

'Linda,' said he, in his sternest tones, 'will you

oblige me by controlling yourself? If you were not so abominably selfish you would understand that, at my time of life, it is essential that I should look out for a home somewhere. So long as you remain single I ask nothing better than that we should continue to live together as we have done; but it stands to reason that that cannot last. Before very long you will be married; and what is to become of me then? At present I have a shakedown under your roof and a sufficient sum paid quarterly to my account to enable me to keep my head above water; but do you suppose any husband would consent to have an old father-in-law quartered upon him, or to pay away even the small portion of your income which I now receive? Not he, my dear! I know human nature pretty well by this time; and I can assure you positively, without knowing who he may be, that he wouldn't hear of it. And quite right too. Now, with Mrs. Williams I shall obtain a sufficient income to be independent of my daughter and my son-in-law, which will be by far the most agreeable arrangement for all parties.'

'Papa,' said Linda, earnestly, 'if you will give up Mrs. Williams, I will gladly promise never to marry anybody.'

'Fiddlededee!' said Mr. Howard. 'Of course you will marry.'

'No,' said Linda, shaking her head decidedly; 'no, I shall not. Nobody wants to marry me—at least nobody wants me for myself—and I don't want to marry anybody. I shall remain single.'

'Well, then, I shan't,' returned Mr. Howard, 'and there's an end of it. I have made up my mind and given my word, and nothing that you can say will alter my decision. But I confess I should like to see you established before I change my own condition. I need not say that you will always be welcome to share my house: but I fancy you would not much care about living with Mrs. Williams.'

'I couldn't do it, papa,' answered Linda with conviction. 'I really couldn't bring myself to do it. It would go too much against the grain.'

'So I rather imagined,' observed Mr. Howard, coolly. 'The only thing is that if you don't live with us, I don't quite see what you are to do. You can't live all by yourself, you know.'

'I could engage a companion,' said Linda. She was stung by her father's indifference, and forced herself to adopt a more matter-of-fact tone.

'A companion is not a chaperon,' said Mr. Howard. 'The truth is that you have no choice between taking up your abode with us—which I am sure you are most welcome to do—and marrying. Now, if I thought it at all likely that your marriage would take place before the year was out, I would certainly postpone my own. For I am not in any desperate hurry to lead my Williams to the altar,' he added, with a grin. 'Supposing, now, a good-looking young man of excellent family and fine prospects were to propose to you—you would not refuse him, eh?'

'You mean Lord Keswick,' answered Linda, drily.

'Perhaps I do,' said Mr. Howard, not at all disconcerted. 'Keswick is one of the best young fellows I know: it is a match that any girl might be proud to make.'

'Only he hasn't asked me, you see,' said Linda, in the same cold tone. 'If he ever does I daresay I shall take him.'

'He will ask you, my dear; I feel sure that he will,' said Mr. Howard, eagerly.

'Really? You think he would condescend to take my poor eighteen thousand a-year, and make me Viscountess Keswick, and, some day, Countess of Grassmere, in return, though neither of us cares a button for the other? What an honour for me!'

'Indeed, my dear, many people would think it so,' replied Mr. Howard, a little puzzled. 'They tell me

the Grassmeres haven't married out of the peerage for generations.'

'That settles it, then,' said Linda. And at this juncture, Hudson coming in to announce luncheon, the colloquy came to an end, and Linda was enabled to drop the ironical tone, of which, to tell the truth, she was no great mistress. The presence of a butler and footman in the dining-room happily precluded the possibility of further conversation, save such as related to topics of general interest; and Mr. Howard, who did not see that he could improve his position by any renewed discussion, made his escape upon the earliest opportunity.

Linda returned to the drawing-room and cried a little over her work. The blow which had fallen upon her was an altogether unexpected one. Never, in her utmost anticipations of possible ill fortune, had she contemplated so great a calamity as a stepmother. And such a stepmother! Poor Mrs. Williams was not an actively disagreeable woman; but her dress, her speech, and her gait were a perpetual grief and burden to all persons of average refinement. And her daughters were, if anything, worse than herself. Linda thought of her future quasi-relationship to those terrible young women, and quailed in dismay.

But, as her mind became, by degrees, accustomed to the inevitable, she began to take herself to task for the ungracious manner in which she had received her father's intelligence. After all, there had been a great deal of truth in his plea. It was natural enough that he should look forward to his daughter's marriage, and ask himself where he should find a home when she was provided with a husband. 'I shall never marry,' thought Linda; 'but he cannot know that.' And he had been very kind—poor papa!—and had borne her reproaches meekly enough. 'I daresay I am abominably selfish, as he said,' Linda thought, sadly; 'and ungrateful too. He has done so much for me, and I

have done nothing for him. What right have I to complain if he thinks a little of himself now that he is getting old? And yet, if it were only a home that he wanted, I could promise him that—only he wouldn't believe me. Oh, dear me! Mr. Mainwairing was right: there is no happiness in being rich. How thankful I should be if some good fairy would make us poor and free again, and transport us back to dear old Blasewitz!'

Her self-communings were interrupted by the entrance of a visitor. Mrs. Williams was announced, and waddled across the room, rustling in her violet silk dress, and panting, as she always did after climbing a staircase. Linda rose, and was saluted with a damp kiss, which she hastened to rub off with her handkerchief while Mrs. Williams was settling herself in an arm-chair.

'I am so glad to find you alone, my dear,' said the poor lady, who looked very hot and embarrassed. 'I have just seen your pa, and he tells me he has been informing you of—of his wishes.'

'Yes, he has told me,' answered Linda, frigidly, looking Mrs. Williams full in the face, with slightly elevated brows.

She had not intended to be uncivil; but the woman's scarlet cheeks and violet costume exasperated her, in spite of herself, and rendered cordiality impossible.

'You were rather surprised, I dare say,' resumed Mrs. Williams. 'Dear me, how hot it is to-day! I dare say you were rather surprised.'

'A little,' answered Linda, quietly.

'Yes, to be sure! Quite natural that you should be. My dear, how do you manage to look so cool this weather? I declare I'm so warm I can hardly bear myself. And I've come out without my fan, too.'

'I dare say you will be cooler presently,' remarked Linda, giving her visitor a hand-screen. She felt that

charity commanded her to set this poor fat panting woman at her ease; but she could not bring herself to obey the behest.

'She has got into a ridiculous position of her own free-will,' thought Linda; 'let her get out of it as best she can. Why should I help her?'

'Nobody likes a stepmother, I know,' went on Mrs. Williams, humbly.

Linda said nothing.

'But what we thought was that in your case it would not so much matter, because——'

'Because?'

'Well, because you are sure to be married yourself before long. Mr. Howard said he should like your wedding to come off before ours; and I am sure so should I. Not but what I should be very pleased to have you live with us, my dear; and I do want you to look upon me as your mamma——'

'Excuse me, Mrs. Williams,' interrupted Linda; 'but that is what you are not, and never can be. And, if it is the same to you, I would rather change the subject. I can't feel quite contented at losing my father yet.'

She ought to have been propitiated by Mrs. Williams's humility; but, somehow or other, it only had the effect of irritating her.

Mrs. Williams emitted a huge sigh; after which there was silence for a little space. Then the unfortunate bride-elect felt impelled to take up the thread of her discourse again.

'I am sure I don't want to distress you, Linda,' she began, hesitatingly; 'but, if the thing is to be, we can't shut our eyes to it, can we?'

'Only we needn't talk about it.'

'But, my dear, Solomon says, "Out of the fulness of the heart the mouth speaketh." And he says, "It is not good for man to live alone," too.'

'Does he?'

'The Bible says so, at all events; and to my mind Jeremiah and Isaiah and the rest of them were just as good men as Solomon, though they may not have had all his gifts. And it is very true that a man is not meant to live alone—much less a woman. Your poor pa often talks about what he shall do when you are married, and gets quite low over it. And, for my own part, I feel so lost at times without poor Mr. Williams that I don't hardly know where to turn nor what to do. Ladies do get so dreadfully imposed upon. You wouldn't believe the money I've lost through not having proper advice. And as for travelling on the Continent, I wouldn't do it without a gentleman—not after the rudeness and extortion I met with last time—no, not for anything you could offer me!'

'Papa knows all about money matters,' remarked Linda; 'and he has travelled a great deal. I dare say you will find him very useful abroad.'

Linda knew that she was behaving very badly; and the knowledge was a comfort to her, as I dare say it sometimes is to the best of us. It was more with cruel Destiny than with Mrs. Williams that she was angry; but Destiny is impervious to mortal attacks; and here was a fat woman, who, as the instrument of fate, perhaps deserved some hard words, and at whom it was a relief and a solace to be able to snap.

But Mrs. Williams, in general vast, warm, and smiling, like the South Pacific, was also, like that tranquil ocean, subject to sudden and violent tornadoes of wrath Linda's last speech stirred up one of these, and, to the great astonishment of the culprit, the offended lady started up from her chair, brandished her hand-screen in a fury, and broke out with—

'How dare you speak so to me, miss? How dare you insult me so? What do I gain by marrying your father? Answer me that! Do you know that he comes to me a poor man, and that I shall make him a rich one? For not one penny of *your* money will I

have! And you will please to make arrangements for finding a home for yourself, for into my house you do not come, nor will I come into yours. No! I will not have my girls spoilt by associating with you, you impertinent, airified, ill tempered little——'

'*Really*, Mrs. Williams——' said Linda.

'Oh, don't smile at me in that superior way. I'm not afraid of you, my young lady, though you have an earl for your uncle and go about with lords and ladies. Your father thinks me good enough to enter his family, and I suppose he is as good a judge as you—though if I had known how I should be received in this house, Goodness knows whether I should have accepted him. And a stepfather is no pleasanter than a stepmother, let me tell you; and yet my dear girls haven't given me a cross word or look about it, bless them! And most unkind it is of you, Linda, I must say—most unkind and cr—cruel! Oh!—hoo!—hoo!'

Down flops Mrs. Williams upon the sofa in a storm of noisy sobs; out comes her patchouli-scented handkerchief to stem the flood of easily flowing tears that well over from her eyes, escape down her cheeks, and patter upon her poor violet silk lap. After the storm the rain, and presently the sunshine again. Mrs. Williams' wrath has already passed away and left her deeply, bitterly ashamed of her vulgarity. Poor fat, kind-hearted mortal, to whom it is forbidden to be otherwise than ridiculous even at the most pathetic moments! It would require a harder heart than Linda's to bear malice against her as she apprehensively lifts up a flushed and tear-stained countenance, gasping out—

'Oh, my dear, what have I been a-saying? I'm that upset and worried that I'm not answerable for my words—I'm not, indeed. Overlook it for this once, my dear, and I'll never break out so again.'

'It was all my fault, Mrs. Williams,' says Linda, feeling a good deal ashamed of herself. 'I was very

disagreeable. I, also, am a little upset to-day. Let us forgive one another and make friends again.'

Whereupon Linda is kissed and wept over, and bears her burden with meekness, admitting to herself that her future stepmother is a good woman in her way. Nevertheless, she is more than ever convinced that the same house will never be able to hold her and the Williams family.

And now, behold! before the tears are well dry on Mrs. Williams' cheeks, the door is flung open, and in walks Lord Keswick, looking rather graver than is his wont. At the sight of him Mrs. Williams hastily rises and takes her leave.

'I shall see you again to-morrow, my dear,' she remarks, encouragingly, as she rustles away.

CHAPTER XVIII

LORD KESWICK'S COURTSHIP

Mrs. Williams thought she had given proof of some tact and *savoir faire* in taking her leave so precipitately upon Lord Keswick's entrance; but if she could have read the secret thoughts of the two people whom she had thus considerately left to themselves, she would have made the surprising discovery that each of them unfeignedly regretted her abrupt departure.

Both of them would gladly have had a few more minutes of breathing-time, for they both knew that a crisis in their lives was imminent. Lord Keswick had nerved himself for the declaration of a proposal of which he was more than half-ashamed; but he had not yet had time to decide upon the manner in which his offer might most fittingly be made; and Linda, who had divined the young man's errand the first moment she had seen his grave face, desired nothing more

ardently than that she might be enabled to stave off the inevitable moment at least for another twenty-four hours. The day before she would have received Lord Keswick's advances with perfect composure, and would have refused him so kindly and prettily that his feelings could scarcely have been hurt, whatever his disappointment might have been. Constant practice had taught her the art of saying 'No' without difficulty, and with infinitely more grace than she had displayed when honest Herr von Oberndorf had made his avowal to her a year ago. But the world was all changed since yesterday. Linda, to use an expression which, we may be sure, would never have occurred to so well brought up a young lady, was 'between the devil and the deep sea;' and, looking upon Lord Keswick in the light of whichever of the above alternatives may appear most appropriate to the reader, she had already begun, in a dull, indifferent way, to doubt whether it might not be best for her to give him a favourable reply. As yet, however, she was undecided, and could not make up her mind either to dismiss or retain him.

In this wavering frame of mind she dashed hurriedly into conversation, thinking, 'Perhaps somebody else will come in presently, and I shall get rid of him.'

'We were at the Opera last night,' she began, seizing upon the first topic that suggested itself to her. 'Patti was singing divinely. Did you ever hear her in "Don Pasquale"? I think it is one of her best parts.'

'I daresay I have,' answered Lord Keswick, absently. 'I don't know much about music, though. You went with my mother, didn't you?'

'Yes. How fatiguing it must be to sing, night after night, in this stifling weather! And yet how beautifully she does it! And how fresh and young she looks!'

'Who? Patti? Ah, but look at the pay she gets.'

'Yes; but that wouldn't prevent her from looking fagged if she were so. I suppose it is the excitement that keeps her up.'

Lord Keswick didn't know much about *prime donne*, but he should think the excitement wore off after the first year or two, and that the work must be no end of a bore when you knew all the airs, and had got sick of them, you know. Which seemed pretty well to exhaust the subject.

After this an apparently troublesome obstruction in his lordship's throat made it so evident that he had some serious statement to make that Linda hastened to say something else—no matter what—before he should have time to begin.

'We went on to Lady Crowder's after the Opera,' she resumed. 'Why were you not there? You did not lose much, though; it was very hot and very dull. Are you going to the Duchess of Cirencester's ball to-morrow? Of course you will be at your mother's on Thursday.'

'That,' said Lord Keswick, slowly, 'will depend principally upon you.'

'How flattering!' said Linda, with a little nervous laugh. 'I shall certainly be there, if that is any inducement to you.'

'I didn't mean that. I meant that my going to balls, for the rest of this season, will depend upon what answer you make to—something that I have got to say to you.'

There was no evading that. Linda leant back in her chair and hardened her heart.

Lord Keswick was a successful rider, but many people denied that he was a good one. He was reckless, they said, and a bad judge of pace—which was certainly true. A fence, in his eyes, was simply an obstacle to be surmounted, and he never thought of asking himself what his horse's powers were, but rode straight at it, and, by luck or by pluck, generally con-

trived to scramble over. With moral as well as material difficulties it was his habit to pursue the same simple plan. In the present instance he felt that he had an awkward task before him, and had no notion how to set about it; but he knew that, before he had done speaking, he should, by some means or other, have left the obstacle behind him; and that, after all, was the essential thing. So he settled himself in his chair, fixed his eyes upon Linda's face, and began, in a steady, unmodulated voice:—

'I daresay you know, Miss Howard, what I am going to say. Of course you must have understood that I shouldn't have been coming here as often as I have, and sending you flowers and all that, unless I had meant to ask you, some day, to—to—in short, to honour me by becoming my wife. Now, I'm not much of a fellow for love and romance and that kind of thing. I don't believe in it, and I don't pretend to feel it. But I do like you better than anybody else I know, and I would much rather marry you than any girl I ever saw. Only what I wanted to say was that if you had been poor I shouldn't have asked you. I must marry a girl with money; my people insist upon it, and, in fact, I can't help it. I thought I ought to tell you that before you gave me your answer, because I can't bring myself to be such a humbug as your—as some fellows. Now, I've told you the honest truth. If you take me I'll do all I can to make you happy; and I think we should be happy, because we get on so well together—always have. But that is for you to judge of.'

And Lord Keswick, having taken his fence like a man, drew a long breath of satisfaction.

Linda contemplated him silently for a time, with an amused smile on her lips. 'That is a very funny way of making a proposal, do you know?' she said at length.

'I did it very badly, I know; but I had to tell the

whole truth,' said Lord Keswick, much more at his ease now that he had discharged his duty.

'And it is so difficult to tell the whole truth, isn't it? Sometimes it is morally impossible—and perhaps that is just as well.'

'But one feels the better for having told it,' said the young man, still glowing with conscious probity.

'Does one? But perhaps one does not always feel the better for having it told to one. There is that to be considered, you see, in advocating a system of unreserved openness of speech.'

'But I wasn't advocating any system that I know of,' said Lord Keswick, innocently.

'I thought you were. Didn't you say that people ought always to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth—or something to that effect? Now, I don't believe society could hold together for a day without white lies.'

It began to strike Lord Keswick that the lady was wandering rather far from the immediate question in hand, and that this discussion as to the inherent value of truth was a mere pretext for evading more personal matters.

'Perhaps not,' he said. 'In the meantime may I remind you that I am waiting for my answer?'

'Your answer? I wonder what answer you expect?'

'I don't expect anything; I only hope,' said Lord Keswick, trying to look humble.

'You must be of a very sanguine disposition if you hope for a favourable answer after such a cynical declaration. But perhaps, after all, it is a refusal you hope for.'

'You know it is not,' said Lord Keswick. 'And I don't think it is quite fair to laugh at me, Miss Howard. You would not have laughed if I had told lies and gone down on my knees and sworn that I loved you. I would not ask you to marry me under false pretences; but everybody knows that it is not

always love matches that turn out best in the long run; and I thought perhaps you might agree with me that we could be very happy together without having what you might call a romantic attachment, don't you know?'

'Quite so. And now you want my answer.'

'If you please.'

'What can you expect me to say? Here is your case, according to your own showing. "I don't care a straw for you, nor you for me; but as you have a fortune, which I do care for a good deal, and as I have no objection to you individually, I shall be very well pleased if you will consent to marry me." Well, that is very candid and business-like, if it is not particularly flattering. But, as it seems to be agreed that we are to put love altogether out of the question, I may naturally ask what is to be my return for the money which has tempted you to make your kind offer? You would make me a viscountess, it is true; but it so happens that I do not care about being a viscountess, or a countess either—or a marchioness, or even a duchess. I am not sufficiently English to worship titles; and since I have been in London I have seen more than one duchess who did not seem to me what I should call a lady. I don't want a title. I have found out that my money will take me into the best society you have; and, besides that, I am not at all sure that I have any great love for the best society. So you see you are proposing a bargain to me which would be all to your own advantage.'

'Oh, if you put it in that way——' said Lord Keswick, looking rather disgusted.

'In what way would you like me to put it? I thought we were to be perfectly truthful, and dismiss all pretence and hypocrisy, and so forth.'

'Yes; bu——'

'But candour has its limits. I understand, and I quite agree with you. I told you just now, you know, that it is pleasanter to tell the truth than to

hear it. If you had asked me to marry you in the ordinary way, perhaps I should have been able to give you an ordinary answer; but you would go in for being eccentric, and now that I answer you according to your eccentricity you think me very ill-mannered.'

'Oh, no,' protested Lord Keswick. 'Please don't suppose that I meant to imply that. But I don't want you to think that I was merely trying to make a bargain with you either.'

Yet his conscience told him that that was precisely the thing that he was endeavouring to do; and this made him uneasy; for he had generous instincts, and did not like the idea of overreaching anybody. He had always been given to understand that a viscount's coronet was worth a good deal of certain people's money; but if Miss Howard really didn't think so—why, then, of course, there was nothing more to be said. Only he did wish she would express her views more distinctly; because at present he could not make out whether she meant to accept or to refuse him.

He would have been not a little surprised to hear that the lady herself was in a state of similar uncertainty; but so it was. Linda's mind was in a chaos of doubt, perplexity, and misery, amidst which two things only seemed clear and certain—that her father wished to get rid of her, and that she would never live under the same roof with Mrs. Williams. Being thus so rejected and forlorn, she could not, on the spur of the moment, bring herself either to welcome or send away this good-natured, selfish little mortal, who, with the light of truth shining in his clear blue eyes, had promised that 'he would do all he could to make her happy' as his wife. So, since she could not take the dilemma by the horns, she went on trying to evade them.

'Why should you not make a bargain?' she asked. 'Everybody seems to do it; and, so long as the bargain is a fair one, where is the harm? Papa is going to

marry Mrs. Williams because she is rich and can give him a comfortable home; and Mrs. Williams is going to marry papa because she wants somebody to help her with investments and look after her luggage when she is travelling; and you want to marry me because—unluckily foi myself—a misguided old man chose to make me an heiress; and——'

'But I say,' interrupted Lord Keswick, whose eyes had opened in a manner expressive of extreme surprise, 'is that really a fact? About Mr. Howard, I mean.'

'Oh, yes,' said Linda, with a not very successful assumption of indifference. 'I forgot you had not heard of it. So you see,' she added, with a faint smile, 'I should gain something if I married you, after all; because I must live somewhere, and I don't think I could bear to live with a stepmother. Besides, they want to get rid of me—naturally.'

Her voice trembled a little as she spoke these last words, and she rose hastily and began pulling the dead leaves off some flowers which stood in a stand beside one of the windows.

Lord Keswick thought he understood something of the struggle which was agitating the girl's mind. Some dimly chivalrous instinct suggested to him, also, that it would be ungenerous to press her further just then. He got up and drew closer to Linda, who was standing with her back towards him.

'Let us leave it open for a couple of days, Miss Howard,' he said, gently. 'I would give you a longer time, only I can't, because of a promise I made this morning. Think it over, and let me have my answer the day after to-morrow. And I hope you won't think worse of me than you can help. I can't pretend to be disinterested—you know that; but I swear I would never have asked you to marry me if I hadn't been—well—very fond of you, and if I hadn't really believed that we could be happy together. Now, I won't say another word, except to remind you that there are

heaps of better fellows than I who would be only too glad to give you a home if you wanted one. I mean, you mustn't let yourself be driven into accepting me by mere dread of your stepmother. Good-bye.'

'Good-bye, Lord Keswick,' said Linda, stretching out her hand, but keeping her face averted. 'You are very kind and good, and if I were to marry anybody I think it would be you. But it is difficult to decide all at once ; and, as you don't mind, I shall be glad to have two days to think things over in.' Then she wheeled round suddenly and exclaimed, 'What matter-of-fact people we are! Wouldn't one think we were discussing a small matter of business, instead of the question of whether we are to pass the rest of our lives together or not? There will be no broken hearts, will there? whichever way I decide.'

She laughed ; but Lord Keswick saw that her eyes were swimming in tears. They were very pretty eyes —brown, soft, and sad ; and there was a look in them which somehow increased the uncomfortable feeling of self-contempt with which this conscientious young man had been afflicted ever since Mr. Howard's visit to him in the morning. He went his way silently ; and as he strolled, in the sunshine, across the brown grass of Hyde Park he marvelled more than once how it was that he had escaped falling in love with Miss Linda. Possibly he might have been guilty of that weakness, he thought, if she had not been so rich, and if he had not been ordered to marry her.

Linda, when she was alone again, threw herself upon a sofa, covered her face with her hands, and cried a little. But she was too feverish and excited to give way to her feelings for long. She rang the bell presently and ordered the carriage ; and as soon as it was ready drove to Lord Sturdham's house in Bruton Street.

'Yes, Lady Sturdham was at home,' the butler said, in answer to her inquiry, but she was not very well. He would ask whether she was able to receive visitors.

'Oh, I am sure she will see me,' said Linda, getting out of the carriage, and passing through the hall-door without paying any regard to the man's reproving observation of 'Her ladyship is very far from well, ma'am.'

She ran lightly upstairs and entered the darkened drawing-room.

'Linda, my dear, is it you?' asked Lady Sturdham's voice faintly from the other end of the room.

'Yes, Aunt Selina,' answered Linda. And as her eyes became accustomed to the half-light she discovered the invalid stretched upon a couch, with a novel in her hand and a bottle of smelling-salts at her side, and advanced towards her. 'I am very sorry to disturb you, aunt,' she continued; 'but I wanted particularly to see you for a few minutes. Are you feeling too ill to talk to me?'

'Oh, no, my dear,' answered Lady Sturdham, a little plaintively. 'I have one of my bad headaches, but it is of no consequence. You do not come to see me so often that I can afford to send you away when you do pay me a visit. Sit down here. I know you will excuse my getting up; every movement is a torture to me. You have something particular to tell me, you say?'

'Yes, aunt,' replied Linda, briefly. 'Papa is going to be married to Mrs. Williams.'

Lady Sturdham raised her delicate white hands and let them fall again with a movement indicative rather of sorrowful protest than of surprise.

'My poor child!' she ejaculated. 'I foresaw this from the first. How very, very shocking! And at his age too! Ah, dear, dear me! But I foresaw it from the first; I always knew how it would end.'

Lady Sturdham's melancholy satisfaction at the remembrance of her prescience did not seem to be participated in by her niece.

'Of course papa is quite right to marry if he wishes it,' she said, rather sharply.

'Yes, yes; we cannot dispute his right to please

himself; there is no law to prevent old men with grown-up daughters from marrying again,' agreed Lady Sturdham, in a tone which seemed to imply that the absence of such a prohibition from the statute-book was, in her opinion, a subject for regret. 'But it will be a terrible trial for you, my poor dear, to see that—that person in your dear mother's place.'

'I never knew my mother,' replied Linda. 'It is my place that Mrs. Williams is going to take. Papa and I have been everything to each other all my life. I have kept house for him, and looked after his clothes, and kept his accounts ever since I was quite a little thing; and I know all his ways and fancies so well that I can't think anyone else will ever be able to understand him as I do. But that is all over now.' She paused a moment, for her lips were quivering again, and she did not wish to break down. Then she resumed more cheerfully: 'I have no business to complain, I know. Mrs. Williams is not so bad as she seems. But it would be hopeless for me to attempt to be friendly with her; and I think she herself sees that.'

Lady Sturdham took Linda's hand and patted it kindly. 'Perhaps it will not be for long,' she said.

'My living with Mrs. Williams, do you mean? It need not be at all, unless I like. Lord Keswick proposed to me this afternoon.'

Lady Sturdham forgot all about her headache. She whisked her little feet off the sofa, and bending forward, clasped both her niece's hands as she cried, 'My dearest Linda! I am so very, very glad!'

'Why should you be so glad, aunt?' asked Linda, smiling a little sadly. 'Is it such a very great honour to receive an offer from Lord Keswick? I did not say I had accepted him.'

Straightway Lady Sturdham's forehead became puckered into anxious lines. 'Oh, Linda,' she gasped, 'surely you have not—you cannot have——'

'Refused him? No, I had not that audacity. But I have not accepted him either, and I don't know whether I ever shall do so or not. I can't make up my mind, aunt, and I thought perhaps you could help me. You see I like him very much, and I am sure he would be kind to me—he is such an honest, simple little fellow!—but I don't—I don't love him, aunt.'

'I am *sure* you don't, my dear,' answered Lady Sturdham, primly. 'Ever since I have known you I have felt quite certain that you were not the sort of girl to indulge in sentiments of that kind. Nowadays girls are so terribly independent and strong-minded that I often think it will end by their proposing to the men instead of waiting till they are asked—I do really. But I remember that my dear mother used to say that no lady should ever permit herself to feel anything more than a friendly interest in a gentleman till she was engaged to him; and as for love, that, I think, ought to come after marriage, not before it. Just think, my dear, what a dreadful thing it would be if a young lady were to—to fall in love with a gentleman who did not care for her.'

'But suppose she couldn't help herself?' Linda suggested.

'Indelicacy is a thing which every lady ought to be able to avoid,' replied Lady Sturdham, with some severity. 'But we need not discuss that question. If you are afraid to accept Lord Keswick because you think you only "like him very much," I can assure you that you need hesitate no longer. Indeed, it would be very wrong to do so.'

'Well, let us consider that objection disposed of,' said Linda, with a short impatient sigh. 'But there is another one. He does not love me.'

'Oh, Linda, Linda,' said Lady Sturdham, shaking her grey curls with old-fashioned archness, 'how can you tell that?'

'Only by his own confession. In fact, he took a

good deal of trouble to convince me that he was entirely free from any romantic feeling towards me, and that he would never have proposed to me if I had not happened to be rich. You look incredulous, Aunt Selina, but perhaps the world has changed since you were young. The simple truth is that Lord Keswick wants money, and believes that I want a title. So, as neither of us hates the other, he thinks we should get on very well together as husband and wife. That is exactly what he said. And I was very glad that he was generous enough to tell the truth.'

Lady Sturdham was one of the best-intentioned women breathing. She said her prayers and read her Bible morning and evening, and honestly believed herself to be a follower of the precepts contained in the New Testament. Not for worlds would she have counselled a fellow-creature to commit a sinful action. Yet she made the following astounding reply:—

'From what you tell me, my dear, I am inclined to think that Lord Keswick has behaved most nobly. No man can be wholly indifferent to eighteen thousand a-year, though no doubt many a one would pretend to be so. His having alluded to your fortune quite convinces me that he is a young man of high principles and sensitive honour. I have long hoped that something might come out of your friendship with him, and now I am satisfied that your future life will be a happy one.' She added, by way of clinching the matter, 'James thinks so too.'

After that Linda gave up all hope of her aunt. She only said wistfully, 'I wish Uncle Jim were at home.'

'He has gone down to the country for a week, my dear. You know one of our county members died the other day, and James wishes to be on the spot, in order to support the new candidate; for those dreadful Radicals have determined in the most foolish and useless way to contest the seat. But if he were here I am

sure he would advise you just as I have done. He has a very high opinion of Lord Keswick.'

'And when does he come back?'

'Not for four or five days certainly; but it may be longer.'

'And I have to give Lord Keswick an answer within forty-eight hours. I should have liked to have asked Uncle Jim what he thought about it; but perhaps, as you say, he would have advised me as everyone else seems inclined to do; and perhaps, if he had recommended me to remain single, I should not have taken his advice, or if I had taken it I should have regretted it afterwards. So it does not much matter. I think I will write to Lord Keswick at once, and tell him that it is all settled. There is no object in putting it off another day. Good-bye, aunt. I am glad you are pleased with my news.'

So Lady Sturdham kissed Linda and patted her on the shoulder, and bade her good-bye with a contented heart, thanking Heaven that her niece was about to escape from the dangerous influence of Mr. Howard, and to enter a family whose position in society was beyond question.

And Linda, as she was driven homewards through the crowded streets, almost persuaded herself that she was glad that Lord Sturdham had happened to be away. Uncle Jim's ideas upon the subject of love before or after marriage might not, she thought, have altogether coincided with those of Lady Sturdham's late mother, and he might have asked questions and expressed opinions which could only have resulted in unsettling his niece's mind and disposing her to think ill of what, upon the whole, was no doubt a very excellent arrangement. 'Papa wishes it,' thought Linda, 'and so do Lord and Lady Grassmere, and Aunt Selina and Mrs. Williams and Lord Keswick; and the rest of the world (including myself, I think) does not care a rush one

way or the other. Some people will be rejoiced at my consent, and nobody will be hurt by it. I must tell Ada Tower; and when she next writes to Mr. Mainwairing she can inform him that his anticipations have been realised, and that I have married a "big swell"—or am going to do so.'

The carriage had stopped before the big house in Lancaster Gate now.

'Horrid old house!' murmured Linda, apostrophising that eligible family mansion as she sat in the carriage waiting for the door to be opened. 'How I hate you! And what an utter delusion and disappointment you have been! I suppose I shall soon be able to sell you now and see the last of you. It is to be hoped that Lord Keswick will not want to live here, for nothing on earth would induce me to consent to that.'

Then she went upstairs to the drawing-room, and seating herself before her davenport, wrote swiftly, and without hesitation, the following note, which Lord Keswick duly found on his plate the next morning at breakfast-time:—

'250 Lancaster Gate, July, 1867.

'My dear Lord Keswick,—

'I have been thinking over your proposition since you left, this afternoon, and I really see no reason why I should keep you waiting any longer for my reply to it. I have made up mind now that it shall be as you wish, and I daresay it will all turn out happily. At all events, it is a good thing that we start without any misunderstanding, and that neither of us will expect anything more than friendliness and perhaps occasional forbearance from the other. As we shall have plenty of money we shall not be obliged to see too much of one another. I fancy it is living in a small house that causes a good many of the quarrels between married people.

'I suppose I shall see you at the Duchess's. We

can have a talk then, if it is necessary; but I don't know that there is anything more to be said.

'Believe me,

'Very truly yours,

'LINDA HOWARD.'

Linda read over this artless composition with some satisfaction. It appeared to her to be business-like and to the point, and to express happily the complete indifference which she felt towards her suitor, and which she thought he ought to be made fully aware of. But Lord Keswick smiled slightly when he perused it, and muttered under his breath, 'Poor little girl!' He fancied that she had been a trifle piqued by his candour, and that a slight flavour of romance thrown into his wooing would not have displeased her so much as her words seemed to imply. But there was time enough yet for that kind of thing, he said to himself, as he thrust Linda's note into his pocket and set to work with a fine appetite upon his devilled kidneys. He was in a state of high good humour and self-satisfaction. He had successfully accomplished his appointed task, and that in the most direct and honourable manner. He had gained a charming wife and handsome fortune, and it now only remained for him to hasten to Belgrave Square, and receive the blessing of his affectionate and grateful parents.

The amount of gratification experienced by various deserving persons upon the announcement of Lord Keswick's engagement should have gone far towards consoling the betrothed couple for what both of them perhaps considered as in some sort a personal sacrifice. There was joy in the house of Williams and thankfulness in the house of Grassmere. Lady Sturdham in her gladness went straight off to Hunt and Roskell's and purchased a beautiful pearl necklace, which she despatched to her dear Linda, 'with fond love and every good wish from her old Auntie.' As for Mr.

Howard, he tripped down to his club with the light heart and buoyant mien of youth; and chancing to meet Mr. Deane at the top of St. James's Street, he confided to him the good news, clapping him upon the shoulder with a force and joviality which greatly discomposed that very respectable gentleman.

'Come and dine with us, Deane, my boy,' said the proud father, 'and we'll drink happiness to the young couple before you set to work upon your confounded parchments and settlements. I am thoroughly satisfied with the match, Deane—thoroughly satisfied.'

'And so, I hope, is Miss Howard,' Mr. Deane replied. 'Whatever makes her happy will make her friends happy too, I am sure.'

As far as appearances went there was no reason to doubt Miss Howard's happiness. At Lady Grassmere's ball, which took place a few days after the engagement had been publicly announced, it was generally observed that the young heiress was looking even prettier than usual, and that she talked, danced, and laughed with more animation than she generally exhibited. To be sure she did not seem to have much to say to her *fiancé*, nor he to her; but that might reasonably be attributed to a natural feeling of modesty; and, as Lady Sturdham remarked, 'dear Linda was never of an over-demonstrative turn.'

CHAPTER XIX

AT SOUTHAMPTON

A FINE schooner yacht was bowling merrily across the blue dancing waves of the Solent, heeling over under a fresh westerly breeze, which sent her on her way at a good nine knots an hour There were only three people besides the helmsman in the after-part of the vessel: an elderly gentleman, in elaborately correct

yachting costume, who, with his legs very wide apart, and his hands in the pockets of his jacket, was endeavouring to look as if he was quite accustomed to balancing himself upon a heaving slope as steep as the roof of a house; a fair-complexioned young man, who was lying full-length upon the white deck, face downwards, perusing a sporting paper; and a young girl, who had established herself upon a pile of rugs and cushions in the stern, and was dreamily watching the flying water as it dashed from the side and foamed away to leeward.

The yacht was the 'Swallow,' a 200-ton schooner, the property of Lord Grassmere, who having gone in for nautical pursuits in his youth, as he had done for most expensive amusements, had kept on his yacht long after he had ceased to care about the sea, just as he had continued to entertain his friends at Ascot long after their society had become a heavy burden to him, and for equally good reasons.

The London season was a thing of the past; the Goodwood races were over, and so also was the Squadron regatta, from which the 'Swallow' was now returning. Lord and Lady Grassmere were at Homburg, recruiting their jaded systems by a course of mineral waters and early hours; and thus it had come about that Lord Keswick, having his father's yacht at his disposal, had prevailed on Miss Howard to run down to Cowes with him for a week, taking her father with her to play propriety.

That week was the pleasantest that had fallen to Linda's lot since she had become a rich young woman. The fresh bracing sea-air did her good, and seemed to blow away all the worries and troubles that had vexed her little head so terribly of late. There were no fine ladies, no unmanageable servants, and no morning visitors on board the trim ship that lay at anchor off Cowes, and rose and fell so gently and slumberously with the slow swell of the summer sea; and if there was an unavoid-

able *fiancé* there, he was the most accommodating and considerate of *fiancés*, and never thought of exercising the authority or claiming the privileges which, as some people might have thought, belonged to his position.

It was a delightful, lazy time; a brief—only too brief—parenthesis, during which the past and the future might be altogether pushed out of one's life and all disturbing thoughts dismissed. A time when present existence and blue sky and sea and sunshine and briny breezes were enough, and when idleness passed away the hours as easily as, and far more agreeably than, occupation. Every day the racing yachts spread their great white wings and came tearing past the 'Swallow' as she lay at anchor, looking, to inexperienced eyes, as if the smallest additional puff of wind must inevitably capsize them. With the aid of a pair of field-glasses and the information of the skipper Linda soon learnt to know them all and distinguish the colours of their tiny racing flags. She and her father and Keswick had a daily sweepstakes, into which they put five shillings apiece, and the result of which they awaited with intense anxiety.

In the evenings they played whist for twopenny points and sixpence on the rub, Mr. Howard taking dummy, and pretty generally rising up a winner. They got on very happily together, these three, and were on excellent terms with one another; which was scarcely surprising, seeing that two of them had just obtained what they desired, and that the third was usually contented when she had made others so.

Never, since the memorable journey from Dresden to London, had Mr. Howard shown himself so amiable, so cheerful, so charmingly playful as at this time. He made friends with the crew of the yacht, who thought him a very meddling, inquisitive old gentleman; he smoked his cigar and talked of nautical matters with the captain, who, immediately detecting his ignorance, treated him with respectful contempt; he was familiar

and confidential with Keswick, who good-humouredly tolerated him; and he was thoughtful and considerate in many small ways towards Linda, who was overjoyed at these marks of her readmission into the parental favour. How thankful she was to see papa himself again! How gladly did she hail the reappearance of certain small jokes which, in old days, had been an infallible sign of his approbation; and how willingly did she add her contribution to the boisterous outburst of merriment with which the author of these pleasantries was in the habit of concluding them! Wealth might be mere weariness, and the world a disappointment, and existence itself a doubtful blessing, but here at least were sunshine and free air, and a papa pleased with his daughter; and for the present was it not wisest to enjoy these good things, and forget what had passed and what was yet to come? But this condition of philosophic beatitude could not last long; and so we find the 'Swallow' cleaving the waves at the mouth of Southampton Water, and Miss Howard sitting on deck with a pensive countenance.

'I am so sorry it is over,' she remarked presently, as Lord Keswick, who had finished his paper, dragged himself on his hands and knees to her side. 'It has been great fun, hasn't it?'

'First-rate!' answered the young man heartily. 'I should like to do it all over again.'

'Ah, that we shall never do.'

'Oh, yes, we shall. We'll come down for this very week next year.'

'But papa won't be with us then,' said Linda, sadly.

'Hm! Well, no; I suppose not. But we'll make up a jolly party somehow or other. I say, what a bore it is we are going to be married in winter. We might have taken the yacht for our wedding trip, eh? It wouldn't have been half a bad idea, would it? Get rid of servants and grinning landlords, and all that kind

of thing, you know. I always think newly married couples look such precious fools travelling, don't you?'

'We might put off the day till next spring,' suggested Linda, calmly.

'I don't know what your governor would say to that,' replied Lord Keswick, not offering any objection on his own score.

'Or yours. No, we must do as we are bid, and be married on a bleak December morning at St. James's, Piccadilly, and go to a gigantic breakfast afterwards, and have our healths proposed and rice thrown at us, and go down to Dover in the rain or snow, and be dreadfully sick crossing the next day. How horrid it will all be!'

'Awful!' assented the future bridegroom, with a groan. 'Why can't people be married without sending for all their friends and relations to make merry over them? It's deuced bad taste. By-the-bye, Linda, where on earth are we to go for the honeymoon? Must go abroad, I suppose? What do you think of Italy?'

'Oh, I don't know,' said Linda, with sudden impatience. 'Don't let us talk about it any more. Do you see that big steamer catching us up? I wonder where she is from?'

'What do you suppose that steamer is, Dawkins?' asked Lord Keswick of the captain, who was steering.

'One of them American liners, my lord—North German Lloyd, I expect,' answered Dawkins, glancing over his shoulder at the huge black mass which was rapidly drawing nearer. Linda took up a pair of field-glasses and scanned the deck of the steamer. 'There seem to be a great many people on board, she remarked carelessly, as she turned to take a last look at Cowes, now growing indistinguishable in the distance.

If the glasses had been stronger, or if she had used them more carefully, she might almost have distin-

guished the features of a tall, brown-bearded man who was leaning over the taffrail of the inward-bound steamer, and who was admiring the lines of the 'Swallow,' without feeling any special interest as to her occupants. He stood smoking his cigar, and kept his eyes fixed upon the yacht long after she had dropped astern, though he had ceased to think about her, and indeed no longer saw her. A fellow-passenger sauntered up to his side, and following the direction of his gaze, observed, 'That's a real smart little craft, Mr. Mainwairing. Do you know the name of her owner?'

'I can't say I do—or even her own name. I am not very good at distinguishing one yacht from another.

'Well, sir, I am generally allowed to have a fairly good eye for a ship, and I can tell you that is a mighty nice little vessel. Belongs to one of your aristocracy, likely.'

'To an ironmaster or a brewer more probably,' answered Mainwairing, blowing out a cloud of blue smoke and watching it evaporate into the air. 'Those are the people who get the good things of the world in these days. She is flying the Squadron burgee though, I see.'

'And do you mean to tell me, sir, that a man of business could not be a member of your Yacht Squadron if he felt like it?'

'Not at all; only he would have to be balloted for; and the Squadron is more exclusive than other yacht clubs.'

'I reckon he would be admitted if he were wealthy enough. Wealth, Mr. Mainwairing, will make its way, and will not be kept down by prejudice. I believe the aristocracies of Europe are beginning to understand this.'

'I fancy they have understood it for some time,' answered Mainwairing. '"Put money in thy purse" was considered to be sound advice some centuries ago; and as for prejudice, I don't think you will find that

there is much remnant of that against commercial men in this country.'

'Well, sir, I hope not. I understand that some of your dukes and earls are putting their sons into trade as a profession; and very wisely. What does an aristocracy without money amount to? Why, it is no aristocracy at all, and ought to be wiped out. Money, sir, is power, and money rules the world.'

'No doubt of it,' answered Mainwairing, flinging the end of his cigar overboard; 'and that makes it the more unfortunate that money should so often get into the wrong hands.'

He moved away, not caring to pursue the subject further; and, contemplating the shores of his native land and Netley Hospital looming through the sunny haze, had soon taken up the thread of his reflections at the point at which his American fellow-passenger had caused him to drop it.

Our friend Mainwairing's prospects have greatly improved, from a worldly point of view, since we saw him last. Having tired of Canada, he had drifted, in his usual aimless manner, to New York in the beginning of the summer, and was hesitating whether to remain a few months longer in the States or return to Europe, when a telegram informed him of the sudden death of his elder brother, and besought him to come home at once. He took his passage in the first steamer that had a vacant berth, and set sail for the old country with feelings of a somewhat mixed nature.

His brother's death, which everybody else had long regarded as a by no means improbable contingency, was not only a real grief to him, but also a shock. He was not a man given to looking far forward; and he had always taken it for granted that poor old Tom would marry, some day or other, and have a family. For himself he had never anticipated more than his younger son's portion, with which, and with his collection of violins, he was, upon the whole, very well contented.

But now he perceived—not altogether with pleasure—that his life must henceforth shape itself in different courses from those in which it had hitherto run. As the heir to a baronetcy and a large property, something more than the study of music must now occupy his time; and Mainwairing was not very sure that his new duties might not prove a great bore. He was not sure, either, how far he should be able to adopt the tastes and pursuits of his father, with whom he would now be expected to reside; and he soon recollected, with alarm, that one of the first things which Sir George would require him to do would be to take unto himself a wife, lest he also should die and leave no heir behind him. Here was a prolific source of disagreement to start with, for Mainwairing had firmly resolved to live and die a bachelor.

It was characteristic of the man that he had been a couple of days at sea before a sudden thought struck him which put all other subjects out of his mind for the rest of the voyage. He remembered that the obstacles which had prevented him from declaring his love to Linda Howard, a year back, were now removed; and that, in his new position, he might pretend to the hand of any heiress in England without laying himself open to the imputation of ultra-mercenary motives. From that day forth Mainwairing became very restless and impatient towards the time at which the ship's run during the past four-and-twenty hours was announced. He grumbled outrageously when a head-wind caused a temporary diminution of speed; and when, owing to a heated bearing, the engines were stopped for a few hours, he abused the captain, the crew, the engineers, and the North German Lloyd Company with such energy and fervour that he was treated, for the remainder of the voyage, with that respect which none but a man of ungovernable temper can command. What if he should be too late? What if he should find her engaged when he arrived in London? For I am sorry

to say that this undutiful son had made up his mind to call at Lancaster Gate before going down to his father in Staffordshire. He was in a fever of anxiety and impatience. A few weeks earlier, when he had been sure that the object of his desires was for ever out of his reach, he had been able to contemplate, with some approach to resignation, the probability of Linda's marriage; and had even, as we know, written a few careless words to Miss Tower with a view to elicit any news there might be to be communicated on that subject; but now the idea of her becoming the wife of another man was intolerable; and so taken up was Mainwairing with the dread of this catastrophe that he forgot to worry himself with the question of whether he himself was likely to find favour in her eyes. And now that he was on the point of landing in England his spirits had fallen rather low; for, after all, what chance was there of a young lady of fashion being in London in the second week in August?

Meanwhile the unconscious Linda was pursuing her voyage to Southampton, and in process of time the 'Swallow' sailed past the big steamer as she lay at her moorings blowing off steam, whilst her passengers were hastening to get on shore. Linda and her father were due on the following day at Beechlands, Lord Sturdham's place, a few miles from Southampton, and Lord Keswick was to go to London by the afternoon express. Mr. Howard, who had business in town, had arranged to accompany his future son-in-law, and to return to Southampton the next day, Linda being left, for the time, at an hotel.

'See you again soon, I suppose?' Lord Keswick remarked, standing at the door of the smoking-carriage, whither his betrothed had accompanied him to bid him good-bye.

'Oh, yes, I suppose so,' answered Linda. She added, with some hesitation, 'Do you wish me to write to you?'

'Oh, thanks,' said Lord Keswick, who had not yet given this subject a thought. 'If you don't mind—I should like it awfully. And you won't criticise my spelling when I answer, will you? I'm an awful beggar to spell badly. I think we *ought* to correspond,' he continued, in a lower tone. 'Not very often, of course —once a week, or something like that. But it *is* the proper thing, you know, ain't it?'

Linda laughed outright.

'I don't know,' she said; 'I never was engaged before; but I think it would look better if I could tell Aunt Selina I had heard from you occasionally. Now you must get in, or you will be left behind. Good-bye, papa. Good-bye, Lord Keswick.'

She perched herself upon the step and kissed her father, and then held out her hand to her *fiancé*. And indeed no warmer salute than a shake of the hand had as yet been exchanged between these unimpassioned young persons.

The train began to move, and Linda turned and walked slowly away, with a slight feeling of regret at parting with her undemonstrative lover. She had got to like little Keswick so much better of late. He was so simple, so unaffected and honest, that it would not have been a hard matter even to love him; and Linda sometimes thought she would be able to do so—in a certain way—when once she had become his wife. It is true that at other times she told herself that she could never marry him, and that she wished she were dead. But in her heart she knew that her fate was decided; and she knew, too, that, as *mariages de convenance* go, she was not unfortunate.

Now, as Linda was passing through the station doors with a slow step and a preoccupied mind, a tall gentleman, in a violent hurry, came running up from the opposite direction, and before he could stop himself had nearly run into her arms.

'I beg a thousand pardons,' said he, clutching at

his hat, and diving past the lady whom he had so nearly upset without looking at her.

His rapid career was interrupted by a *nonchalant* porter.

'Express just gone, sir,' said that functionary, contemplating the sky with that exasperating serenity which his tribe always display under such circumstances.

'The devil!' cried the impetuous gentleman. Then he turned on his heel and exclaimed, 'Good gracious me!'—the latter ejaculation being prompted by his having caught sight of Linda, who, for her part, had recognised him a few seconds earlier.

'How do you do, Mr. Mainwairing?' said she, with all the calmness in the world. And how could he tell that her heart was beating as fast as his own?

He was utterly taken by surprise, and could only ejaculate stupidly—

'Miss Howard! Who in the world would have thought of seeing you here?'

'Why should I not be here?' she returned, smiling. 'I have been to Cowes for the regatta, like everybody else. It is you who ought to give some account of yourself. When I last heard of you you were in Canada, and had no intention of returning to England for an indefinite time. What has brought you back, and in such a hurry, too?'

Mainwairing did not half like this cool greeting. In all his imaginary pictures of his entrance into Linda's drawing-room at Lancaster Gate—and he had drawn a good many such during the idle hours of the voyage—she had never behaved herself at all in this way. A little cry of surprise, a change of colour, a quick movement of welcome—surely a man appearing unexpectedly from the other side of the Atlantic might count upon that much. But no! There stood the subject of his dreams, as beautiful as—nay, more beautiful than ever—but as calm and undisturbed as if she had parted from him the day before. She wore a dark blue

serge dress, he noticed, which fitted her admirably, and a grey felt hat, round which a white gauze veil was twisted But while he scanned her fair face eagerly and silently she drew the latter appendage down and disappeared behind it, murmuring something about the sun being so scorching. Mainwairing inwardly called down maledictions upon the head of the inventor of gauze veils, as I dare say many another man has done before him and will do again. At this moment his servant came up and informed him that there would be another train for London in two hours. Would he go by that or wait for the last train, which was a faster one?

'I have altered my mind, Davis,' answered Mainwairing; 'I shan't start till to-morrow. There is an hotel somewhere near this, isn't there?'

'Yes, sir, the South-Western.'

'Very well. Get a room there for me, and unpack what I shall want for the night.'

'Very good, sir,' said the man, and withdrew, wondering who the young lady might be who had obviously caused this sudden change of plans. He indulged himself with a good long stare at her, and muttered, as he marched away with his master's rugs and umbrellas—

'She's a well-shaped one, anyhow.'

For, though a cat may look at a king, neither a cat nor a valet can see through one of those abominable gauze veils, and the faithful Davis failed to recognise the young lady of Dresden, whose features had been sufficiently familiar to him at one time.

'Which way are you going, Miss Howard?' asked Mainwairing, when his valet had departed. 'May I walk with you?'

'Of course,' answered Linda. 'Papa has gone up to London, and will not be back till to-morrow evening. I was just wondering what I should do with myself till dinner-time when you fell from the clouds and almost

knocked me down. I will walk wherever you please, and as long as you will put up with my company, for I have a hundred things to ask you about. Are you ready to be catechised?'

Mainwairing of course professed his willingness to gratify Miss Howard's curiosity as far as it lay in his power to do so; and so they strolled away down the broad quiet street, she putting question after question to him about Canada and his life and amusements there, and he replying somewhat at random, his thoughts being occupied with other matters.

Southampton is not a very large town, and if you walk quietly along the main street with a pleasant companion you are apt to find yourself in the open country sooner than you would expect. Linda and Mainwairing were out among the green fields and hedgerows before either of them had well perceived that they had left the town behind them. By this time a good deal of mutual information had been imparted. The death of Mainwairing's elder brother and Mr. Howard's engagement to Mrs. Williams had been announced, and had elicited such conventional expressions of sympathy as are usual on occasions of domestic calamity between people who are scarcely well enough acquainted to venture upon a more free declaration of their feelings. But not a word had been said about Lord Keswick. Why Linda refrained from openly stating what could not long remain a secret she hardly knew. Several times the confession rose to her lips, but, for some reason or other, she could not bring herself to give utterance to it. She thought perhaps Mainwairing would question her when she told him that she had been to Cowes in Lord Grassmere's yacht, but he did not do so. He only remarked that he supposed she was on intimate terms with all the great people now, and asked her whether she still kept her old opinion that money was the chief of all blessings.

'No,' she answered, rather dolefully; 'I was not

long in changing my mind about that. Do you remember the dear old days at Blasewitz, when I played your accompaniments, and you used to scold me for wishing to be rich?'

'I remember every day and every hour I spent at Blasewitz,' he answered; 'but I don't recollect scolding you. And you, too, think of old times occasionally, do you?'

'Oh, yes,' said Linda, with a sigh; 'and I often wish the old times could come back again. But there is no use in wishing for impossibilities.'

'So now you want to be poor again. Might one ask why?'

'Only because I was happier when I was poor. I can't tell you exactly why things have gone wrong with me since I have been rich; but they have. For one thing, I am sure papa would never have dreamt of marrying again if this wretched money had not all come to me. He could not bear to be dependent upon his daughter; you can easily understand that. And then there are so many things that make money a burden. One feels that one ought to be doing some good with it, if one only knew how, instead of using it only for luxuries and as a way of getting into society, which I don't a bit care about. Don't you think it is humiliating to be visited by people who are only civil to you because you are rich? I think no nation on earth worships wealth as the English do.'

'You used to wish to be rich, I remember, because you fancied they slighted you on account of your poverty. Now, it seems, you don't care whether they slight you or not.'

'Not much. I used to think that if ever I became a rich woman I would take my revenge upon them by refusing to know them; but one can't do that, and it would be hardly worth while if one could. Mrs. Tower came to call upon me the other day, and made herself as fascinating as if she had a son on the look-out for an

heiress. And all the time she was talking I couldn't help thinking of that evening on the Brühlische Terrasse, when she turned down the corners of her mouth and sniffed at me, and of how angry I was, and of how very little it signified after all. Ada and I have become great friends, you know. I have heard of you sometimes from her. You and she are constant correspondents, are you not?'

'Hardly that,' said Mainwaring. 'I am a very poor correspondent at the best of times, but Ada writes to me pretty frequently, and of course, every now and then, I have to send her a line or two.'

'What a very ungallant speech!' exclaimed Linda, though she was secretly not displeased at his indifferent tone. 'I have a great mind to repeat it to Ada, only I don't wish to be ill-natured. You know I used to say I was sure you would end by marrying Ada; and I am not yet convinced that I was wrong.'

'I shall never marry Ada Tower,' said Mainwairing, with a certain solemnity of emphasis.

'Are you quite sure of that?'

'Quite; and I will tell you why.'

He paused as if he expected some encouragement; so Linda said, 'Why?'

They were walking on the grass by the side of the high road, which stretched, white, dusty, and solitary, before them into the distance. It was a still, hot afternoon, and the whole earth seemed drowsy. The breeze which had sent the 'Swallow' so swiftly on her way in the morning had given place to a dead calm, and there was no sound in the air except a sleepy buzzing of insects. Some moss-grown logs, piled up by the wayside, looked as if they had been placed there for the benefit of weary pedestrians. Mainwairing pointed to them.

'Let us sit down,' he said, 'and I will tell you all about it.'

Linda seated herself silently upon the topmost log,

wondering a little what he was going to tell her, and Mainwairing took up his position at her feet.

'I shall not marry Ada Tower,' said he, in a low, deliberate voice, 'because, if I ever marry at all, my wife will be—somebody else.'

Linda, who had raised her veil, would have liked to have dropped it again now, for she felt that she was blushing, and she was furious with herself for being so silly and school-girlish. What reason had she to blush because Mr. Mainwairing had made up his mind whom he was going to marry? But it would make matters worse to hide her face, so she said 'Yes?' in a perfectly steady voice, and her colour gradually faded away as she waited for him to go on.

'Linda,' he said abruptly, 'I love you.'

It was not an eloquent avowal; but it had at least the merit of being free from ambiguity. Linda's heart gave a great leap. She had one brief flash of joy and triumph, and then a cold, sick feeling of despair crept over her, and seemed to turn her to stone. She neither stirred nor spoke.

Mainwairing started to his feet. He thought she was going to faint. 'What is it?' he asked, in a tone of some alarm. 'Have I frightened you?'

Linda tried to smile. 'No,' she said; 'it is nothing. But I had better tell you at once that I am engaged to be married to Lord Keswick.'

A long silence. Linda looked down, and trembled like a criminal. To anyone else in the world she would have spoken of her engagement without fear or shame; but in the presence of this man, who said he loved her, and whom she now knew only too well that she had loved from the first, she felt as guilty as if this projected marriage had been planned by her, instead of by those who hoped to make their profit out of it, and as if she had been faithless to the one who really loved her for herself. For it never occurred to her to doubt Mainwairing's disinterestedness. In her distress and

confusion she almost expected that he would upbraid her for her perfidy; and it was with no small trepidation that she waited for the effect of her announcement. But Mainwairing took it more quietly than she had expected.

'Don't distress yourself, Miss Howard,' he said, gently. 'I know you are too kind not to be sorry for me; but it can't be helped, and I must try to put a brave face upon it. It is no fault of yours, you know, that you can't love me, any more than it is my fault that I can't help loving you. Goodness know I have tried hard enough!' he added, with a rather grim laugh.

Linda shot a timid sidelong glance at him. 'Why did you try?' she asked. It was perhaps hardly wise of her to interrogate him upon the subject; but the temptation was too strong for her.

'It was a question of money,' he answered, with a dreary shrug of his shoulders, 'like most other things. When I first knew you you were poor, and so was I. I was too selfish to give up a great many small luxuries which I should have had to do without if I had married in those days; so I hesitated—and went away. Then, when I found out that you were worth more to me than anything else in the world, I went back to Dresden to tell you so; and, behold! you were transformed into a great heiress. You see how it was that I could not speak then. Well, then I went away to Canada, and thought I would try to forget you there; and of course I didn't. You were too poor at first, you see, and too rich afterwards. And now that I am rich too, and am free to tell you my story, I find out—what perhaps you will say I might have thought of before. But I am sure you will forgive me if I have been too presumptuous. You know what a dreamy, absent-minded sort of fellow I am. I am always thinking of something else when I part my hair in the morning, and I haven't shaved for years. Else perhaps I might have noticed

what an old fogey I am getting, and how little chance I should be likely to have against a good-looking young fellow like Lord Keswick.'

He assumed as light a manner as he could command, partly to conceal his mortification and partly because he thought Linda looked more distressed than the occasion warranted. He was glad that she should sympathise with him, but he did not wish to make her unhappy.

'Don't trouble yourself any more about me, Miss Howard,' he went on, seeing how grave and pale she looked. 'Tell me about yourself. Are you—are you very fond of Lord Keswick?'

'I like him very well,' said Linda, without looking up. Her tone, still more than her words, excited Mainwairing's suspicions.

'What do you mean by "liking him very well"?' he asked. 'Why do you look so oddly? Upon my word, Miss Howard, I believe you don't care a straw for the fellow.'

'Oh, yes, I do,' she answered, quietly. 'I like him very much in a way. It is not a love-match. Neither he nor I ever pretended that, or wished anyone to suppose it. The truth is my money will be useful to him; and I—I was very lonely, and wanted a home. And he is very kind and good-natured. *Voilà!*'

'I could have given you a home, Linda,' said Mainwairing, sadly. 'And if you had married me there would have been love upon one side, at all events. Good God!' he went on, with more animation, 'you cannot be allowed to throw away your life like this. Break off this impossible engagement; it is not too late yet. And, oh, Linda, if you would marry me, I would not ask or expect that you should love me at first. That would come in time, I know; and I should be content to wait. How can you ever be happy with a man who admits that he does not care for you? And what have you in common with young Keswick, who

hasn't two ideas in his head beyond a knowledge of horseflesh? You and I understand each other; we have very much the same tastes and habits; we like the same kind of life. I will not give up hope. If you love no one else, why should not I have as good a chance as another?'

Linda was moved, for a moment, by his vehemence, which affected her the more from its contrast with his usual lazy manner. For a moment she thought she would tell him all; would confess that she loved him better than all the world; and, cutting herself free at one blow from all the trammels that bound her to the past, would set forth anew into a blissful future. But it was only for a moment. A row of familiar faces started up before her mind's eye and warned her back into the path of duty. Her father, furious and menacing; Lady Sturdham, shocked and grieved; poor Lord Grassmere, bowed down by the returning flood of his embarrassments; honest little Keswick, mutely reproachful—the images of all these flitted before her; and she summoned up all her courage to resist temptation. It was too late now, she said to herself. She had given her word; the die was cast; her fate was sealed. She looked up at Mainwairing, and shook her head—rather mournfully, it must be confessed.

He took courage from this, thinking that she was giving way, and pleaded his cause with more earnestness than before. But he began to falter at length, for he saw that his eloquence was producing no impression whatever. The girl looked wretched enough certainly; but her pale face was as passionless as marble. He doubted whether she even took in the sense of what he was saying. The truth is that Linda was like one who, creeping along the face of a precipice, feels that his best chance of safety lies in his power of temporarily suspending his thinking faculties, or at least of concentrating them upon the one object of advancing. If he allow his mind to dwell for an instant upon the

giddy depth beneath, he may lose his head, his balance, and his life. One thing only Linda saw, or fancied she saw, clearly—that it was her duty to marry Lord Keswick; and to that idea she adhered bravely, if mistakenly, not suffering herself to listen to the persuasions of her own heart on the one side, or to the pleadings of her lover on the other.

Exactly what passed after she had taken up this stubborn position she could not subsequently recall to mind. She remembered that there had been a long colloquy, during which Mainwairing had been by turns imploring, impatient, and angry; she did not recollect what she had said to him; but she knew that she had striven to make him understand that her determination was irrevocable, and that she could never become his wife. That she must have succeeded in convincing him in the end was certain, for at last he sprang to his feet, saying, 'Then it is all over, Miss Howard. I see now that you could never have learnt to love me. Perhaps you are right, and Lord Keswick is more suited to you than I. Shall we go back now?'

Linda rose mechanically, and meekly followed him, as he strode along the dusty road towards the town. In justice to Mainwairing it must be said that he had no idea of how fast he was walking. Tramp, tramp, tramp—how hot and airless and sultry it was! Linda felt, as one sometimes does in bad dreams, that she had been walking like this all her life, and must go on till the end of it. Her head was swimming, her eyes were hot and dim, and her knees trembled under her.

Shortly afterwards, a lady, who happened to be driving into Southampton, in an open carriage, to do an afternoon's shopping, observed in front of her the backs of an apparently very unsociable couple. On the one side of the road marched a tall man, who switched viciously at the hedge with his cane as he walked, while, on the other, a girl dressed in blue serge toiled wearily along, with drooping head and downcast mien.

'A lovers' quarrel,' thought the lady, who was of a benevolent disposition. 'Poor girl! how tired she looks, and what a wretch the man must be to make her walk at such a pace in this broiling sun!'

She scrutinised the pair with some half-amused interest as the carriage drew nearer to them; but when she was close enough to the girl to discern her features she threw up her hands with a gesture of surprise not unmixed with dismay.

'Stop, Rogers, stop!' she cried to the coachman. 'Good gracious, Linda, my child! what are you doing here?'

Linda, as may be imagined, was not overjoyed at recognising Lady Sturdham; but after what she had gone through that afternoon, her self-control was not to be upset by so trifling a *contretemps* as this.

'Is it you, Aunt Selina?' she said, summoning up the ghost of a smile. 'How fortunate! Will you give me a lift into Southampton? For I am simply dropping with fatigue. Mr. Mainwairing has walked me off my legs. I don't think you know my aunt, Lady Sturdham, Mr. Mainwairing?'

Mainwairing, who had been standing on the other side of the carriage, tugging moodily at his moustache, took off his hat.

'Not Sir George Mainwairing's son?' said Lady Sturdham, interrogatively.

Mainwairing said, 'Yes.'

'Oh. I thought—surely your friends imagine that you are in America?'

'I only arrived this afternoon from New York.'

'Oh, indeed,' said Lady Sturdham, looking a good deal mystified and not over well pleased. 'Can I take you back to Southampton, Mr. Mainwairing?'

'Thank you, no,' answered Mainwairing, rather curtly; 'I will not trouble you; I prefer to walk. Good-bye, Miss Howard.'

He raised his hat again; and presently the carriage had left him far behind.

'My dear,' said Lady Sturdham at once, 'where is your father?'

'Papa was obliged to go up to London this afternoon,' Linda answered. 'He will be down to-morrow; and I am to wait for him at Radley's Hotel.'

'Surely it would have been a better plan for you to have come straight to us. But I never could understand your papa. What was the matter with that young man? He looked very strange, I thought.'

Linda remarked disingenuously that Mr. Mainwairing had just lost his brother.

'Oh, nonsense, my dear,' returned the old lady, rather sharply. 'His brother died weeks ago; and besides, he must have expected it for a long time. There was something more than that the matter with him.'

'Was there?' said Linda. 'Perhaps it was the heat.'

And though Lady Sturdham cross-examined her niece at considerable length as to the origin and duration of her acquaintance with Mainwairing, and administered to her a gentle lecture upon the impropriety of roving about the country with young men, she obtained no information whatever relating to what had taken place in the course of that special walk, and was driven to the conclusion that Mr. Mainwairing had proposed, and been refused. 'Which, after all, would be of no consequence,' she thought. 'Lord Keswick is not likely to be jealous.'

Linda, on being left at the hotel, went upstairs, and flung herself upon her bed in a state of total exhaustion, mental and physical. She ate no dinner that evening, and lay awake the whole night through, tossing to and fro with a splitting headache, her hands and feet burning with fever.

'I am going to have an illness,' she thought, when

the first chill of dawn came through the open window and set her shivering violently. 'Perhaps I shall die. Well, I shan't much mind.'

CHAPTER XX

MR. DEANE IS DISGUSTED

By the time that Linda had taken her bath and put on her clothes she was forced, rather against her will, to admit to herself that she was not going to be ill at all, and that there was nothing worse the matter with her than an aching heart and an aching head. It was rather a disappointment. Things had come to such a pass with her that she would have welcomed a good brain-fever, or any other disease which would have brought with it unconsciousness and oblivion, and might even have cut the knot of her difficulties in one way or another. She had declared, the day before, that her mind was made up, and that nothing should tempt her to draw back from the destiny which she had voluntarily accepted. But it is one thing to resolve and another to perform; and, for all her courage, Linda could not feel sure that her strength would hold out to the end.

She remained in her room all day, fearing to leave the house, lest she should again encounter Mainwairing, who had not mentioned by what train he intended to leave; and no half-hearted wretch, hesitating between the dictates of his conscience and the temptation to commit a crime, could have passed a more miserable morning than did this unfortunate girl, whose only doubt was whether she had sufficient heroism to make shipwreck of her whole life for the advantage of a few selfish people who would never know or appreciate the sacrifice she was making for them.

She compared herself mentally to a recruit going

under fire, who dares not advance, and will not run away, and who, if left to himself, would, in the natural course of things, come to a dead stand-still. But as, in the case of the soldier, such a solution of the difficulty would be a physical impossibility—he being of necessity forced forward by the advancing mass behind him, and perhaps, if need be, by an admonishing poke from a friendly bayonet—so the mere force of time and the sequence of events bade fair to carry Linda on to the inevitable end; and we know that she had one or two friends at her back who were prepared to keep her up to her duty by means of a moral bayonet-thrust, should that manner of persuasion appear necessary.

Such a one was, indeed, unconsciously administered, that very afternoon, by Mr. Howard, who returned from London in high spirits, bringing with him a roll of music and a short note from Lord Keswick, in which Miss Howard was begged to accept 'the pieces which she had said she wanted.' There were one or two more, the writer said, which he had been unable to obtain; but he was going to ransack the music-shops for them the next day, and would send them down to her, if his search proved successful.

If Lord Keswick had known the conflict which was going on in the girl's mind he could scarcely have selected a present more likely to further his own cause. A ring or a bracelet would not have touched her much. Such things are to be bought at the first jeweller's, and Lord Keswick was not the man to hesitate over the price of anything that might happen to take his fancy. But the fact that he had expended a few shillings in buying this music showed, not only that he had noticed and remembered a careless passing wish, but also that he had taken considerable pains to gratify it; for the pieces were old ones, and not to be met with in every music-shop.

The amount of gratitude which Linda felt for this small attention would have been quite incomprehensi-

ble to a girl more accustomed to having her wishes anticipated. She slipped away to her bedroom and cried heartily for the first time since her interview with Mainwairing, declaring to herself that she had misjudged Lord Keswick, that he was kinder to her than anyone had ever been before, that she was not worthy of him, and that she had been wicked to think for a moment of throwing him over. Then she dried her eyes, prayed, poor little soul! that she might be enabled to do her duty, and set out for Beechlands, with her father, in a more composed frame of mind.

Beechlands is a fine old place, standing on a rising ground, with terraces and lawns and a blaze of flowers round about it, and undulating reaches of well-timbered park beyond; but it is not an amusing house to stay in. Lord and Lady Sturdham are old-fashioned people, and have old-fashioned ways. Breakfast, preceded by family prayers, takes place at nine o'clock; there is a heavy luncheon at one, dinner at seven, and at half-past ten the butler brings in the bedroom candlesticks. During the shooting season the house is tolerably full of visitors, and then a decorous gaiety takes possession of the place. The billiard-room is kept lighted up to midnight; the drag is taken out of the coach-house; excursions to Netley Abbey, and other local lions, are organised; ponderous dinner-parties are holden in the big dining-room; and sometimes a quasi impromptu dance is got up. But at all other times of the year Beechlands is anything but lively quarters; and such unsuspecting people as find their way thither in July or August generally discover that they have another visit to pay in a different part of the country before they have been Lord Sturdham's guests above a day or two.

Poor Mr. Howard was driven to the verge of despair by the monotony of his existence with his relations, and confided to his daughter that he should not be able to stand it much longer.

'Hang it all! I can't get up in the middle of the

night and dine in the middle of the afternoon,' said this man of fashion, plaintively. 'I hate farming, and I am getting sick of smoking cigars in the conservatory and talking to the gardener all day. After dinner your uncle tells his confounded long yarns, and falls asleep in the middle of them, by Jove! I must be off somewhere, Linda, or the slowness of life will be the death of me.'

There had been a time when Mr. Howard had dined at five o'clock, and had occupied his days chiefly in loafing about the streets of Dresden; but he had nearly forgotten this period of his life, and if he had been reminded of it would probably have denied that he had then been alive at all—having been, as it were, in the chrysalis stage, previous to his manifestation to the world in his present character of a mature butterfly.

Linda did not mind the dulness of Beechlands. What she chiefly desired, just then, was rest and peace; and these blessings she found—at least to some extent—in the mode of life of which her father complained so pathetically. The contrast between the sober, methodical fashion in which the days glided on at Beechlands and the noise and bustle of London was most soothing to her. The stately old house, with its spacious staircase, its oak panelling black with age, its stained-glass windows, its long corridors, from whose walls rows of departed plain-featured Blounts looked gravely down, its trophies of casques and pikes and swords, and the faint old-world scent of *pot-pourri* which pervaded it throughout, seemed to belong to another and a nobler age than the crowded, money-grubbing, vulgar city which she had left behind her. Little Lady Sturdham, in her silks and laces, came sweeping noiselessly over the worn Turkey carpet of the passages, looking like one of the old pictures stepped out of its frame; Lord Sturdham's cheery voice, calling his niece to come out for a walk with him, echoed through the

house, as he stamped in at the front-door with his dogs at his heels. At seven o'clock a clanging bell announced to all who dwelt within a mile or two that my lord was about to sit down to dinner. It was more like the English life of which Linda had read in books than anything she had yet witnessed; and she was beginning to think that Uncle Jim, in his threadbare velveteen coat and gaiters, was more like the ideal English nobleman than Lord Grassmere, in all the glory of his Court suit and Garter.

Linda did not share her father's dislike to matters connected with farming. She was always glad to accompany her uncle to the Home Farm, which was his especial hobby; and though she could not pretend to understand much about the price of hay and wheat, or the latest improvements in agricultural machinery, she admired the strength and beauty of the gigantic cart-horses, with their scarlet collars and ribbons; she liked feeding the ducks and chickens and poking at the pigs with a long stick, and she thoroughly appreciated the dark cool dairy, where the pans of yellow cream stood, and a little fountain splashed musically into a marble basin. And that, as Lord Sturdham justly remarked, was as much as you could expect from a woman.

It soon came to be an understood thing that Linda should join her uncle in his morning walk, which sometimes took him to the farmyard, sometimes to the kennels, and sometimes to the harvest-fields, where the reapers were already at work; and the only drawback to her pleasure in these rambles was Uncle Jim's inveterate tendency to recur to the subject of her marriage, and rally her thereupon with an old-fashioned jocularity which, under the circumstances, was especially embarrassing and distressing. He always spoke of the coming event as if it were a marriage of affection on both sides; and before very long Linda discovered that such was in truth his honest belief. For some reason, not

very accurately defined in her mind, she could not bring herself to undeceive him; so she bore with his small jokes as best she could, though sometimes—for she had become very nervous and easily affected of late—they brought the tears into her eyes.

One day, when the innocent old gentleman had been making himself more than usually intolerable in this manner, Linda pleaded a headache, and said, if Uncle Jim didn't mind, she would go back to the house. Lord Sturdham, who looked upon headaches as a mysterious affliction, part of the original curse under which all the daughters of Eve labour, and the nature of which is hardly to be understood by a male creature, dropped the corners of his mouth, and gave utterance to the sympathetic moan which he knew that his wife always expected from him under similar circumstances.

'Go and lie down at once, my dear,' he said. 'And ask your aunt for some of her sal volatile—that's the best cure for a headache. Or a glass of port wine—some people find that a good thing. Will you take my arm back to the house?'

'Oh, dear no, thank you, uncle,' said Linda, rather amused. 'Finish your walk; and I will go slowly home. I shall be all right before dinner-time.'

So she went her way, sadly enough, across the park, letting the tears run down her cheeks without restraint, now that there was nobody to see them. 'Will it always be like this?' she wondered despairingly. 'Am I to be miserable, and conceal my misery, for the rest of my natural life? I suppose not. I suppose, when I have been married a year or two, I shall have got over this, and be as fond of Lord Keswick as most wives seem to be of their husbands. Not passionately fond, of course, but just properly and soberly attached, as one might be to an elder brother. But, oh! how shall I ever bear to meet *him* as an ordinary acquaintance, and make civil speeches to his wife? For of course he will forget me, and marry somebody else—Ada Tower,

most likely. Men are not like us. Some years hence, I dare say, he will tell her the whole story, and wonder how he could ever have been so infatuated about me.'

These reflections, and others arising out of them, brought Linda to the hall-door. There she encountered the butler, who informed her that a gentleman was in the library waiting to speak to her. At that moment Linda could think of but one gentleman who was likely to have come down to Beechlands to seek her out; and though he was dearer to her than the whole world, she would gladly have avoided seeing him; for what could he have to say to her, or she to him, which could be productive of anything but a renewal of unhappiness to them both? She turned the handle of the library-door, therefore, with a beating heart, and was much relieved to find that the only tenant of the room was Mr. Deane.

The old solicitor, who had his back turned to the door, and was poring over a book of prints, started up at the noise of Linda's entrance and advanced towards her with a countenance expressive of great solemnity and concern.

'My dear young lady,' he said, 'I have come to see you upon a most serious, and, I am sorry to say, a most unpleasant matter of business.'

All matters of business being equally unpleasant to Linda, she did not attach much importance to this preamble. 'What is it, Mr. Deane?' she asked, rather wearily, seating herself, and taking off her hat.

Mr. Deane fidgeted, put on his spectacles, took them off again, changed his chair, and at last began.

'I must ask you to prepare yourself for some bad news.'

'I am quite prepared,' answered Linda, confidently, feeling well assured that no news could make things worse for her than they already were.

'I want to prepare you,' resumed Mr. Deane, 'for a great change in your circumstances—a change which,

I am sure, no one can regret more unfeignedly than I do. But we must take what is sent us.' Here he paused again, and looked at Linda doubtfully.

'Well?' said she.

'It seems, then, that the will under which you enjoy your late uncle's property, and which, as you may remember, is dated some eighteen months back, is null and void, having been set aside by a subsequent and much more informal document; but one which I am bound to admit is altogether unassailable.'

'Then I am poor again!' exclaimed Linda, excitedly.

'Now, my dear young lady,' implored the lawyer, holding up his hands entreatingly, 'pray do not agitate yourself, and hear me out. It is a bad business; but not perhaps so utterly bad as you may suppose. I have been a good deal put out by it myself, because, as I think I have told you, the previous will was drawn out under my personal supervision; and though my old friend frequently spoke to me upon the subject, he never led me to suppose that he had changed his mind with regard to the disposition of his property. Why he should have done so without consulting me, merely making use of an ordinary sheet of letter-paper as a means of bequeathing his wealth, is more than I can understand. However, let that pass. There is the will; and the signature is duly attested. The document was brought to me by Hudson, the butler, who found it, he says, while dusting out a bureau in the room which, I understand, has lately been used by your father as his study. It was among a number of other papers, which would appear to have been left undisturbed since your uncle's death. It is dated only a week previous to his decease; and a thorough search, which I ventured to make immediately at Lancaster Gate, has failed to bring to light any more recent document. Now, as to the provisions, which are very short and simple. Your father is to have a life-interest in the

whole of the property, real and personal, with remainder to you. The other legacies are the same as in the first will.'

Linda had risen from her chair, and was standing before Mr. Deane, with parted lips and wide-opened eyes.

'Is this true?' she exclaimed. 'Are you quite sure there is no mistake?'

'Why, what mistake can there be?' retorted the old lawyer, a little testily. 'Haven't I seen this ridiculous document with my own eyes? And should I have come down here to tell you you were disinherited if there had been any doubt about its validity? No, no, my dear Miss Howard, there is no use in disputing the facts. The money which we all believed belonged to you is, for the time being, vested in your father; and the only thing we can do is to make the best of it.'

'Make the best of it!' echoed Linda, in a tone of triumphant joy. 'Why, my dear Mr. Deane, do you really call this bad news? Bad news indeed! It is the best news I have heard for a year, and far, far better news than I ever expected to have heard again. I must go and tell papa at once.'

'You are in a very great hurry to get rid of eighteen thousand a-year, I must say,' grumbled Mr. Deane. 'It is all very well to put a good face upon misfortune, but it is not necessary to rejoice over it; and what possible cause you can have——'

'Mr. Deane,' interrupted Linda, conclusively, 'you have never been a girl with heaps of money, and therefore you can't judge of my feelings. If you had told me that every penny of it had gone to a stranger I should not have cared a bit—at least, so far as I myself am concerned; but as papa has got it I am overjoyed. Because that is what I always wished for from the beginning.'

'But, Miss Howard—excuse me—I don't think you quite understand—you can hardly have realised yet

what a serious matter this is. You must pardon me for reminding you that Lord Keswick, as well as yourself, has a strong interest in your fortune. Yes, yes; I know what you would say. Young people never think much about ways and means. But their friends have to think for them; and from what I have heard from Lord Grassmere's solicitors I greatly fear that your life, as the daughter-in-law of a nobleman with a certain position to keep up, will entail a good deal of economy and self-denial.'

This view of the subject had certainly not yet presented itself to Linda; but it did not appear to cause her much disquietude.

'Of course I shall release Lord Keswick from his engagement,' she answered promptly.

'A very generous impulse, my dear young lady,' said Mr. Deane, who perhaps rated this exhibition of magnanimity a little more highly than it deserved; 'but it is scarcely to be supposed that his lordship will take advantage of it. The fact is—not to mince matters—it looks to me very much as if you would have to live almost entirely upon what your papa may be disposed to allow you; and what that will be we can't, of course, tell. I fear it may be but little.'

'I am sure that whatever papa does will be the right thing,' said Linda, up in arms at once.

'No doubt—no doubt. I should be the last man in the world to assert the contrary,' answered Mr. Deane, rather irritably. He added, under his breath, by way of relieving his feelings, 'He can't touch the principal, and he can't live for ever; there's comfort in that.'

'And whatever happens,' continued Linda, 'I am thankful to be rid of this detestable money. It has never given me any happiness; and it ought never to have been left to me at all. I am very glad my uncle saw his mistake before he died.'

'Well, well,' said Mr. Deane, with a slight shrug of

his shoulders. 'Now, I suppose, I had better see your papa.'

'I will go and look for him,' said Linda, picking up her hat, and leaving the room with a light step and a lighter heart.

When she was gone Mr. Deane indignantly apostrophised space.

'Don't talk to me about reason and common sense and men of business!' he exclaimed. 'Tom Howard was no better than an old fool. All the interest of his hard-won money to be made ducks and drakes of for years and years to come! For that superannuated dandy will live to be eighty, I know—it would be just like him! And as for the poor girl, why, that young lord will throw her over, as sure as my name's what it is; and her father will bully her to the end of his life, and she'll only say "Thank you." Bah! I am disgusted with the whole business! Tom Howard, you unspeakable ass, if I only had you here I'd—I'd punch your head for you!'

CHAPTER XXI

MR. HOWARD AND LADY GRASSMERE ACCOMMODATE THEMSELVES TO CIRCUMSTANCES

Great was the perturbation caused in the Grassmere family by the news of Miss Howard's loss of fortune. Lord Keswick, though considerably taken aback, was for marrying Linda, *quand même*; but, as was to be expected, the family decision was against any such Quixotism. Lady Grassmere, who received the melancholy intelligence in a letter from her son, in which he also expressed his determination to keep to his engagement, hurried back post-haste from Homburg, after telegraphing to the young man to meet her in London on her arrival.

In obedience to these instructions, Lord Keswick presented himself at the big house in Belgrave Square, which, with its closed shutters and unwashed door-steps, looked dismal enough at this season of the year, and was let in by a travel-stained maid, who informed him that my lady had already arrived, and was waiting for him in her boudoir. Mounting the stairs, he found his mother sitting, almost in the dark, over a cup of tea, haggard and worn, the little curls over her forehead all limp and disarranged, and her blooming complexion replaced by a pair of lined and yellow cheeks from which the dust and blacks of many railways had not yet been removed. She looked such an old, old woman, as she sat in her dim corner, that even Lord Keswick, unobservant as he was, was startled, and exclaimed, in a tone of remonstrance, 'I say, mother, you've been over-tiring yourself!'

'I am half-dead,' replied Lady Grassmere, faintly; 'but it doesn't matter. I could not possibly rest without seeing you, after your shocking letter.'

'It's a bore, isn't it?' said Lord Keswick, seating himself, and lifting up Lady Grassmere's pug by the tail.

'It is quite too dreadful,' answered Lady Grassmere, in heartbroken accents. 'I don't know what I have done that things of this kind should always happen to me. Please be so kind as to leave Planchette alone; my nerves are completely shattered: and her howls are more piercing than those of any dog I ever had in my life. Planchette, my love, come to your mother! Of course there must be an end of everything. I am very sorry for it, for I really liked the girl; but the idea of your marrying a pauper is too utterly preposterous.'

'She won't be exactly a pauper, you know,' Lord Keswick remarked. 'Her father has promised to secure her an allowance of three thousand a-year the day of her marriage.'

In truth Mr. Howard, in the first glow of his prosperity, and in his desire to have a viscount for his son-in-law, had actually made this generous offer.

'People of that kind would make any sacrifice to get into society,' said Lady Grassmere, ungratefully. 'Three thousand a year! it is absurd. If he had said eight—and then, taking her prospects into consideration—— But no! the thing is not to be thought of. You had better go away somewhere for a time. Why don't you go to Norway and fish? Or to Russia—that would be better, perhaps—and you could make a long trip of it, and not come back till after Christmas. I can easily get you introductions to all the people worth knowing in St. Petersburg; and I will ask your father for money. But you really must try and do it as cheaply as you can; he has become so troublesome lately about the smallest expense. Yes; go to Russia, my dear boy; and everything shall be comfortably settled and forgotten before you return.'

Lord Keswick shook his head. 'I could not do it,' he said; 'I couldn't really. It would be too d——d shabby!'

'There is no necessity for using bad language,' said Lady Grassmere, leaning back in her chair with an air of languid disgust; 'and as for shabbiness, I think if anyone has a right to complain of that, it is we, and not these Howard people. I shall always believe that the whole scheme was concocted by that wretched old man to entrap you into marrying his daughter. The story is really too absurdly improbable! As if people made wills and then hid them! Nothing shall convince me that that horrid smirking man has not had the paper in his pocket all along.'

'I can answer for it that Linda knew nothing about it, anyhow,' said Lord Keswick, too lazy to argue the question of Mr. Howard's guilt or innocence.

'Pray do not call the girl by her Christian name,' said Lady Grassmere. 'It is not the proper thing to

do, now that you are no longer engaged to her. I am not blaming her. She seems to me to have acted very rightly in the matter; and I understood you to say that she had entirely released you from your engagement.'

'Oh, yes; she says the whole thing is off. I don't think she ever was very keen about it, you know. All the same, it don't look well to throw her over the moment one hears that all the money is not there. And to tell the honest truth, mother, I really am awfully fond of Linda.'

'Fond of her!' ejaculated Lady Grassmere, with an indescribable accent of contempt. 'What do you mean? Surely you can't have been such an idiot as to fall in love with the girl?'

'Not quite that, I think,' answered Lord Keswick, laughing a little shamefacedly; 'but I like her better than I shall ever like anyone else; and that goes for something, you know, when it is a question of a companion for life. And I'll tell you what—I'm sick of this marrying for money. It's too confoundedly base and mean; and—and it's beneath me; and if you prevent my marrying Linda you needn't ask me to make up to any more heiresses, for I tell you plainly I won't do it. I'd rather starve, by Jove!'

'Go away,' said Lady Grassmere, with an exhausted wave of her hand. 'Go to Russia, and talk rubbish to the Russians, if you think they will stand it. In my present weak state I can't. Go away; and thank Heaven that you have a mother to keep you from making a fool of yourself. Go to Russia.'

And the upshot of it was that Lord Keswick went. He protested—with some energy at first, but more feebly afterwards—and finally gave way, as he had always done, from his childhood, when he had been opposed with any approach to determination. Matrimonial matters were, in truth, as he said to himself, 'not much in his line.' He thought he had understood

what was his duty towards Linda; but perhaps, after all, his mother knew best; and she expressed herself confident of being able to conclude the matter to everybody's satisfaction. Very likely it might be the wisest plan to leave her free to act as she wished. Certainly it would be the least troublesome.

Lady Grassmere, being thus left unfettered, sat down and wrote a short but not unfriendly note to Linda, in which she spoke of the engagement as having been dissolved by mutual consent, and expressed her sincere regret that circumstances should have rendered such a step inevitable. 'I blame nobody,' her ladyship was kind enough to say, 'though it does seem strange that your uncle's executors should have made so *extraordinary* a mistake.' Then she expressed a hope that she might meet Miss Howard at some future time, and assured her that she would always be glad to hear of her welfare. Of Mr. Howard and his proffered three thousand a-year she did not deign to speak at all.

All of which Linda, when she received the letter, perfectly understood, and in nowise resented. She had never harboured any illusions upon the subject of Lady Grassmere's friendliness, and she thought it quite natural that that worldly-wise lady should cast her off now that there was nothing to be gained by patronising her. What Lady Grassmere did not know, and never could have been brought to believe, was that Miss Howard, on her side, would not now have consented to marry Lord Keswick. So long as she had felt that she would be inflicting an injury upon one who had been uniformly kind to her by breaking off the match Linda would not allow herself to think of doing so, even though she had found out, to her sorrow, that her heart had gone into the keeping of another man; but now matters were altered—she was once more her own mistress; and it was Lord Keswick's interest as well as hers that their compact should be annulled. Knowing this, Linda was not disposed to be angry with Lady

Grassmere; but Lord Sturdham was highly incensed, as was also Mr. Howard. These two antagonistic natures became almost friendly by reason of their common indignation.

'That woman is absolutely without shame!' exclaimed Lord Sturdham.

'And deuced impertinent into the bargain,' chimed in Mr. Howard.

'A more cruel and heartless letter I never read,' said the one old gentleman.

'And not so much as a thank you for my offer of three thousand a-year!' cried the other. 'It isn't every man who can or will do that much for his daughter. And so Lady Grassmere will find out.'

'Such actions ought not to be allowed to go unpunished,' said Lord Sturdham, emphatically. 'In my young days Keswick would have got the horsewhipping he deserves; but we are too civilised now to take notice of an insult.'

'But, James,' put in Lady Sturdham, 'you forget that it was Linda, not Lord Keswick, who broke off the engagement.'

'Pooh, pooh, my dear, we all know what that means. It sounds better, of course, to say that she took the initiative; but who is likely to believe it? I shall take care to let Grassmere know what I think of his son's conduct; and as for that woman, I must request, Selina, that you will not receive her, or call upon her, when we go to London.'

'Very well, James,' answered Lady Sturdham, submissively—speaking, it may be presumed, with a mental reservation.

'Of one thing,' resumed her indignant lord, 'I am quite convinced, at any rate—that Linda is very well out of this match.'

'Perhaps so,' said Mr. Howard, who was a good deal chagrined at the failure of his scheme, 'perhaps so; but I confess that, for my own part, I do not think

that engagements ought to be lightly entered into or lightly broken. When people are betrothed they have already, in some sort, agreed to take one another for better or worse ; and I do not think they should allow a matter of a few thousands a-year to part them.'

After recording these very creditable sentiments it is painful to have to add that Mr. Howard's application of them to his own case was not so close as it ought to have been. No sooner, indeed, did this bad old man find himself in secure possession of a handsome income for the remainder of his days than he began to cast about him for a decent pretext for getting rid of poor Mrs. Williams, with whom he no longer felt the slightest inclination to encumber himself. With this end in view he despatched to that too confiding lady a long and beautifully worded letter, informing her of the unexpected change in his circumstances, and speaking in a spirit rather of resignation than of joy of the riches and responsibilities which had been shifted from his daughter's shoulders to his own. He had not desired this, he said ; he had been well contented with the peaceful prospect which, previously to the discovery of the will, had seemed to be mapped out for his declining years. But the decrees of heaven were inscrutable: no man could ignore them or fashion his life precisely in the manner most agreeable to himself. Even now he had been compelled unwillingly to acknowledge that the plans which he had formed for the future must be greatly modified, in order to fit in with cares and duties which it would be wrong in him to neglect. He had for many years carefully watched the course of English politics, and he had formed opinions with reference to several important subjects—such as, for instance, the enlargement of the franchise, the relations of labour to capital, and the necessity for a scheme of compulsory education—opinions which he now felt that he ought to give utterance to in the Parliament of the nation. Upon many a man silence

was imposed by the obscurity of his position; but one who, having the power to proclaim his convictions, hesitated to serve his country, in this way, to the best of his ability, was worthy of all blame. Nevertheless, a political career demanded self-abnegation, the abandonment of many innocent recreations, the renunciation of domestic ties—and so forth, and so forth, through six closely-written pages.

But Mrs. Williams was obtuse, and would not understand these delicately veiled hints. She wrote to express her hearty approval of Mr. Howard's resolution. His talents, she declared, she had appreciated from the first, and she was proud to think that they would now be made manifest to the world. Nor need he fear that domestic ties would be any drag upon him. She was not a girl, to want her husband to be for ever at her elbow. It would be enough for her to read his speeches in the papers, and to know that he had a comfortable home to come to when his daily labours were at an end.

It thus became necessary that Mr. Howard should undertake a journey to Brighton, in order to make his meaning more clear; and it will be satisfactory to all lovers of justice to hear that he spent an exceedingly trying day there. At the end of it, however, he left the widow's house free of all entanglements: for a just man and one tenacious of his purpose is to be shaken neither by tears nor by reproaches, nor even by dire threats of legal proceeedings. The latter menace, indeed, Mr. Howard could afford to laugh at, knowing full well that it would never be carried into effect.

'Bring your action by all means, my dear madam, if you choose,' said he, blandly. 'It will give me very great pleasure to pay any damages that may be awarded to you. Only I warn you, as a friend, that you will be universally ridiculed, and that you will never be able to show your face in society again.'

Thus two engagements, contracted out of the love

of money, were broken off by means of the same agency. In both cases greed came off victorious; but in both there was comfort for the losing side; and perhaps Mrs. Williams. when her wounded pride had had time to recover itself, may, like Lord Sturdham, have solaced herself with the reflection that, after all, she was 'well out of it.'

It is to be feared that Mrs. Williams got very little pity or sympathy from Linda. All that wrong-headed young woman's judgments being warped by the primary article of her creed—that papa could do no wrong—it was hardly to be expected that she should view his cruel treatment of the widow with an unprejudiced eye. To her it appeared that everybody had got his and her deserts—everybody, except perhaps one. And who knew but that he, too, might now obtain the object of his wishes—that is, if he still cared about what he had pleaded for with so much earnestness, that hot afternoon, at Southampton? In the meantime sufficient for the day was the joy thereof. To wake up in the morning to the consciousness of freedom; to find all the black clouds that had hung over the future rolling away, and glimpses of a sunny landscape beginning to peep out here and there; to see papa growing rosy and like his old self under the influence of the healthy country life—were not these blessings enough and to spare?

Mr. Howard no longer complained of the dulness of Beechlands. He had made up his mind to go into Parliament; and he talked politics, all day long, with Lord Sturdham, who soon brought him to a sound Conservative way of thinking. He even took trouble to acquire some superficial knowledge of farming, as one who might, some day, find it advisable to become a landowner. He smoked less, only drank a couple of glasses of wine after dinner, and limited himself to one modest brandy-and-soda before going to bed. The man not only had the faculty of adapting himself to

circumstances, but actually could not help so doing. As a future legislator of mature years respectability appeared to him to be the one great thing required of him; and he therefore, to the immense advantage of his health, devoted all his energies towards becoming respectable.

In due course of time his praiseworthy endeavours met with their reward. A vacancy occurring in the representation of Beechampton, Mr. Howard issued his address, and was returned, without a contest, by the docile electors of that sleepy little borough, nobody thinking it worth while to oppose Lord Sturdham's brother-in-law. Whether Mr. Howard's convictions became modified, or whether, upon reflection, he decided that his vote might be more serviceable to his party than his voice, I do not know, but I believe that he has never yet given the world an opportunity of admiring his eloquence. He is, however, a very constant attendant at the House, where he still sits for Beechampton, and where he may be seen most evenings during the session, having his place, at this present time, among the majority, and lustily calling out 'Hear, hear!' at the proper moment. He is a very well-dressed, sprightly old gentleman, much esteemed, both in the House and out of it, and a standing refutation of the calumnies of those envious persons who pretend that wealth exercises a debasing influence upon its owners. Beechampton is proud of its member, who is always affable with his constituents, and spends his money like a gentleman, and the Conservative party is not likely to lose the seat during his lifetime.

But this is advancing matters. Mr. Howard did not make his bow to the Speaker till nearly a twelvemonth later than the time with which we are now concerned.

CHAPTER XXII

IN KENSINGTON GARDENS

One fine frosty December morning Linda found herself once more in the house at Lancaster Gate of which she was no longer the undisputed mistress. She and her father were in London for a few days, preparatory to paying a round of promised visits in the country. For it must not be supposed that Miss Howard had ceased to receive invitations, or had been dropped by all her friends, as soon as the change in her circumstances had become known. Heaven forbid! All ladies are not so grasping as Lady Grassmere, nor are all young men so traitorous as Lord Keswick (whose conduct, by the way, had met with universal reprobation); and the hospitable doors of many an English mansion were ready to fly open and admit the dispossessed heiress, whose expectations, it will be observed, were still excellent.

Mr. Howard, then, with his customary liberality, had brought his daughter to town, to buy furs and dresses and bonnets, and whatever other articles of feminine adornment might be necessary to enable her to hold her own amongst the distinguished ladies whom she was about to meet; and, on the morning after his arrival, took his place at the foot of the breakfast-table, while the obsequious Hudson handed him a pile of letters.

Truckling, time-serving Hudson! Used he not once to carry the letters to the other end of the table, and affect not to hear when Mr. Howard asked whether there was anything for him? Did he not, upon one occasion, actually decline to send for the carriage, on the ground that he had received 'no horders' to that

effect from his young mistress? And behold! last night he presented himself deferentially to the new master of the house, with his cellar-book and his keys, respectfully intimating that he hoped to be allowed to keep his situation; and even ventured to put forward, in support of his request, the fact that it had been his good fortune to discover the missing will. How did he find that will? How came he to forget so far what was due to his station as to demean himself by doing the housemaid's work of dusting out drawers? How came the rascal to be prying among the letters and papers of his superiors? Mr. Howard asked no questions, but good-humouredly told the man he might stay as long as he behaved himself. Mr. Howard was too much of a philosopher to quarrel with a servant for paying his humble tribute to the golden image before which all England bows down. Perhaps even you and I are a shade more civil to our friend Jones, now that he has a house in London, a house in the country, and shooting and a yacht, than we used to be when he wore a threadbare coat and spent half the year economising at Brussels—though our daily bread doesn't depend upon Jones's favour. Hudson's past offences were forgotten and forgiven; and as to that question of reading other people's letters, what can you expect, if you will leave your correspondence lying about? (anybody may read mine, and welcome!) And, if Hudson had been dismissed, is it likely that his successor would have proved more scrupulous?

Mr. Howard took his pile of letters from his butler's hand, without any intention of subsequently secreting them, and tossed one out of the packet to Linda as her share.

'It is from Ada Plowden, papa,' said Linda, opening her letter, and glancing at the signature. 'They have come back from their wedding tour.'

'Oh! Sensible girl, that. She has known how to feather her nest.'

'But I didn't think Mr. Plowden was very nice, papa,' observed Linda.

'Thirty thousand a-year is very nice. You can't expect a man to have everything,' said Mr. Howard, reasonably; and Linda went back to her letter, which was written in Ada's accustomed frank spirit.

Mrs. Plowden declared that she was perfectly happy in her new state of life. The honeymoon, thank goodness, was over. It had been a trying time for both of them; but they had emerged from it triumphantly, and had not quarrelled once. Mr. Plowden had had one or two fits of the sulks, but, on being left to himself, had come out of them sheepish and contrite. With careful management there was every hope that these periodical attacks would become less and less frequent, and eventually cease altogether. In the meantime remorse for past misdeeds had taken the form of a shower of diamonds—'which is infinitely preferable to a shower of tears,' said the practical bride. What were Linda's plans for the winter, and was there any chance of their meeting? 'I am dying to show you half-a-dozen dresses which Worth has made for me,' said Mrs. Plowden. 'They are not much trimmed—people are not *wearing* dresses much trimmed, in spite of what the fashion-books say; but the cut of them is a thing to dream of! What do you think of the new colour? Some people think it is too *voyant* for a whole costume; but I must say I like something bright,' &c., &c. The remainder of the letter was entirely taken up with matters of a like absorbing interest. Then came the following postscript: 'By-the-bye, I hear your old friend, George Mainwairing, is making himself awfully unpopular with the whole county. He shuts himself up completely; won't hunt, won't shoot, won't do anything, except play that weary old fiddle from morning to night. *Entre nous*, I don't believe he and I would ever have got on together, even if he had asked me.

I was quite convinced that he never intended to do that before I consented to marry Mr. Plowden; so you may say "Sour grapes," if you like; but it is, nevertheless, quite true that I am thankful things have turned out as they have done.'

So Mrs. Plowden, too, considered herself 'well out of it.'

'I think, papa,' said Linda, looking up from her letter, 'I think I will walk over to South Kensington this morning and see Ada.'

And I would not undertake to say that Mrs. Plowden's postscript had nothing to do with Miss Howard's desire to visit her friend. Linda had received no communication, direct or indirect, from Mainwairing since the day when she had driven away in Lady Sturdham's carriage and left him standing, hat in hand, on the highroad; and it must be confessed that his silence had caused her some surprise. She had heard of him, indeed, through Ada Tower, who had described him, in her letters, as much changed, and by no means improved; and who had, no doubt, also informed him of Linda's loss of fortune, and consequent rupture with Lord Keswick; but, if so, the news had not affected him in such a manner as might have been anticipated. He had neither written to Linda nor sought her out, which surely he would have done had his love been so unalterable as he had professed it to be. Could he really have forgotten so soon? It was not surprising that this question should have occasioned Linda some perplexity and a good deal of secret unhappiness. She had given her whole heart to this man, deeming that she had a right to do so, having heard from his own lips that he loved her; and as the weeks and months passed on, and he made no sign, the hopes which had gladdened her when she first became free again faded away, and left her almost as sad as she had been in the days of her wealth. But, if she suffered, she at least took care that no one should know it. Outwardly she

was more cheerful and bright than she had been for some time past; she talked a good deal, laughed as much as she could, and never lost an opportunity of amusing herself. And I daresay she often cried herself to sleep. But she never tried to put Mainwairing out of her thoughts. She thought no shame of loving him since he had once loved her. If he did so no longer that was a misfortune; but it could make no difference in her feelings. Her pride was a little hurt, but her heart was steadfast.

So Linda set out to walk across Kensington Gardens; and as she tripped briskly along under the leafless trees, with the blue sky overhead and the sunlight, yellowed by the London mist, shining palely on the frozen ground, she wondered why it was that Mr. Mainwairing held aloof from the society of his neighbours. According to Mrs. Plowden's account he was evidently not happy in his mind; but what cause for unhappiness he could have, save one, which, if it existed, he had it in his own power to remove, Linda could not imagine. And while she was still debating this question a quick footfall rang on the ground behind her, came nearer, overtook her, stopped with a sudden jerk—and, lo and behold! there was the man himself.

No two people could have looked less pleased at meeting one another than did Linda and Mainwairing. Both their faces assumed an expression of constraint and annoyance, and both of them glanced instinctively to right and left, as if in search of some way of escape. But as it was equally impracticable for them to take to their heels in different directions and to pass on without a word, Mainwairing bowed, and Linda, laughing rather uneasily, remarked—

'We seem fated to meet unexpectedly, Mr. Mainwairing, I did not know you were in London.'

'I only came up last night,' he said. 'I did not

know you were here either, or I should have put off coming.'

This was at all events candid. Linda could only survey Mr. Mainwairing with raised eyebrows of astonishment.

'Is it rude to say so?' he asked. 'If it is I beg your pardon. I fancied you would understand why it must be painful to me to see you. Some day or other I hope we shall be good friends again and meet often; but it would be absurd in me to pretend that I am capable of that kind of thing just yet.'

'Why should we not be good friends?' asked Linda, demurely, drawing patterns on the path with the point of her umbrella. 'What have I done?'

'Done? Oh, nothing. You don't think I am sulky because I can't have what I want, surely? I am not such a fool as that. Only I think it is better that we should not meet just at present. Suppose you had lost a friend or a relation—your father, let us say, for I believe you are fonder of him than of anybody—you would like to go away for a time, would you not? You couldn't go about your ordinary occupations in the house where he had died just at first. You couldn't see your friends, and play the piano, and order the dinner, as if nothing had happened. But in a year, or in two years, you would be able to go back and sit in his chair, and drink his wine, and give dinner-parties in his dining-room, as other people do whose relations have been dead a reasonable time. I don't say you would love him or regret him less, but you would have got accustomed to doing without him. Of course you would. People can't pass their whole lives in lamenting the dead; and I don't mean to nurse my sorrow for ever. But I must have a little time. I am still sore and down in the mouth and aching all over. Let me sit in my corner and rub myself and moan for a bit, and presently I shall get up, with a shake and a

sigh, and nobody will suspect what a beating I have had.'

Linda continued to prod the earth with great diligence, but a smile was hovering about the corners of her mouth. 'I couldn't help refusing you——' she said at last, very slowly.

'I know that—I know that.'

'Because I was engaged to Lord Keswick at the time, and——'

'And you didn't care a button for Lord Keswick at the time; so that that had not much to do with it that I can see. Well, well, I am glad you are not going to marry him, at all events. Whoever your husband may be, Miss Howard, I hope you will love him.'

'Perhaps I shall never marry at all,' suggested Linda, gravely.

Mainwairing smiled with melancholy incredulity. 'The time will come, Miss Howard,' said he, 'and the man too. I am not going to be jealous of him—not even in the depths of my heart—only, when he comes, I hope he will be good enough for you.'

This was very magnanimous, but a little bit exasperating. How dense Mr. Mainwairing seemed to have become! 'Must I propose to him myself?' inwardly ejaculated Linda, in despair. 'I can't marry the man,' she said at length, 'if—if he won't ask me.'

Something in her voice made Mainwairing start as if he had been shot. 'Linda!' he exclaimed, in a tone of such agitation that it sounded almost like anger, 'what do you mean?'

She said nothing, but she looked up, for the first time, and her eyes met those of her questioner.

Two umbrellas fell to the ground with a simultaneous clatter, and lay, prone and unheeded, where they had fallen. For Mainwairing had seized Linda by both her hands, and in such an attitude a knobby

umbrella-handle is an impediment best cast away. There they stood, face to face at last, gazing into one another's faces in speechless happiness, and looking, from the further end of the long wintry avenue, like nothing so much as a capital H. Corporal Larkins of the Scots Fusilier Guards, who happened to be taking a walk at the time with an attendant nursemaid, descried the couple from afar and pointed them out to his companion, with a chuckle.

'Well, I'm sure!' observed that young person, very properly shocked. 'She ain't shy—*she* ain't!'

'Won't she just get snuff when her ma comes round the corner and ketches her!' says the jocular corporal, as the intervening trees shut out this interesting tableau.

Let us, too, saunter on behind the hulking soldier and study the fit of his scarlet tunic, or the amazing amount of grease on his hair, or Susan's sealskin jacket (how is it that all the cooks and all the nurses have got sealskin jackets?), or anything else you please, for the next few minutes. By the time that we have taken a turn or two Mainwairing's conversation and Linda's may have assumed a form more likely to interest the general reader.

They are walking along quite soberly, side by side, now, having picked up their respective umbrellas and awakened to the consciousness that Kensington Gardens are open to the public, which is in the habit of making use of its privilege.

'But what made you say you hated me?' he asked.

'I never said anything of the kind.'

'Yes, you did; I solemnly declare you did—or something to that effect, at any rate.'

'I don't know what I said,' confessed Linda. 'I had to get rid of you, you see, and that was all I thought about.'

'And so you told those abominable—you equivo-

cated in that shameful manner, just to serve your own purposes. Oh, Linda, to think that you could fib in that calm way!'

'I wasn't calm,' exclaimed Linda, indignantly. 'How can you say I was calm, when you know you yourself thought I was going to faint? I believe I should have fainted if the road had not been so dusty, and if I hadn't been afraid of somebody coming.'

'You really did care a little about me, then?'

'Don't you think you might have guessed that?'

'No; not when you went on asseverating that you couldn't bear the sight of me. It was all very well to dissemble your love, but why did you give me that emphatic moral kicking downstairs? I never was so humiliated in all my life.'

'And were you very unhappy?'

'Well, yes. I don't mind admitting to you, in strict confidence, that the last four months have been about the most miserable I have ever spent.'

'And do you forgive me now?'

'Forgive you!——'

Here it seems advisable to make another pause. Nobody wants to look on at a love scene: such intrusions are hardly fair to the actors, and are productive of very little amusement to bystanders. And perhaps, all things considered, the pause may as well be converted into a full stop. The moment is a propitious one. Nearly all the persons with whom we have been concerned are in an enviable state of bliss and prosperity. Nearly all of them are looking forward to a future full of bright promises. Above all, nearly all of them have got their pockets full of money. Is it not best to take leave of them at once, lest they invest their treasure in foreign securities, or fall ill, or otherwise encounter troublous times, and so we part from them in sorrow?

Troubles enough, no doubt, are in store for them

all, as for all human creatures. Let us hasten to drop the curtain while as yet the sun shines in an unclouded sky, and the bride smiles under her orange-blossoms, and the little boys at the church-door *hooray*, and the organ thunders out the Wedding March.

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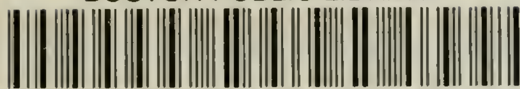
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