JOSEPH WILMOT;

OR, THE

MEMOIRS OF A MAN-SERVANT.

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INDEX TO THE ENGRAVINGS.

INDEX TO THE LADY'S BOOK.

INDEX TO VOL. I.

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CHAPTER I.

THE SCHOOL.

I WAS fifteen years of age when the schoolmaster, at whose establishment I had been brought up from my earliest infancy, was seized with apoplexy and died in a few hours. Beyond this seminary—which was situated in the neighbourhood of Leicester—I had no associations. I never remembered to have been elsewhere: no happy home received me when the half-yearly holidays came round. I never had experienced any parental care: I was told that my father and mother had both perished of some epidemic malady when I was a babe in my cradle. I had no relatives nor friends—at least not to my knowledge: for none

ever came to see me. I was not aware how it had happened that I was placed at this school, nor who paid for my maintenance there. All my experiences were those of a friendless orphan; and I was even ignorant for what profession, trade, or calling I might have been destined—what views might have been entertained concerning me—and whether there were persons in the world sufficiently interested in me to have any such views at all.

Mr. Nelson's academy was what might be termed a second-rate one,—the boys for the most part consisting of tradesmen's sons; and thus the education we received was far more of a commercial than of a classical nature. The scholars in the higher classes, however, learnt Latin;—while such accomplishments as drawing and dancing were considered as *extras*, to be paid additionally for,—and for which no provision was made on my account. It was a cheap school, the terms averaging from thirty to thirty-five pounds a year. There were altogether about twenty boarders, and double that number of day-scholars. Mr. and Mrs. Nelson, who kept this seminary, had no children of their own: they were elderly people,—practising a great deal of meanness under the name of economy, and stinting their pupils very much in respect to fare with the pretence of the most sedulous regard for their health. At the same time there was no positive cruelty in their treatment towards us; and during the holidays, when I was the only scholar who, having no home to go to, remained at the academy, I occasionally experienced some little indulgences. For these I was indebted rather to Mr. Nelson than to his wife, he being the kinder of the two. But even if I had been surrounded with all possible comforts, and had found myself the object of the most affectionate attentions,—these could not have compensated for the want of that happy variety and the absence of those cheering influences which are only to be found in the love of parents and in periodical visits to home. My life at school was therefore a monotonous and an unhappy one; and if I were not naturally of a somewhat gay disposition, I should have pined and sickened with sorrow at such a mode of existence. Even as it was, my heart used to be riven with the sorest pangs when "breaking-up day" arrived—when the joyous voices of my school-fellows combined in the thrilling chorus of the holiday songs—when the boxes were packed up, all save *mine*—and when I heard them gleefully telling each other how they should amuse themselves, and what diversions would be certain to await them at the parental dwellings to which they were about to repair. And then, too, when they were all gone and I was left alone in the spacious school-room, how my young heart swelled almost to bursting!—what suffocating sobs rose up in my throat! what bitter scalding tears rained down my cheeks! Some of the boys were wont to promise that they would ask their fathers and mothers to invite "Pretty Joe"—for that was the name by which I was familiarly called—to pass a few days at their house; and at first I was comforted by this prospect of going even amongst strangers: but doubtless the fathers and mothers thought it was quite sufficient to have their own children to keep, to amuse, and to divert, without caring about a stranger-child,—for the invitations never arrived; so that at last, when breaking-up days came round again, and those promises on the part of my young companions were renewed with well-meaning emphasis and generous sincerity, I only acknowledged them with a sad and sickly smile: for I knew that they would not be fulfilled.

I was called Pretty Joe because I was considered to be the best-looking boy in the school. I was not tall for my age—and was slightly built: but I believe I may say without vanity, that I had a very genteel appearance and was symmetrically shaped. I can well remember what I was at fifteen: a profusion of dark hair clustered in natural curls about my head, and was parted over a high pale brow: my dark eyes had an expression of softness, without being absolutely melancholy: my features were delicate, and of even feminine regularity. The boys used to say what nice teeth I had; and for personal cleanliness Joseph Wilmot was invariably quoted by Mrs. Nelson as an example. I was considered to be intelligent and quick; and as I generally mastered my lessons more readily than most of my schoolfellows, I never hesitated to assist them in their tasks. Naturally good-natured and obliging, I was an almost universal favourite; and I do not remember that I was ever bullied or ill-treated by those who were older and bigger than myself.

But I need not dwell at unnecessary length upon that portion of my existence which was passed at school. It was, as I have already said, when I had completed my fifteenth year, that Mr. Nelson was suddenly carried off by apoplexy. This event occurred in the middle of the holidays,—and therefore when all the scholars, with the exception of myself, were away at home. Even before the funeral took place, I overheard the servants saying amongst themselves that Mrs. Nelson did not intend to carry on the school; and then for the first time I began to wonder for what walk of life I was destined. What was to be done with me? Was I to continue under the care of Mrs. Nelson? or should I at last be informed whether I had any friends in the world to take charge of me? I began to experience considerable uneasiness upon these points: for I possessed an intelligence somewhat beyond my years,—but which was nevertheless, in another sense, hampered and confined by the monotonous existence I had led, and by the limitation of my ideas to the narrow walls of that seminary.

The funeral took place—circulars were despatched to the parents of all the boys, intimating that Mrs. Nelson declined carrying on the seminary—and a board was set up in the front garden announcing the premises to be let. The servants received a month's warning to quit; and an upholsterer was sent for to take the furniture on a valuation. Three weeks thus passed after the funeral: and still not a word was dropped to me by Mrs. Nelson in respect to my own fate. Every day I determined to question her—but I dared not: she evidently felt the loss of her husband deeply—though none of her sympathy was bestowed upon me; for if I ventured to accost her, she begged me to go and play and not worry her. Play indeed! I had no one to play with; and even if I had hosts of companions, I felt no inclination for any such

diversion,—being full of anxiety, suspense, and uncertainty in respect to my own lot. Indeed, notwithstanding that my spirits were naturally good, they came not to my succour now: I grew depressed and desponding—and was perhaps more unhappy than I ever yet had been. Methought that the servants looked compassionately upon me; and this circumstance, so far from cheering me, served to deepen the gloom which was settling itself upon my mind: for there seemed something ominous and foreboding in that demonstration of sympathy from quarters where I had never experienced it before.

At length—one morning, nearly a month after the funeral—as I was seated moping in the school-room, which never had appeared so cold and comfortless before, although it was in the middle of summer,—I was sent for into the parlour. There I found Mrs. Nelson, in her widow's weeds, in serious conversation with a stout elderly man, whom I knew to be the grocer that had supplied the school ever since I could remember. He had a harsh and even stern expression of countenance; and as my presence in the parlour at once interrupted the discourse which had been going on, he turned and contemplated me attentively. Mrs. Nelson appeared to watch with some degree of interest the result of this survey, which ended by the grocer giving an ominous and solemn shake of the head.

"You don't think he will suit, Mr. Jukes?" said the widow, in a low mysterious voice, but nevertheless perfectly audible to me, as I stood with my cap in my hand in the middle of the room: for I was not asked to sit down, and I did not dare do so of my own accord.

"He is too slight and delicate for my business, ma'am," replied the grocer. "You know, as I have already told you, I don't want an extra hand at all at this present moment: but if I could have obliged one who has been a good customer to me—particularly under present circumstances"—and he glanced at the mourning garments which the widow wore—"I should have been glad to take him. But he couldn't carry a heavy basket about; and he's of no use unless he could. Besides, ma'am, he's too genteel for the grocery and cheesemongering line: we want strong boys—not slender and pretty ones."

I felt that I had become pale as death while Mr. Jukes was thus speaking: my heart sank within me—a cold tremor came over me—I literally shivered: for the truth of my position was now revealed in all its utter dreariness. I had indeed no friends!—not a being in the world appeared to be interested in me—no, not even the schoolmistress herself, by whom I had been brought up: for she was evidently making the attempt to get rid of me by thrusting me into the service of one who did not want my assistance. She threw a quick sidelong glance towards me. At that moment the tears were trickling down my cheeks; and being slightly touched by my emotions, she said, "You can sit down, Joseph."

"Don't you think, ma'am," asked Mr. Jukes, "that he had better leave the parlour for a few minutes while we talk the matter over?"

"Yes, to be sure—it would be better," answered the widow: then, turning to me, she added, "Go back to the school-room for a little while, Joseph—but keep in the way, as you may perhaps be wanted again presently."

I accordingly issued from the parlour, closing the door behind me: but the moment I stood in the passage outside, I was seized with an irresistible curiosity—indeed, an intense anxiety—to learn the nature of the discussion about to take place between those two persons who had suddenly revealed themselves in the light of the arbiters of my destiny. I therefore applied my ear to the keyhole; and, with suspended breath, lost not a syllable of the conversation which immediately followed my departure from the room.

"But if you cannot take him, Mr. Jukes," asked the widow, "what on earth am I to do with him? It's impossible for me to keep the poor boy. Mr. Nelson has left me with means comparatively limited; and, as you know, I am going to reside with my maiden sister at Liverpool. I must set off to-morrow—all my arrangements are made—and she will expect me at a given hour. Something *must* be done with Joseph before I leave."

"But why, ma'am," asked the grocer, "did you push it off to the last moment?"

"Why, you see," rejoined the widow, "I waited the result of those advertisements that I had put into the London papers, calling upon Joseph's unknown friend or relative, or whatever he is, to come forward. But there has been no answer; and as I have already told you, two half-years have now elapsed without the usual remittance. So I suppose the person who used to make it, is either dead, or else wilfully intended to throw the boy on the hands of poor dear Mr. Nelson and myself."

"But have you no clue, ma'am?" inquired Mr. Jukes: "have you no means of fathoming this mystery?"

"Not the slightest," responded the widow. "I have already explained to you that the half-yearly payments used to be made through the London agent of the Leicester bank: no name was ever given—and from the very first moment that Joseph, when only a year old, was entrusted to our charge, no inquiry has ever been made concerning him."

"Then the payments themselves," observed Mr. Jukes inquiringly, "must have been effected in ignorance of whether the boy was alive or dead."

"Not exactly so," answered Mrs. Nelson: "for it was an understood thing from the very outset, that the London agent of the Leicester bank should only continue to receive the half-yearly amounts so long as no intimation was given that farther payments were rendered unnecessary by the boy's death."

"And do you not remember, ma'am," asked the grocer, "sufficient of the personal appearance of the female who entrusted the child to your care, to be enabled to take some measures to trace her out?"

"I never saw her face," responded Mrs. Nelson: "our interview did not last many minutes—and she was veiled the whole time she was here. The fact is, poor Mr. Nelson and myself would not have taken the child under such mysterious circumstances—only that we were pressed for money at the time. A hundred guineas were offered as a sort of premium, or earnest of good faith in the matter; and we naturally reasoned that those who were interested in the child, would not display

such liberality if they harboured the intention of ultimately throwing him entirely upon our hands."

"And do you think, ma'am, that it was the mother herself who brought you the child?"

"Certainly not. She was a lady—or at all events a superior kind of person: but that she was *not* the parent, I am well convinced, as she exhibited no kind of emotion on leaving the infant with me. And a mother, you know, Mr. Jukes, could not have behaved thus callously."

"One would think not," remarked the grocer: "but who knows?"

"Well, it's of no use," resumed Mrs. Nelson, "to discuss the past: it is the present which demands my attention. Of course I cannot maintain the boy: it is quite sufficient to lose a year's keep for him,—for it is not only his food, but his clothes and pocket-money that I am thus robbed of. I repeat, therefore, something must be done with him to-day. The servants will all leave to-morrow morning—the house will be shut up—the keys will be given to the landlord—and I am to be off by an early coach. Surely, Mr. Jukes, you could manage to place the boy in some respectable situation? There's Thompson the linendraper, for instance: he has had a great deal of my money——"

"Useless, ma'am, to think of it!" ejaculated Jukes. "It was but last Monday I asked Thompson to take a nephew of mine—just such another boy as this Wilmot in personal appearance: but he refused. Trade is getting bad; and shopkeepers, instead of taking fresh hands, are discharging old ones. For my part I don't know what you are to do with the boy: unless——"

At this moment I heard one of the servants descending the stairs; and I was compelled to make a precipitate retreat into the school-room, for fear of being caught in the unworthy position of a listener. When there, I sat down at one of the desks—buried my face in my hands—and cried bitterly. Oh! how cold went the iron of my neglected condition into my very soul: but every syllable of the conversation I had just overheard, was scared as it were with *another* iron that was red hot, upon my brain;—and there it burnt as if eating its way in, accompanied with excruciating tortures. For a moment I thought of flying back to the parlour—falling on my knees at Mrs. Nelson's feet—and beseeching her not to turn me adrift upon a world of which I was ignorant, but the bitter bleakness of which I already more than half suspected. Yet on maturer reflection I dared not take that step: I saw that it would be tantamount to a confession that I had played the part of an eaves-dropper—that I had listened at the door. Good heavens! what would become of me? My young heart wept tears of blood. I was too inexperienced to conjecture for an instant what motive there could have been for my parents to have abandoned me: and I asked myself why they had done so? Some secret voice, speaking within me, appeared to say that I had been cheated with the tale of their death; and perhaps it was a consolation to which I clung, to reflect that they might after all be still alive, and that sooner or later I should know them and be acknowledged by them.

At the expiration of a few minutes after I had thus sought the school-room, one of the maid-servants came to tell me that I was to return to the parlour: and she added—methought with a look of deep commiseration—"You are going away presently, Joseph. I have orders to pack up your box."

"But where am I going?" I asked eagerly.

"I do not know," she replied. "Mr. Jukes, I think, is going to take you somewhere——most likely," she added after a pause, and with a still more significant glance of sympathy, "to his own house."

I hurried to the parlour, composing my features as well as I could, so as not to betray that by listening at the door I had come to a knowledge of facts so strange and new, and at the same time so replete with a mournful interest for myself. Mrs. Nelson and Mr. Jukes were seated with that air of silent seriousness which people always adopt when they have made up their minds to a particular course, and have to announce it to the individual whom it concerns. As for myself, I experienced a sensation of mingled awe and fright: for young though I was, I knew but too well, and felt but too keenly, that this was an important era in my life, and that perhaps all my future destiny might hinge upon the circumstances of the present moment.

"Sit down, Joseph," said Mrs. Nelson: "I have something particular to communicate. I am sorry to say, my poor boy, that you have no friends in the world; and I am compelled to cease to be one towards you. I wish it was otherwise——I really do——but we cannot alter the course of events. You are going to leave me, Joseph——I dare say you have already suspected as much, from what was just now remarked in your presence. Mr. Jukes will take you somewhere——But *he* will explain, Joseph: it is not necessary for me to say any more. So come and wish me good bye; and here is something to put in your pocket."

The tears were running down my cheeks: for Mrs. Nelson's words had terribly confirmed—if indeed any such confirmation were wanting—the previous idea which I had already conceived of my utter friendlessness. It struck me that she herself was moved, as much as so selfish, mean, and mercenary a woman could possibly be affected; and as she shook me by the hand, she left half-a-crown in it.

"Now, my boy," said Mr. Jukes, rising from his seat, "we will be off. I suppose your box is all ready; and I have got my chaise-cart at the door."

"Good bye, Joseph," again said Mrs. Nelson. "Be a good boy; and——"

"Oh, ma'am!" I exclaimed, feeling as if my heart were ready to burst: for now that I was about to part from her, it seemed as if she suddenly stood in the light of a friend—the only friend, too, that I had in the world; and it was natural that I should thus regard her in that moment of my ineffable anguish; for with her I had been brought up from my infancy:—"Oh, ma'am! pray do not send me away from you—pray don't! I will do anything I can, to help to earn my own living: but pray let me go with you—or let me come after you! I will walk, to save expense, and if you will tell me the road——But don't send me away—pray, pray don't!"

"My poor boy," answered Mrs. Nelson—and I

think she put her handkerchief to her eyes: indeed, I should be sorry for the credit of humanity in general, and of her own sex in particular, if I were mistaken: "it cannot be! I am too poor to maintain you. Good bye:"—and turning abruptly away, she passed hurriedly into the back parlour, closing the door behind her.

I was about to precipitate myself after her,—when Mr. Jukes caught me by the arm, saying gruffly, "Come now—it's no use your making all this bother: you must go."

His manner frightened me; and the dismay which I experienced suddenly stopped my weeping, and stupified me as it were into an unnatural calmness. Still holding me by the arm, he led me out of the house, and helped me to ascend into his chaise-cart, which was standing at the front garden gate. The housemaid brought out my box; and shaking me by the hand, she said, "Good bye, Joseph:"—then, as she turned abruptly away, I heard her murmur, "Poor boy!"—and I saw that she applied the corner of her apron to her eyes.

Mr. Jukes, having also mounted the cart, drove off; and I longed to ask him whither he was going to take me: for I felt assured that the *somewhere* alluded to by Mrs. Nelson, did not refer to his own house. But I dared not put the question: he looked so harsh and stern—while his compressed lips gave him an appearance as if he were in a measure angry with me for something, but for what I could not conjecture. The school was situated nearly three quarters of a mile out of the city; and during the drive, my reflections were as painful as they were varied. A horrible uncertainty filled my soul; and then I thought that at the very moment when I was thus being turned adrift from the only place that I had ever known as a home, all my late school-companions were happy and comfortable at *their* homes, with affectionate parents and amidst kind friends. Oh, how hard was my lot!—worse than a known and positive orphanage: for if my parents were alive, I was discarded by them—abandoned—cast off!

The vehicle entered the city, and presently halted in front of a large gloomy-looking building, the immediate contemplation of which filled me with some vague and undefined feeling of dread. Mr. Jukes, leaping out of the cart, rang the bell; and a wicket-gate was opened by a very old man with a most repulsive countenance, but who touched his hat respectfully to the grocer.

"Now, Joseph—this is the place," said the latter individual: "look alive and jump down—for I am rather in a hurry."

"But what place is this, sir?" I asked, with a strong shuddering recoil from the entrance of the gloomy building, as I alighted from the cart.

"What place is it?" repeated Mr. Jukes: then drawing me a little on one side, he said, "You see, my boy, you have got no friends to take care of you; and I am one of the guardians of all poor people who are in such a condition as yourself, or in a like one. You will be well taken care of here, and in a short time apprenticed to a trade—so that you will be able to come out of the establishment altogether in a year or two, and do something to earn your own living."

"But what place *is* it, sir?" I demanded, with the energy and firmness of desperation.

"What place is it?" he again repeated, and now more gruffly than before. "Why, what the deuce place should it be but the Workhouse?"

This name—this horrible name—was associated in my mind with everything degrading, wretched, cruel, and hopeless. I almost shrieked out as it smote my ear, and as the cause of the maid-servant's sympathy at the school flashed to my mind. She, poor creature, evidently knew or else suspected that I was to be taken to the workhouse:—if she had not been told so, she doubtless conjectured it from the circumstance of Mr. Jukes being a guardian of the poor. I fell down upon my knees and besought him not to compel me to enter that dreadful place. He gave vent to an oath—seized me again by the arm—forced me to rise—and began to drag me towards the wicket-gate at which stood the porter with the repulsive countenance. I felt as if I were being borne to a place of execution, or to be immured in a living tomb. Again did the energy of despair seize upon me: I burst away from Mr. Jukes—sped along with the fleetness of an arrow shot from a bow——yes, I fled as if it were for life or death; and turning round a corner, was in a few moments out of his sight. I looked back: he either was not pursuing me, or else I had so far distanced him that he had not as yet reached the corner; and I continued to dash along as if blood-hounds were on my track. On, on I went: several people whom I passed, stood still in amazement: with two or three I came in violent collision;—still I put forth all my speed, and at length gained the open country. But I ran on until, thoroughly exhausted, I sank down upon the green sward under a hedge.

CHAPTER II.

LONDON.

I DID not remain longer in that shady retreat than was absolutely necessary for the recovery of my breath: but when I resumed my flight, it was at a less precipitate pace. I reached a main road, and pursued it without any settled purpose in view—without even knowing in which direction it led. Presently I beheld a milestone, which indicated that the distance was ninety-eight miles to London. London!—that word suddenly became full of a magical interest for me. Was it not in London that such scope was offered for the enterprising and persevering spirit? was it not thither that friendless outcasts like myself had bent their way to find the streets paved with gold, and to bask in the sunlight of Fortune's smiles? Where could I hope to succeed, if not in London? where could I expect to earn my bread, if not in the metropolis? Besides, as Robinson Crusoe was haunted by images of Cannibal Indians at every turn on his lonely isle, so was I haunted by the image of Mr. Jukes; and the idea of being overtaken and conveyed to that dreadful workhouse, made me long to place as great a distance as possible between myself and the city of Leicester. In my inexperience I knew not how much trouble Mr. Jukes might give himself to find me; and I thought he would take a great deal more pains than it was at all probable he did. In London, therefore, did

I hope to be safe from his pursuit: for I had a sufficient idea of the vastness of the capital to know that one miserable item of the immense mass of humanity might shroud himself there from the knowledge of his pursuers. So my resolve was taken; and to London would I proceed!

Somewhat cheered by the prospect of shortly beholding that mighty city which was associated in my mind with all possible attributes of splendour, wealth, encouragement, and hope, I pursued my way,—accomplishing three or four miles without feeling much weariness, and experiencing a proportionate elevation of the spirits, the greater the distance that grew between me and Leicester. And yet my position was one which had little or nothing satisfactory in it, if properly contemplated. My box was of course left behind in the cart: I had nothing but what I stood upright in—not a single change of linen; and only half-a-crown in my pocket—that half-crown which Mrs. Nelson had given me at parting. It was my every-day suit that I wore; and it was shabby enough: for my best clothes were in my box—and my *exit* from the school had been too hurried, as the reader has seen, to allow me to change my garments. But for the first few miles these circumstances did not trouble me. When wearied, I entered a field and threw myself on the grass to rest. Sleep came upon me; and when I awoke, I found that I had slumbered for many hours, as the sun was now tinging the western horizon with hues of purple, and orange, and gold.

I rose up: my limbs felt stiff—and there was a certain despondency in my soul; for the night was coming—I knew not how to obtain a bed—and I feared to roam in the dark. All the horrible tales of robbery and murder which I had ever heard or read, crowded into my mind; and it did not occur to me that people were only murdered when they offered a resistance which a boy like myself would be incapable of showing, and when it was believed that they had about their persons something worth the perpetration of such a crime. I continued my way: the evening closed in—the twilight gradually disappeared—the dusk deepened around me. I kept in the middle of the road, so as to guard against a surprise in case anybody should leap out from the hedge upon me. Presently I heard the clatter of wheels and horses' feet coming from behind. I stood aside—a post chaise-and-four was shooting past me, when I thought that I might have a ride for nothing, and moreover that there would be protection and safeguard on the part of the postilions riding the horses and the people seated within the vehicle. I accordingly sprang up behind; and in this manner proceeded about six miles, until the chaise halted at a town to change horses. Then I got down—walked rapidly onward—and had just cleared the buildings of the place, when the chaise overtook me again. I resumed my seat behind; and in this way—adopting a similar course at the next halting-place—I managed to ride altogether twenty miles; so that I was now twenty-five from Leicester and seventy-four from London. But the chaise went no farther; and I walked on, vainly expecting that it would overtake me once more. I continued my course deep into the night, until thoroughly exhausted; and then entering a field, slept beneath a haystack. When morning came, I washed myself as well as I could in a rivulet; and proceeding to the nearest village, purchased a penny roll, which I eat ravenously. I longed for better fare—but was determined to husband my resources.

I will not go on recording every minute detail of my journey to London. Suffice it to say that by dint of walking until the soles of my shoes were worn through—by getting an occasional ride behind a carriage, or a lift in some good-natured person's cart—after sleeping by night in the fields—and all the time eking out my slender pecuniary means as well as I was able,—I came in sight of the great metropolis at about seven o'clock on the fourth morning after my flight from Leicester. Though well-nigh beaten with fatigues which I was scarcely strong enough to endure, I nevertheless felt my spirits elate with hope as I walked on; and at length began to enter the outskirts of London. I almost fancied that I should at once be accosted by some benevolent person who, inquiring into my circumstances, would offer me a situation by which I could earn my bread: but gradually as I drew farther and farther towards the heart of the metropolis, the thought crept into my mind that everybody appeared too much intent upon the hurry and bustle of his own affairs, to give any attention to those of a stranger. I felt sadly wearied, and excessively hungry. Presently I saw by the prices marked up in a humble coffee-house window that I could have a good breakfast for fourpence. I examined the state of my finances, and found that I had exactly tenpence remaining: so I entered—and being served with some tea and bread-and-butter, made a hearty meal. When I had done, I thought that I would inquire of the people of the house if they knew where I could procure a situation of some kind: I did not care what, so long as I could earn my bread. But then I reflected that as my clothes were in sad disorder through sleeping in the fields and my long fatiguing travels, it would be necessary to make such improvement as I could in my personal appearance before seeking for employment. It was some time ere I could muster up courage or induce myself to inquire if I could be allowed the use of a chamber to wash myself in: and when I did, I was eyed suspiciously: but after some little demur, it was intimated that on the payment of sixpence my wish should be complied with. This was all I had left: but feeling confident of succeeding in my aim ere nightfall, and having the whole day before me for the search,—considering too how necessary it was to make myself as decent as I possibly could,—I paid the fee, receiving the accommodation I required. By means of soap and water, a clothes-brush, and a hair-comb, I did effect a considerable change in my looks; and as no one could see how the soles of my shoes were worn through, I felt comfortable and full of cheerfulness. Before, however, I descended from the room to which I had been shown, the landlady of the place instituted the most searching scrutiny, even to the very sheets of the bed; and I felt much shocked as the idea flashed to my mind that she fancied I might have stolen something. Indeed, I made some remark upon the subject,—when she coolly and frankly declared there were so many young thieves about, who came in such specious guises and with all possible pretexts, that it was necessary to take this precaution. Having thus got her into

conversation, I told her that I had come up from the country to seek my fortune in London—at which she smiled; and when I asked her if she could recommend me to a place of some kind or another, she laughed outright. Abashed, and suddenly dispirited, I said no more—but quitted the house.

Plunging still deeper into the maze of London—and after looking wistfully into many shops with the idea of entering and renewing my inquiries for employment—I at length mustered up courage to walk into a chemist's; for the man whom I saw behind the counter, had something benevolent in his look. I however experienced a refusal far more abrupt than I had anticipated from an individual of his appearance; and continuing my way, called and repeated the same inquiry at several other shops. Everywhere I met a negative response,—sometimes delivered civilly enough—at others with more or less curtness—in one or two instances characterized by downright brutality. My hopes subsided: my apprehensions increased. There was I, a friendless and a penniless wanderer in the streets of the metropolis: hunger was gaining upon me: and then came the thought of where I was to lay my head throughout the night that was approaching,—for there were no fields at hand, wherein to stretch my weary limbs beneath a haystack! It is true, I had not literally believed, as Dick Whittington did, that the streets were paved with gold: but I had certainly fancied that London presented such numerous opportunities for willing industry to push its way, that not more than a few hours would elapse ere I should find myself in a position to earn my bread. But there I was,—stupified and bewildered by the din and bustle going on around me—stunned by the incessant din sustained by countless vehicles of all kinds, from the splendid equipage dashing past, to the cumbrous wain laden with merchandize, and with its team toiling laboriously along—in the midst too of the busiest population that any city under the sun possesses—men, women, and children hurrying hither and thither, and all seeming intent upon affairs of vital import,—there was I, as completely alone in the heart of all this noise and turmoil as if I had been standing on the summit of a barren rock in the middle of a vast ocean whose heaving billows and careering waves were flowing, and tossing, and surging up around!

Never shall I forget any one incident, thought, or feeling which I experienced on this memorable day,—the first day of my acquaintance with London! It is a date indelibly fixed upon my memory,—to which all that has yet been narrated served but as mere prefatory matter, and which may therefore be deemed the starting-point of my history. It was the 28th of July, 1836. But let me continue. I wandered on and on—I rambled hither and thither—I roamed through square and street, lane and alley—I crossed bridges: in that one day I saw more of what may be termed the exterior aspect of London, than many of its inhabitants usually behold in a month. Evening came; and the shops began to blaze with gas, while the lamps were lighted in the streets. I was famished with hunger, and half dead with fatigue. I knew not what to do. I would have digged if anybody had given me the work to perform: but to beg I was ashamed. And yet this latter alternative appeared my only resource!

The thousand clocks of the mighty metropolis were proclaiming the hour of ten, as I seated myself—or rather fell down, upon the steps of a door in a somewhat obscure street, and where the houses were of a mean description compared with those of the thoroughfares immediately contiguous. Not many persons were passing that way; and those who were, took no notice of me. I had already seen enough of London to be aware that the spectacle of poverty, rags, and distress must be too familiar to the view of its inhabitants to arrest much attention; and as I now began to reflect on the swarms of mendicants I had seen about the streets during this memorable day, I was lamentably disabused of my magnificent ideas of the universal prosperity, as well as of the general scope for the exercise of honest industry, which I had believed to exist in the metropolis.

While I was still seated on that door-step,—and with difficulty keeping down the tears that gushed up to the very brims of my eyes, as if they came from the fountains of the heart,—I observed that I had become the object of attention on the part of an individual whose appearance, as seen by an adjacent lamp, would under any other circumstances have made a ludicrous impression on me: but I was now too thoroughly wretched to experience such an effect. He was tall and thin—apparently about thirty years of age—with a sallow complexion and sandy-white hair. He had small, sharp, piercing gray eyes; and his whiskers, instead of growing continuously from the region of the ear to the chin, were confined to two tufts low down on the lower jaws—or the jowls, to use a somewhat vulgar name. He was dressed in a suit of black, the rustiness and threadbare condition of which were so great as to be easily discerned even in the semi-obscurity of the place. His hat, with very narrow brims, and tapering away towards the crown so as to have a chimney-pot appearance, was napless and battered: but he nevertheless wore it airily perched above his right ear, so as to give himself a jaunty look. His linen was by no means of the cleanest: his shirt-collar was very low, so that the long scraggy neck seemed longer and scraggier still, save in the throat, where it had a lump which looked as if he had swallowed an apple that had stuck half-way down. He wore those shoes which are denominated "high-lows;" and as his trousers were too short for him, the dingy white stockings were seen between. The coat-sleeves were proportionately short,—not reaching even to the wrist: he had no gloves—but carried a stick in one hand, and flourished a gaudy bandanna-handkerchief in the other.

Such was the individual who was thus eyeing me with interest and attention; and as he stood for nearly a couple of minutes with his piercing gray eyes fixed upon me, I had ample leisure to study his appearance in return. At length he accosted me: and laying one of his hands upon my shoulder, said in a quick sharp manner, "You seem in distress, youngster?"

"I am indeed," was my response: and no longer able to subdue my feelings, I burst into tears.

"Now, if this is a dodge," said the singular individual, "it's so uncommon clever that it beats into fits anything I ever knew before; and it *must*

be a deuced clever dodge to come the counterfeit over me:"—then, having again surveyed me very hard for another minute, he cried, "No, it isn't a dodge: it's real! Who are you? where do you come from? and what's the matter with you?"

"I have come from the country," was my answer, "in the hope of finding some employment in London: but I have been disappointed."

"Have you got a character, either written or in the shape of a reference?" demanded my new acquaintance.

"No," I answered most ingenuously. "I did not think it necessary to prove that I was honest, since I have never done anything wrong."

"Green!—green as grass!" ejaculated the man. "But you speak uncommonly well: you are a decent looking boy——Come, tell me—I suppose the fact is you have run away from home?"

"Home!" I echoed, half bitterly, half mournfully. "I have no home."

"Well, but you have been to school—you can read and write, I suppose—and all that sort of thing?"

"I have received a good education," I eagerly replied: for I clutched at the hope that the stranger might help me to some situation. "I have learnt history, geography, arithmetic, the use of the globes, and Latin as far as Ovid's Metamorphoses."

"Then the deuce is in it," quickly exclaimed my new friend, "if we can't metamorphose you into something. Come along with me."

I could have flung my arms round his neck and embraced him,—ugly, sinister-looking, and meanly clad though he were: for I only beheld in him a friend whom heaven had suddenly sent to save me from starvation in the streets. But he did not

afford me an opportunity of bestowing that testimonial of my affectionate gratitude: for, seizing me by the hand, he led me hurriedly along the street. I no longer felt tired—nor did I feel that my feet were cut and bleeding, my shoes and stockings being completely worn through. We passed out of that street, through several thoroughfares, into a maze of lanes and alleys, with numerous courts leading out—and which district my companion informed me was called Clerkenwell. At length we turned into a court narrower and darker than any other which I had as yet seen—and stopped at a door, at which my companion knocked. It was opened by an elderly woman with grizzly gray hair, and whose countenance of flaming red was rendered still more rubicund by the light of the candle which she carried in her hand.

"Lend us this light," said my friend: and snatching it from her, he led me into a room opening from the narrow passage on the ground floor.

CHAPTER III.

MY NEW FRIEND.

The place into which I thus found myself conducted, was dirty to a degree, and wretchedly furnished with a miserable ricketty table, half-a-dozen rush-bottomed chairs in an advanced state of dilapidation, and a desk covered with papers at the curtainless window. A door communicated with an inner room; and as it stood open, I caught a glimpse of a bed stretched upon the floor. Such was the result of the first glance which I threw around: but my attention was speedily called to a more cheering spectacle, as my new friend, opening a cupboard, proceeded to place a loaf, part of a Dutch cheese, and some cold meat upon the table. He then told me to "peg away," while he went and fetched some beer;—saying which, he quitted the house. In a few minutes he returned, bringing a quart of beer in one hand, and a bottle half-filled with spirits in the other. I gladly partook of the former liquor: for now that I was once more seated, I experienced a return of that sense of weariness amounting almost to exhaustion, which had compelled me to sit down upon the door-step where my new acquaintance had found me.

"Now, youngster," he said, so soon as I had finished my supper,—and I believe I never ate so ravenously before in all my life,—"you can go and get to bed as soon as you like; for I see that you are thoroughly knocked up. You may take possession of my crib; and I will make myself a shake-down in this room when I have done my glass and my pipe. We will postpone all talk upon business till to-morrow morning. But, by the bye, what's your name?"

"Joseph Wilmot," I answered.

"And a very fine one it is too—especially the *Wilmot*. Mine is Taddy——Mr. Taddy to those that I am not familiar with; but Tom Taddy to intimate friends. And now good night."

I expressed my thanks to Mr. Taddy for his kindness towards me: he bade me take the candle, as he could smoke and drink in the dark until I had got to bed; and I accordingly retired to the inner room. This contained little more than the bed upon the floor—a large earthenware pan upon a chair, to wash in—and a huge stone jug to contain water. Mr. Taddy's lodging was therefore of the most wretched description: but I was too thankful for having obtained an asylum to suffer myself to find fault with it—and too tired to do so, even if I had been inclined. I lay down; and in a few minutes was fast asleep. When I awoke in the morning, my first impression was that I was still at school, and that I had been hurried through the varied phases of a dream in which whole days appeared to have passed: but as I looked around that wretched room, I was too forcibly reminded of the sad change which had taken place in my condition, to be able to doubt its reality any longer. My heart sickened at the thought; and in comparison with the poverty-stricken place where I now found myself, the dormitory at the school appeared a perfect paradise. In order to escape from the bitterness of my reflections, I rose and dressed myself as quickly as I could; and scarcely had I finished, when Mr. Taddy threw open the door, exclaiming, "Well, youngster, I hope you liked your quarters?"

"Yes, thank you," I answered. "But I do not see where you have slept; and I am afraid that I must have deprived you——"

"Of my bed?" he ejaculated. "Nonsense! I slept where I tumbled down:"—then, perceiving that I was opening my eyes in astonishment, he went on to say, "Yes, it's quite true. I drank all that stuff which the publican calls gin, but which is two-thirds vitriol; and where I fell, there I lay—and there I slept. Now for a wash—then to breakfast—and then to business. You light the fire, Joe; and put the kettle on to boil. You will find a couple of herrings in the cupboard: put them in the skillet, and hang them in front of the fire."

All these instructions I obeyed as well as I was able; and when Mr. Taddy had finished his ablutions, he recreated himself with a pipe until breakfast was ready. All the time the meal lasted, I wondered what could be the nature of that business to which he alluded, and in which I was evidently to play a part. I was not kept very long in suspense: for so soon as I had cleared away the breakfast things, my companion said, "Now, Joe, seat yourself at that desk, and write down something to give me a specimen of your hand."

"What shall I write?" I inquired.

"Anything. Only three or four words, that I may see what sort of a fist you make of it, and whether the coveys that I do business with can read it. Write one or two of your school-copies, if you like, in a good bold round hand. I write such a precious scrawl that I do believe it's the reason my business hasn't taken better than it has; and that's the reason too why I resolved to employ a clerk. So I saw that you were a likely lad to suit me,—and now to work."

I accordingly sat down at the desk; and in pursuance of the hint which Mr. Taddy had given me, I wrote these three favourite school-copies in my best round hand:—"Virtue is commendable."—"Honesty is the best policy."—"Integrity is its own reward." Being well satisfied with my per-

formance, I rather expected to receive the emphatic approval of Mr. Taddy: but when I presented him the paper, and he glanced over its contents, he burst forth into such an immoderate fit of laughter that I was quite confused. He rolled upon his chair—the tears came into his eyes—again and again did the peals of merriment burst forth; and if he had been a stout person, instead of the lean, lank individual he was, he would certainly have gone off in a fit of apoplexy. For five good minutes did this uproarious mirth continue; and even when it began to subside, he could only give utterance to his comments upon my caligraphic performance in broken sentences.

"Capital, youngster!" he cried, "nothing could be better. *Virtue is commendable:*"—and here he literally shrieked out with renewed merriment, "*Honesty is the best policy.* By Jove! you will kill me with laughing. *Integrity is its own reward:*"—and then his merriment exploded in a perfect roar. "However, the writing is admirable; and that is the essential. The texts, I think, we may dispense with in the circulars we have got to write. They won't exactly suit the ladies and gentlemen with whom we have to deal. Now, take your pen; and I will smoke a pipe and dictate at the same time."

I scarcely comprehended the meaning of that violent mirth which my lucubrations had produced: but having no reason to be annoyed, inasmuch as it was better to excite laughter than anger, I took my place at the desk and prepared to write.

"Now then," said Mr. Taddy, "be careful to cross all your *t's* and dot all your *i's*. Are you ready? Well, begin in this way:—Mr. Thomas Taddy, of No. 3, Ragamuffin Court, Saffron Hill, begs to inform ladies and gentlemen who practise the honourable profession of begging, that he has opened an office of the highest respectability for the register of all announcements, wants, interests, and requirements connected therewith. He believes that an establishment of this nature has been long needed in the British metropolis; and in soliciting favours, he will study his best to give perfect satisfaction, Mr. Taddy having much experience in all things regarding the profession. In the first instance, he begs to announce that he has upon his register a number of children to be let out at sixpence a day and their victuals,—some of whom are subject to fits, and will be sure to excite the utmost sympathy. *Item*, Mr. Taddy contracts to furnish toilets of every description of rags and tatters for male and female. Ladies and gentlemen are requested to inspect the goods. *Item*, Mr. Taddy has contracted with a lucifer match manufactory for the supply of a thousand boxes weekly: these are warranted, and would be found a most eligible bargain for ladies and gentlemen making their rounds as *timber-merchants*." *

I had gone on thus far writing in a sort of bewilderment: but at length it struck me that my new acquaintance was naturally a person of a most humorous character, and that this was a joke in which he was indulging. I therefore laid down my pen and made bold to laugh: whereupon Mr. Taddy vociferated in a savage tone, "Fire away, you young rascal—or I will give you something to grin for."

I was astounded and frightened by this sudden change in his mood, and settled myself as soon as possible to continue writing.

"*Item*," he continued, "Mr. Taddy has a hundred thousand varieties of Yards of Song for a Penny, all consisting of ballads by the most eminent authors. *Item*, an inexhaustible supply of Last Dying Speeches and Confessions, with blanks left for the names of the persons who are hanged, and which can readily be stamped in at the shortest possible notice by types in hand for the purpose. *Item*, several well-trained dogs for blind men, with chains and collars, and warranted to lead safely through the most crowded thoroughfares; including a very clever black terrier, uncommonly savage, and will bite the heels of any one who does not drop halfpence into the hat. *Item*, a choice assortment of wooden legs and crutches. Mr. Taddy will undertake to draw up petitions, setting forth the most moving narratives of woe and affliction—likewise begging letters—together with testimonials and recommendations, signed by some of the most eminent persons in the kingdom. Mr. Taddy will undertake to negotiate the sale, hire, or transfer of muddy crossings in great thoroughfares, and will supply brooms at the cheapest rate. He will likewise teach the art of drawing ships in chalk upon the pavement, so as to suit gentlemen who personate shipwrecked mariners. He likewise gives instructions in writing with chalk, so that the student may in three lessons be enabled to write '*I am starving*' with the greatest ease and facility. Gentlemen and ladies having good walks in some parts of the town, and wishing for change of air, may hear of the most eligible beats in other parts of the town, by applying at Mr. Taddy's office. Gentlemen or ladies in trouble, may obtain witnesses either to speak to character or to prove *alibis*, on application at the office,—the rates of payment varying according to the respectability of appearance which the specific peculiarity of cases may render it needful for the witnesses to present."

I was so disgusted with the avocation thus assigned to me, and which I saw to be perfectly serious, that I once more threw down the pen; and starting up from the seat, exclaimed with a firmness which was inspired by indignation and abhorrence, "You may drive me out to starve in the streets—but I will write no more!"

Mr. Taddy likewise sprang up from his chair; but it was to seize my collar with one hand and his stick with the other, and to commence belabouring me with all his might and main. I cried out for assistance—but none appeared; and my unmerciful castigator exclaimed, "You may bawl till you are hoarse, you young rascal: but nobody will come—and I'll be hanged if I don't reduce you to submission. There now—will you take up the pen again?"

"Never!" I ejaculated, my heart swelling with rage and shame at the treatment I had just experienced. "I will leave you:"—and as he had now let me go, I rushed to the door.

"Not so fast, my boy!" he said, with a sneer, as he caught me by the arm and pulled me back. "You are as much in my power as if you were my own son; and if you have any more of your nonsense, I'll take you up before a magistrate—

* Beggars going about with matches are thus denominated.

make you confess that you have run away from your home, your school, your master, or whatever the real truth is—and have you sent back again."

"No, no—for heaven's sake don't!" I cried, thoroughly believing that he would put his threat into execution, and resolving to make almost any sacrifice of feeling rather than incur the risk of being sent back to Leicester, to the tender mercies of Mr. Jukes, and be locked up in the workhouse.

"Well, then, be a good boy—and let me have no more of your nonsense," said Mr. Taddy, perceiving that his menace had produced an effect which made me feel myself completely in his power. "Come, take the pen again, and finish off as many copies of that circular as you possibly can. I must have at least fifty of them sent round to the low lodging-houses, the cadgers' and trampers' dens, and the rookeries, before night."

I accordingly resumed my seat, and obeyed the orders I had received. I wrote up to one o'clock; and then Mr. Taddy, taking me out with him, proceeded to purchase some meat and potatoes for the dinner. On our return to his lodging, I was commanded to cook the victuals,—which I did to the best of my ability; and when the meal was over, he bade me resume my writing. This went on until about six o'clock: we then had tea—and afterwards went out together to distribute the circulars at the various places to which he had alluded. We called at such a number of dreadful dens and neighbourhoods that all the strongest feelings of loathing, horror, aversion, and disgust, were by turns excited within me. I beheld the hideous orgies of the vilest and lowest mendicants, male and female: I was introduced into lodging-houses where scenes of brawling, riot, quarrelling, and fighting were going on: I was conducted into others, as the evening deepened into night, where persons of all ages, from the tenderest to the maturest, and of both sexes, were herding together on beds composed of masses of rotting rags, and where the atmosphere was hot to suffocation and pestilentially fetid. Several times did I implore Mr. Taddy not to drag me thus with him any farther: but my prayers were of no avail; he doubtless feared I should run away if left to myself—and therefore he would not lose sight of me for a single instant. It was close upon midnight ere we returned to the lodging: but I was so sick at heart with all I had seen—so thoroughly humiliated, and experiencing such a sense of utter self-abasement at the ordeal I had been dragged through—that I could not touch a morsel of food; and gladly taking advantage of my master's permission to retire to rest, I lay down and literally wept myself off to sleep.

Next day more circulars were written: but as hour after hour passed, and no one came to avail himself of the benefits held out in those already distributed, Mr. Taddy exhibited many signs of disappointment, impatience, and astonishment. He walked to and fro in the room, smoking his pipe, and every now and then breaking forth into such audible ejaculations as these:—"Well, I can't make it out. I should have thought that there would have been hundreds ready to jump at such offers—and I who have been for the last three months making all arrangements to do the thing well! I thought first of all that it was because my circulars were written in such a precious queer style they couldn't be read: but these are as easy to read as print in a book. However, we will see what to-morrow brings forth."

Unfortunately the morrow proved as barren in its results as the previous day; and to be brief, an entire week passed without producing a single applicant for any of the advantages held out in Mr. Taddy's circulars. Every evening we sallied forth to distribute those written during the day; and every evening, therefore, was I destined to behold a repetition of the same horrible scenes of debauchery and demoralization as those through which I had been dragged on the first occasion. Each day, too, I experienced unmistakable proofs that my master's funds were ebbing lower and lower. First he discontinued his spirits, and contented himself with beer: then we dined off bread and cheese instead of meat—until at last we had nothing but bread alone to eat, and cold water to drink. The landlady of the house—that same horrid-looking woman who opened the door the first night I was introduced thither—clamoured for her rent; and in order to raise funds, Mr. Taddy was compelled to call in a marine store-dealer and sell off for a few shillings the suits of rags and tatters, the ballads and the dying speeches, the crutches and the wooden legs, which constituted his stock, and which I now discovered to have been deposited in another room of the house as a security for arrears of rent previously due to the landlady. No more circulars were written; and Mr. Taddy told me very frankly that he was deliberating in his own mind whether he should turn me adrift to manage for myself, or whether he should try to make me useful in some other way. I was so wretched and desponding that all my spirit seemed to be crushed out of me; and I had not even energy enough to care which alternative he might adopt. Young as I was, I felt wearied of existence.

He appeared to prefer the plan of keeping me with him: but a few days after the sale of his goods, the landlady seized what little furniture he possessed in his rooms; and assisted by a dreadful-looking man,—who, it seems, was her brother—compelled us both to leave the house. Mr. Taddy was very noisy and wrathful: but he was ignominiously thrust forth; and thus, at ten o'clock one night, we were homeless and penniless wanderers together.

"Well, Joe," he said, as we issued from Ragamuffin Court, "we must try and keep up our spirits. But where shall we sleep to-night? Either under the dry arches of Waterloo Bridge—or else we will make our way to the fields, and stretch ourselves under a hedge or a hay-rick."

"The fields!" I exclaimed, suddenly cheered by the prospect of getting into the open country once more: for I was hideously sick at my experiences of the metropolis.

"Well, let it be the fields," he said: and we walked on together. We proceeded thus for about an hour and a half, until we cleared the suburbs of the metropolis on the northern side; and being fortunate enough to find a shed in the corner of a field, we lay down in a waggon which was kept there, and slept till morning.

CHAPTER IV.

MENDICITY, AND ITS RESULT.

THE sun was shining brightly—the birds were singing merrily in the trees—the face of nature appeared to wear its happiest smiles: but not even from the serene aspect of the sky nor from the loveliness of the earth, could my young heart drink in the slightest inspiration of solace. Mr. Taddy had put into his pocket a comb and a rag that had served as a towel at his lodgings; and leading the way through the fields to the bank of the New River (as he informed me the stream was called), he bade me make myself as nice as possible, as he meant to play "the respectable dodge." From his circulars and his conversation, I comprehended what this meant. He purposed that we should commence a career of mendicancy, assuming as respectable an exterior as under circumstances was possible. I was cruelly shocked at finding such was his determination: but I knew full well that there was no alternative. I had eaten nothing since the afternoon of the preceding day: I was half famished with hunger; and thus the calls of nature, being imperious, forced me into his views. We made our ablutions on the river's bank; and then striking across the fields, we drew near a large and handsome house, situated in the midst of a park where the fleecy sheep were browzing on their emerald carpet, and the deer were frisking about. There was a porter's lodge at the entrance of the carriage-drive leading through the park up to the mansion; and above the palings was a painted board, warning off vagrants under pain of prosecution if found intruding within the enclosure. I shrank back in mingled shame and terror on beholding that intimation: but Mr. Taddy, seizing me roughly by the arm, grasped me with such violence that he almost made me cry out with the pain,—saying in a low fierce voice at the same time, "By heaven, you young hound, if you don't keep quiet and look as demure and miserable as possible, I will flay you alive!"

There was no necessity to tell me to look miserable—for heaven knows I felt so: and Mr. Taddy, drawing forth from his pocket a paper which I immediately recognised as a begging petition I had myself drawn up to his dictation, he rang the bell at the gate. The porter—a stout, surly-looking man—came forth from his lodge; and on perceiving us through the iron bars of the gate, he ordered us to be off, "as he didn't want trampers there." Then Mr. Taddy, assuming the most lugubrious look, began whining and snuffling forth a lamentable ditty—of how he was a respectable but decayed tradesman—how he had been reduced to distress by a series of unavoidable misfortunes—how he had a wife and seven children in a most deplorable condition—how he had come out with his dear son, his beloved eldest boy (indicating me) to beseech the succour of the charitable—and how the memorial he held in his hand, was attested by the clergyman of his parish and eighteen persons of repute and eminence who had known him in better days.

While he was giving forth this tirade,—which caused me to look up in his countenance with astonishment at the glibness that characterized so atrocious a tissue of falsehoods,—an elderly gentleman, mounted on a very beautiful horse, appeared round an angle of the road; and the porter, savagely bidding us "stand back," threw open the gate. The gentleman had something exceedingly mild and benevolent in his look; and as he was passing into the enclosure, his eyes fell upon me. He surveyed me with a compassionate interest; and reining in his stead, began to feel in his pocket for some money.

"Beg pardon, sir," remarked the porter; "but I don't think this man is deserving of anything, however it may be with the boy: for while he was telling me a whole string of stories—and also that he was the boy's father—the lad looked up in his face in perfect astonishment."

"My boy," said the elderly gentleman, "tell me the truth: is this man your father?"

Mr. Taddy, who still held my arm in his grasp, pressed it significantly in order to prompt my response: but I said boldly, "No, sir—he is not my father. I am no relation to him."

"Well, sir," observed Mr. Taddy, assuming a most piteous look, after having darted a fiercely diabolical glance at me,—"it's true that I am not exactly the boy's father: but let him say whether I didn't take him out of the streets and act as a father to him. We are in very great distress, sir——"

"Hold your tongue," interrupted the gentleman: then again fixing his eyes upon me, he said, "Do you wish to continue with this man?"

"Oh, no—no!" I ejaculated, with passionate vehemence: for I was suddenly inspired by the hope that heaven had now sent me a friend to rescue me from the slough of wretchedness and degradation into which I had been plunged. "Give me employment, sir—even the most menial ——anything—and I will thankfully accept it—Oh, so thankfully!"

"Very well, my boy," answered the gentleman: "I will not disregard your prayer. Now, my man," he continued, turning towards Taddy, "here is a shilling for you. I have no doubt it is more than you deserve: but take yourself off. Begone, I say—directly!" added the gentleman sternly, as he saw that my companion still lingered, and was evidently loath to part from me. "I am a justice of the peace; and——"

Mr. Taddy stayed to hear no more: but giving me a spiteful thrust forward, he turned abruptly on his heel and hurried away. The gentleman then bade me follow him up to the mansion,—he walking his horse so as not to outstrip me. He said nothing more for the present: but upon reaching the house, desired a footman to take me into the servants' hall, give me some food, and conduct me to the library when I had received refreshment. In the servants' hall I found myself an object of interest with the domestics assembled there; and I overheard some of the observations which passed between them in a low voice. One said that I was a genteel-looking boy: another that I had a certain air of superiority above my present condition; and others spoke to a similar effect. A good breakfast was set before me; and the reader may suppose how much I enjoyed a plentiful meal of good and wholesome food, served up with a cleanliness which appeared to be of the most delicate

refinement in contrast with the wretched makeshifts which I had recently known at Mr. Taddy's lodging. When I had finished my repast, the footman to whose charge I had been specially consigned, conducted me to a spacious and handsomely appointed library, where I found the elderly gentleman reading a newspaper,—and a young lady, of most exquisite beauty, writing a letter at a desk.

"This is the poor boy, Edith, I was telling you of," observed the gentleman as I entered.

The young lady laid down her pen; and lifting her angelic countenance, the complexion of which appeared to be lent her by the purest lily and the softest rose, she gazed upon me with her large blue eyes in a manner expressive of a compassionate interest: then she turned towards the gentleman, and said in a low voice of earnest entreaty, "You will do something for him, dear father—will you not?"

"We shall see, my love," was her sire's response: and addressing himself to me, he said in a benevolent manner, "Tell us, my poor boy, how you came in this deplorable situation and in such objectionable companionship?"

I had previously resolved to observe the fullest candour towards my benefactor: for I felt confident that even if he himself could really do nothing for me, he was too good and kind to send me back to Leicester to be locked up in the workhouse. I therefore gave him my entire history, as frankly as I have narrated it to the reader,—how I had been brought up at the Nelsons' academy—how the death of the schoolmaster had caused the widow to discontinue the business—how I had overheard what took place between herself and Mr. Jukes—how I had escaped from the latter individual—and all I had gone through during my acquaintance with Thomas Taddy. The gentleman and the young lady listened with the deepest attention; and the latter more than once applied her kerchief to her eyes as I touched upon my sorrows at school and the sufferings I had experienced since I left that academy.

"It is all true, dear papa," I heard her say, though she whispered as she bent forward to her sire: "I am certain it is! There is an air of frankness and sincerity about this poor boy, which forbids the suspicion of hypocrisy."

"We shall see, my dear Edith—we shall see," was again her father's response: then, after a few moments' reflection, he said, addressing himself to me, "Now, my boy, if you have spoken truly—as we think you have—something shall be done for you. I shall write by to-day's post to this Mr. Jukes at Leicester——do not be alarmed—do not be frightened—he will not want to fetch you away. So far from seeking to put you into the workhouse, he will be very glad to find that he is so well rid of you."

"There now, dear father," again interjected Edith, in the whispering tones of her musical voice: "see how the poor boy's countenance brightens up again! I am confident he has spoken the truth. You will let him remain here at the Manor until you receive the answer from Leicester?"

"Oh, certainly!" was her sire's immediate response, also delivered in a low tone, "Yes," he added aloud, "you shall remain here, my poor boy, for the present; and we will at once see about putting you into a more comfortable suit of raiment."

I expressed my gratitude for the kindness I was receiving: it was a sincere heartfelt gratitude which I thus poured forth in a voice tremulous with emotion; and as I had no fear in respect to the result of the inquiry to be instituted of Mr. Jukes, it seemed to me as if I had suddenly obtained a permanent footing amongst individuals who would treat me generously. I withdrew from the library, and returned to the servants' hall,—where I perceived that unfeigned pleasure was experienced as I announced that I was to stay beneath that roof for the present. The porter at the lodge had a son of about my own age; and a suit of that boy's clothing was speedily procured for me—so that I felt clean and comfortable once more.

In respect to the family with which accident had thus made me acquainted, I learnt from the domestics in the servants' hall that the gentleman was named Delmar,—that he had two daughters; the elder, whose name was Clara, being married to the Hon. Mr. Mulgrave, who lived in Grosvenor Square, London—and the younger being the Miss Edith whom I had seen. I also learnt that Mr. Delmar had been the father of several other children by his late wife—for he was a widower—but that all had died save Clara and Edith; and that there were fifteen years' difference between the ages of the two surviving sisters,—Mrs. Mulgrave being past thirty, and Edith only eighteen. It farther appeared that Mrs. Delmar had died soon after the birth of Edith,—her heart being broken by grief at beholding so many of her children perish one after the other. Mr. Delmar possessed about five thousand a-year; and being very benevolent and charitable, was beloved by all who knew him.

The return of post from Leicester, brought a reply from Mr. Jukes, fully confirming the statement I had made in every particular. Mr. Delmar sent for me up into the library to communicate this circumstance, and to express his satisfaction at thus finding my narrative so thoroughly borne out. He then went on to say, "There is evidently, Joseph, some strange mystery attached to your birth; but I should advise you to think of it as little as possible, and not to indulge in the hope that the veil will sooner or later be drawn aside: for there are no doubt substantial reasons for the maintenance of that mystery. When you get a little older, you will more fully comprehend what I mean, and will be led to conjecture the cause of your having been abandoned by your parents. We must now speak of what is to be done with you. It is somewhat repugnant to my feelings to make you the proposition I am about to offer, seeing that you have been tolerably well educated and somewhat decently brought up: but I really know not what else I can do for you. If therefore you think fit to become a page in my household, I will give you liberal wages; and you have already seen enough of me and mine, to be assured of good treatment. If I were to get you as a clerk into a lawyer's office, or anything of that kind, you might fall in with bad companions—advantage might be taken of your youth and inexperience—and besides which, you could scarcely earn enough, even by the utmost drudgery, to remunerate a respectable family for giving you

board and lodging. Therefore, I see nothing better that I can do on your behalf—at least for a year or two—than to keep you beneath this roof. You will have but little work of a really menial nature to do—nothing that is positively degrading, nor by which your feelings will be wounded."

I expressed my warmest gratitude to Mr. Delmar for his goodness towards me—assuring him that I only sought to eat the bread of industry; and that so far from hesitating to accept the proposal so generously made, it was much above my most sanguine expectations. He appeared pleased with my answer; and that same day I accompanied the carriage into London—which was about three miles distant—to be measured for my page's dress. In a few days it was sent home; and I assumed the livery of a domestic servant. But I was by no means distressed nor humiliated thereby: I was only too happy at having obtained a comfortable home, and to be afforded an opportunity of earning my own livelihood.

About a fortnight after my entrance into Mr. Delmar's family, a handsome curricle, drawn by two splendid horses, dashed up the carriage-drive one day towards the mansion. A gentleman and lady, with an elegantly apparelled livery-servant, were the occupants of the vehicle. The gentleman himself drove, and took an evident pleasure in the rapid pace and graceful action of the two steeds. He was a man about eight-and-thirty years of age—tall, handsome, and well made. His complexion was somewhat dark: he had an aquiline profile—his eyes were bright and piercing—his hair curled naturally—and he was dressed in the most fashionable style. He had one of those voices which seem to be full of a masculine harmony—deep without being hollow, and full-toned without being loud or sonorous. It was a very pleasing voice, and suited well the handsome person, the elegant appearance, and the polished manners of its possessor. This gentleman was the Hon. Mr. Mulgrave, my benefactor's son-in-law. The lady who accompanied him, was his wife; and very different was her style of beauty from that of her sister Edith. She was, as already stated, thirty-three years of age; and though not above the medium height, yet appeared taller on account of the admirable symmetry of her form and the statuesque carriage of her head and bust. She had dark brown hair and deep blue eyes,—the former of extraordinary luxuriance, and with a rich natural gloss upon it: her complexion was good, but not of the same exquisite purity of white and the same soft blush of the rose which formed that of her sister. It seemed a complexion slightly, but only very slightly touched—I can scarcely say faded—by the gaieties, the festivities, the late hours, and the occupations of fashionable life. Her features were larger than those of Edith—but yet by no means coarse, nor devoid of classical chiselling. She had an air alike commanding and elegant: grace and dignity characterized all her movements; and there was a certain expression of hauteur in her look, as well as in her gait and bearing.

As I have spoken at this length of the elder sister, I will here pause to describe the younger. It has already been said that Edith had a lovely complexion and blue eyes: the former was characterized by all the freshness of youth, unmarred by the heated atmosphere of gilded saloons: the hue of the latter was of a shade lighter than the blue of Clara's eyes, and more nearly approaching the azure—while the other deepened towards the violet. Her hair was of a lighter brown, and might almost be termed chesnut: her lips were of a bright vermilion,—the pearly teeth showing brilliantly when smiles played upon that charming mouth. The form of Clara had the luxuriance of a Hebe blended with the symmetry of a Diana: that of Edith displayed the lithe slenderness and elasticity of a sylph—yet without thinness, and having the modelled contours of just proportions. The disposition of Clara, as read in her countenance at the first glance, was more serious and settled than that of the younger sister,—which was gay and artlessly blithe, without forwardness or giddiness. The one struck the beholder as being a woman of the world and a star in the circles of fashion: the other as an ingenuous, unsophisticated creature, ignorant of the artificialities and unspoilt by the formal conventionalisms of society.

To return to my narrative. It was a little past the hour of noon when the curricle dashed up to the front entrance of Delmar Manor; and Edith hastened forth to greet her sister. There was something unfeignedly warm in the embrace which Edith bestowed—while the same gush of heartfelt emotion was wanting on the part of Clara, although there was nothing positively cold nor unkind on her side. Mr. Delmar received them in the hall, kissing his elder daughter, and shaking hands with Mr. Mulgrave. As Clara swept her eyes around, she observed me standing at a little distance; and she said quite loud enough to be overheard by me, "I see that you have increased your household, dear father. Where did you pick up that elegant-looking page?"

"I will tell you all about it presently, Clara," responded Mr. Delmar; and thus speaking, he led the way into the parlour, followed by his daughters,—Mr. Mulgrave, turning back to the threshold for a few moments to survey with evident pride and satisfaction his elegant equipage as the servant drove it round to the stables. He was then about to enter the parlour, when suddenly stopping short as if recollecting something, he beckoned me towards him,—saying, "By the bye, youngster, there is a small parcel under the front seat of the curricle, which my man knows nothing about. Just run and fetch it in."

As I was hastening away to execute this command, I overheard Mr. Mulgrave say to the footman, "Where did the governor get that neat little page?" I did not catch the reply—but hastened after the carriage; and having found the parcel, sped back into the mansion. But as I re-entered the hall, I found Mr. Mulgrave still conversing with the footman. On beholding me, he at once advanced to receive the packet, which I presented to him; and he eyed me with considerable attention,—so that I made sure the footman had been giving him some particulars concerning me, and which methought had excited Mr. Mulgrave's interest—perhaps his compassion. Soon afterwards, when the parlour bell rang and I hastened to respond to the summons, I noticed that Mrs. Mulgrave likewise surveyed me in a similar manner; and my heart swelled with ineffable emotions at finding myself the object of so

much sympathy. Mr. Delmar, addressing me in his usual tone of benevolence, desired me to order the footman to serve up luncheon soon; and I hastened to obey these instructions.

In the servants' hall some of the domestics were talking together relative to Mr. and Mrs. Mulgrave. It appeared from what they said, that the Mulgraves did not often make their appearance at the Manor, and that there was frequently some little coldness between Mr. Delmar and his son-in-law,—a circumstance which surprised me when I took into consideration the exceeding benevolence of my benefactor's disposition. But from some observations which the servants went on to make, I gathered that it was more than suspected that Mr. Mulgrave lived beyond his means, and that he occasionally had recourse to the purse of his father-in-law, who did not always admire ministering to his extravagances. It also appeared that the Mulgraves maintained great style at their house in Grosvenor Square—gave magnificent parties—and were indeed noted for the mingled sumptuosity and elegance of their entertainments. They had no children, and appeared to abandon themselves altogether to the dissipated pleasures of fashionable life. The discourse of which I thus became a listener, was interrupted by the entrance of Mr. Mulgrave's livery-servant, who was a good-looking, well-made young man, of about four or five-and-twenty, and whose Christian name was George.

In the course of the afternoon I was in the garden gathering some fruit for the parlour-dessert, when I heard footsteps approaching along the gravel walk; and looking back, beheld Mr. Mulgrave. He was walking in a lounging, sauntering manner; and stopped occasionally to gaze around or to eat some fruit. At length he came close up to the spot where I was occupied: and in a kind voice, observed, "I have been listening to the narrative of your adventures, Joseph; and really they amount to a perfect romance. I suppose you are very happy here?"

"Very, sir," I answered enthusiastically.

"To be sure," he went on to observe. "But still it must be somewhat dull for a boy of your intelligence and discernment to live cooped up here in the country. The fact is, I want just such a page as you are; and I have been telling my father-in-law that if he has no objection, I will take you off his hands."

I have no doubt the expression of my countenance showed that I was suddenly grieved and troubled by the announcement just made: for I did not wish to leave Mr. Delmar's service.

"Ah! you object to my proposition?" said Mr. Mulgrave, with a glance of vexation: but instantaneously resuming his wonted affability of manner, he continued to remark, "I think you would like to be in my service, Joseph; and you are a youth of that style which is better fitted for a town-mansion than a country-seat. You would have plenty of gaiety, variety, and amusement at my house. Besides, I should give you good wages. Now, my boy, what do you say—supposing Mr. Delmar assents?"

"I am bound, sir," was my answer, "to do whatsoever Mr. Delmar wishes: but——" and I stopped short, fearful of giving offence by what I was about to say: for I was on the point of observing that I was not so mercenary nor ungrateful as to be tempted by any increase of wages to leave the service of one who had so generously snatched me from pauperism, misery, and degradation.

"But what?" demanded Mr. Mulgrave. "Speak out, Joseph: tell me where your objection lies."

"Simply in this, sir," I was now emboldened to answer,—"that it was my hope to remain for a long, long time in my present master's service:"—and the tears came into my eyes at the thought that there was even a possibility of my quitting the Manor.

"Well, but you would be as kindly treated with Mrs. Mulgrave and me, as you are here," he went on to observe: "so you had better make up your mind to come. Shall I tell Mr. Delmar that, having taken such a fancy to you, I have spoken to you on the subject and you are by no means unwilling?"

"Oh, no sir!" I interrupted him immediately: "pray do not say *that*—because, you know, it would not be the truth. I should be very, very sorry to leave Mr. Delmar. At the same time," I almost immediately added, feeling that some such acknowledgment was necessary, "I am deeply grateful to you for the kind interest thus shown on my behalf."

"Well then," ejaculated Mr. Mulgrave, "we will say no more upon the subject. By the bye," he added, after a brief pause, "Mr. Delmar has amused me particularly with his description of those adventures you experienced when living in the companionship of some man——what was his name?"

"I presume, sir, you mean the person called Taddy," I answered, at the same time thinking it odd that after having shown so much interest on my account, Mr. Mulgrave should speak of my bitter sufferings at the wretched lodging as *amusing*.

"Ah, Taddy—that's the name—and rather a queer one it is. But where is it that this strange character lives?"

"I do not know, sir. Perhaps Mr. Delmar omitted to inform you that we were rendered houseless wanderers at the same time."

"To be sure—I recollect," said Mr. Mulgrave, carelessly. "But where was it that this man carried on his precious avocations—or rather attempted to do so?"

"In Ragamuffin Court, Saffron Hill, sir," was my answer.

"Good heavens, what a name! what a place! The very nomenclature is fraught with a whole world of description. I suppose the fellow has never sought you out since you have been at the Manor?"

"No, sir," I rejoined; "and very sorry indeed should I be if he were to do so."

"To be sure, to be sure," observed Mr. Mulgrave: and then he pursued his way sauntering through the garden.

I was very much afraid for the remainder of the day lest Mr. Delmar should yield to his son-in-law's wishes, and consent to transfer me to his service: but nothing more was said by any one to me upon the subject; and at about nine o'clock in the evening the Mulgraves took their departure in the beautiful little curricle.

"Joseph," observed Mr. Delmar in the course of the following day, "you made for yourself new friends yesterday. Mr. and Mrs. Mulgrave quite envied me the possession of such a page; and I can assure you that my son-in-law was very anxious to have you in his service. But I would not for a moment listen to the proposal; and I do not think, Joseph, that you have any desire to leave me?"

"Oh, no, sir—far, very far from that!" I exclaimed, my heart bounding with delight at the assurance I had just received from my kind master's lips that he was equally disinclined for a separation.

CHAPTER V.

THE MUSEUM.—THE HUMPBACK.

The library of Delmar Manor was a spacious and lofty room—very handsomely furnished—and the shelves of which were crowded with books, being protected from the dust by glass doors. Along the top of the bookcases there was an array of exquisitely sculptured busts and curious old china vases. Communicating with this library by means of a glass-door, was a smaller room serving as a museum of curiosities and objects of *vertu*. In each of the four corners stood a suit of armour,—these panoplies belonging to four distinct periods of the age when such mail-defences were worn. There were cases containing specimens of polished marble—others filled with peculiar shells—others with tropical birds and insects, carefully preserved:—others, again, presented to the view a variety of mineralogical specimens; and in addition to these there was a miscellaneous collection of old jars, porcelains, and vases, of all sorts of shapes and belonging to all ages.

One day, about a week after the visit of Mr. and Mrs. Mulgrave, I had occasion to enter the library to deliver a letter to Mr. Delmar, who was seated there; and with his wonted kindness of manner, he kept me in conversation for a few minutes. He spoke to me about books—told me that I was most welcome to take volumes from the library for the recreation of my leisure hours—and pointed out a shelf where he thought I should find those which were most suitable and proper for my perusal. He then took me into the Museum, as the smaller room adjoining was denominated; and as this was the first time I had been there—the first time, too, that I had ever seen suits of armour—I was much interested with the contents of the apartment. Mr. Delmar, observing that the dust had entered some of the glass cases, and that several of the ornithological and entomological specimens had fallen down or become otherwise disarranged, asked me if I thought I could cleanse the cases carefully and restore the objects just mentioned to their proper position? I at once assured him that I would undertake the task, with the certainty of fulfilling it to his complete satisfaction. He accordingly instructed me to commence at once: and having procured all that was requisite for the purpose, I shut myself in the museum and entered upon the work.

This was about eleven o'clock in the forenoon; and soon after I began, Mr. Delmar went out for a ride on horseback with Miss Edith, who was very fond of equestrian exercise. A little before one o'clock I heard the library door open again: and drawing aside the curtain of the glass door to see who was entering, I perceived that it was Mr. Delmar, who having returned from his ride, sat down again to continue the perusal of some volume in which he seemed deeply interested. He did not enter the museum to observe how I was acquitting myself of the task entrusted to me; and I therefore concluded that he had forgotten my presence there. The work which I had to do, made no noise; and there was consequently nothing to remind my master of my being in the museum.

A few minutes after he had returned to the library, I heard the door again open; and Edward the footman announced Mr. Mulgrave. I went on with my work, the thought never striking me that any conversation of a private character was about to take place between my master and his son-in-law. Indeed, I myself was so interested in the task which I had undertaken, and was so absorbed in the purpose of executing it with the utmost carefulness, that though I heard the voices of those gentlemen talking in the library, I for some time remained totally unconscious of the subject of their discourse. At length I was suddenly startled by hearing Mr. Delmar speak in a louder and more excited tone than I had ever before noticed during the short time I had been in his service.

"No, Augustus," he exclaimed; "I will not do it! Listen—do not interrupt me. You have now been married to Clara ten years: and during that period you have received from me no less than fourteen thousand pounds, in addition to the ten thousand I gave her as a dowry. Your extravagances, sir, are past all endurance. I have remonstrated with you gently and kindly—I have spoken to you angrily—I have discoursed seriously, and I hope in a mannner consistent with my duty as your father-in-law: but all to no purpose. It is invariably the same story. Fresh debts—fresh promises of retrenchment—and renewed disregard for all these pledges so solemnly given. Your brother, Lord Eccleston, who so generously allows you fifteen hundred a year, is likewise wearied of your incessant importunities——"

"Importunities?" echoed Mr. Mulgrave, with the startled abruptness of anger: "this is a hard word, sir."

"I grieve, Augustus," replied Mr. Delmar, more mildly than for the last few minutes he had been speaking,—"I am truly and deeply grieved to be compelled to use it: but I am forced to speak plainly. Your brother has a large family to support; and you cannot deny that he has done his best for you. For heaven's sake do not weary out his patience by too frequent demands upon his purse! As for myself, I am determined not to minister any longer to your extravagances."

"But, my dear sir," urged Mr. Mulgrave, now adopting a tone of entreaty, "do consider the position in which I am placed. What is fifteen hundred a year to keep up a certain degree of style?"

"Fifteen hundred a year," rejoined Mr. Delmar, "for a couple who have no children, is an ample revenue. With proper economy it will enable you to maintain the establishment in Grosvenor Square

— although, as you are well aware, it was against my wish that you removed thither from the cheaper dwelling you occupied for the first two or three years of your marriage. But if you will constantly be giving the most sumptuous parties—if every two or three months you make some fresh purchase of horses—if you bet upon races,—and what is more fatal still, Augustus, if you frequent Crockford's gambling den—for I can call it nothing else—it is no wonder that you should be in constant difficulties, and that you require almost as many thousands as you possess hundreds."

"Well, sir," returned Mulgrave, still in a submissive manner, "I know there is a great deal of truth in what you say: but if for this once you will extricate me from the difficulty in which I am placed——It is but a couple of thousand pounds I ask at your hands——"

"See, Augustus," interrupted Mr. Delmar, "how lightly you talk of a very large sum. Only a couple of thousand pounds! It is more than your whole year's income; and yet it is all to go in an hour, or a minute, to pay off debts. Now listen to me: for matters have come to that crisis which renders it necessary that I should give you a few explanations."

There was a brief pause, during which I was about to open the door and pass away from a place where I was thus rendered an unwilling listener of the painful scene that was in progress: but at the very moment my fingers touched the handle, Mr. Delmar resumed his discourse;—and he spoke in such a solemn tone—indeed there was something so awe-inspiring in the first words that he went on to speak—that I hung back, not daring to obtrude myself: for, as the reader will understand, in order to leave the museum it was absolutely necessary to pass through the library.

"When my lamented wife was stretched upon her death-bed," continued Mr. Delmar,—"and

when, almost heart-broken, I knelt by the side of that couch, sacredly and fervently promising that whatever her last instructions might be, they should receive the completest fulfilment,—she implored me to leave my property at my death equally between our two surviving children. These, as you know, were Clara and Edith. I gave a solemn pledge to that effect: indeed, such would have been my intention even without that last injunction of my poor dying wife. My will has been made in that sense; this writing-desk contains it, and not for worlds would I make the slightest alteration in its provisions. Now perhaps, Augustus, you begin to understand to what end these explanations are to lead: for if year after year I am thus called upon to advance large sums in support of your extravagances, you will find that the share of my property which is to devolve to Clara, will be woefully diminished. All the money hitherto advanced—including even the ten thousand pounds which formed her dowry—has been duly taken into account; and it is so much the less that you will have to receive when it shall please heaven to remove me hence. Now, Augustus, you comprehend the exact position in which, as my elder daughter's husband, you are placed. If you have no regard for Clara's welfare—the welfare of your own wife—it is my duty to take measures to ensure her against that eventual distress which will inevitably be brought about by the course you are pursuing, unless you quickly and effectively reform your conduct. But having given you these explanations, I will afford you one more chance. You shall have the two thousand pounds which your present necessities demand: but if with this knowledge of the exact position wherein you are placed with regard to my will, you again call upon me for pecuniary purposes,—rest assured that, painful though such a course would be for me, you will meet with a stern refusal. Now we will say no more upon the subject; and I will write you a cheque for the sum you require."

There was another pause; and as I supposed the painful scene to be altogether at an end, I no longer thought it necessary to leave the museum. I felt sorry at having remained there during a discourse of so entirely a private and domestic nature: but I had been rendered an unwilling listener—and it was utterly impossible to close my ears against a conversation which through the glass door was so plainly audible.

"Accept my best thanks," said Mr. Mulgrave, doubtless as the cheque was placed in his hand: "and rely upon my promise to retrench. I will now take my departure and settle this unpleasant business as quick as possible: for I am really afraid I shall find an execution in the house when I get home. By the bye, as one means of retrenchment, I will get rid of the under-footman and take a page in his stead: it will be much more economical. I suppose you have made up your mind to keep that boy——what's his name?"

"You mean Joseph," said Mr. Delmar—"the lad you saw the other day?"

"Yes," replied Mulgrave. "I think you might just as well let me have him——"

"No, Augustus," interrupted my kind master—and his response relieved me from a feeling of acute suspense which had suddenly seized upon me; "the boy is happy here—he is a good boy too—and I mean to keep him. Perhaps it may sooner or later be discovered who he really is: the mystery of his birth may be cleared up;—and should it transpire, as there is every reason to suppose, that his parents (if living) move in a genteel sphere of life, I should be sorry if he were to be handed over to them otherwise than as one who had effectually escaped the temptations, the snares, and the vices with which the metropolis abounds. So I am resolved to keep him."

"Oh, of course!" ejaculated the Hon. Mr. Mulgrave. "I only thought that if you really had no use for him, I could take him off your hands. But as you seem resolved to keep him, well and good: and I am glad of it—for he is really a nice boy, and I felt much interested in him."

Mr. Mulgrave and Mr. Delmar then quitted the library together; and it appeared perfectly clear to me that my master had not supposed me to be in the museum. Indeed, if he had remembered at all the task entrusted to me, he most probably thought that I was down in the servants' hall during the preceding scene: but it happened that the dinner was later there than usual on this particular day, and the bell to summon the servants had not as yet rung. It began to ring a few minutes after my master and Mr. Mulgrave had issued from the library: and I lost no time in repairing to the servants' hall in obedience to the summons. When dinner was over, I returned to the museum: but Mr. Delmar came not back to the library during the afternoon; and I found that he had taken Miss Edith out for a walk. The next time he saw me—which was in the evening—he said nothing to show that the thought had in the interval occurred to him that I might have been in the museum while that painful scene was passing with his son-in-law;—and of course I said nothing upon the subject. Nor did I mention to a single soul what I had thus overheard.

Three or four days passed, and my work in the museum was concluded to the entire satisfaction of Mr. Delmar. One afternoon, as I was up in my chamber, I observed a hackney-coach rumbling along the carriage-drive towards the entrance of the mansion: but I did not perceive who alighted, as the window of my room was on the side of the house, and commanded not a view of the front. I had just finished putting on my livery, when Edward the footman entered my chamber to tell me that I was wanted in the parlour down stairs. It was unusual for me to be thus specially fetched; and the recollection of that hackney-coach flashing back to my mind, I was instantaneously struck with the idea of something wrong,—but I knew not what. I asked Edward wherefore I was wanted? He did not know; but said that two strange men, whom he had never seen before, and one of whom was a humpbacked dwarf, were with Mr. Delmar. They had however given no name; and he was utterly at a loss to conjecture what their business might be. He saw that I looked uneasy, and said something to cheer me: for he was a very good-natured man, and I had become a great favourite not only with him, but also with the other servants.

I lost no time in descending to the parlour; and I remember that my heart palpitated and I felt a feverish kind of nervousness: for notwithstanding Edward's cheering words, the dread of

something wrong was uppermost in my mind. On opening the parlour-door, I was seized with perfect consternation on beholding Mr. Jukes seated in that room!

Mr. Delmar was standing behind a chair, on which he leant with both his hands; and the quick appealing glance which I threw upon him, showed me that his countenance wore an expression of ominous misgiving. But before I go on to explain what took place, I will endeavour to depict the appearance of the third person whom I found there. He was, as Edward had described him, a very short man, much deformed, with a humped shoulder greatly protruding. He was apparently about fifty years of age—with harsh iron-gray hair—shaggy overhanging brows—and a cadaverous countenance, marked with the small-pox. He had a cunning, apish, disagreeable look—not merely disagreeable, but repulsive, and one from which it was impossible to help recoiling. His deep-set eyes partly resembled those of the weasel and partly those of the snake. The light seemed hanging as it were in their depths; and he looked out with a cold but searching gaze, penetrating and hideously fascinating. He was apparelled in a suit of black, evidently quite new: his hands were of enormous size—his arms exceedingly long: his legs were very short—and his enormous feet were cased in shoes with the strings tied in large bows. Altogether he had the appearance of a baboon dressed up. It was not however at the first glance that I scrutinized him sufficiently to be enabled to record this description: for as I have already said, I was seized with consternation on beholding Mr. Jukes; and the serious look of foreboding which Mr. Delmar wore, was but little calculated to inspire me with courage.

The dwarfish humpback leapt down from his chair, and hastening across the room towards me, appeared about to extend his arms—I knew not whether to embrace or knock me down,—when Mr. Delmar, as if suddenly struck by a thought, sprang after him; and holding him back, said quickly, "Stop, sir—let us break it gently."

"Ah, to be sure—quite right—very prudent indeed," responded the humpback, his voice having a sort of rattling, husky, jarring sound, which grated terribly upon the ears, while his apish mouth grinned significantly on one side, as he glanced up over his deformed shoulder at Mr. Delmar.

"How do you do, Joseph?" said Mr. Jukes to me, as he nodded his head in a half-familiar, half-patronizing manner; and his countenance had put off its sternness now.

I did not answer: I was bewildered with terror and suspense. What did all this mean? why was Jukes there? who was the humpback? wherefore did Mr. Delmar look mournfully serious? and what was the intelligence that had to be broken to me?

"Joseph," said my kind master, taking me by the hand and leading me a little on one side—while the humpback turned to converse in a whisper with Mr. Jukes,—"Joseph, my dear boy,"—and the exceeding benevolence of Mr. Delmar's voice and look tended to aggravate my misgivings: for I felt that so much sympathy could only be the precursor of some very disagreeable intelligence: "I have an important communication to make. Prepare yourself to hear it—do not be excited—perhaps you will be rejoiced:"—and yet the expression of his features was utterly at variance with the hope which he had thus thrown out.

I tried to speak; I longed to be put out of suspense: but I could not give utterance to a word. I was gasping: my throat felt as if I had swallowed ashes; and I must have been pale as death,—for the anguish of feeling I experienced and the mortal terror that was upon me, were supreme.

"Yes, Joseph," resumed Mr. Delmar, who, though he understood the agony of suspense I was enduring, was yet evidently loath to communicate what would put an immediate end thereto;—"it is a very important piece of intelligence which I have to impart. You are about to leave me, Joseph——"

"No, sir—no—never!" I shrieked forth, the wildness of my despair suddenly unlocking my tongue and finding a vent in words. "Never, never!"—and falling on my knees, I clung with my arms clasped around Mr. Delmar's legs. "For God's sake do not cast me off, sir! for God's sake, do not!"

As I thus spoke in a rending tone, I flung my shuddering looks towards the humpback; for the conviction was strong in my mind that it was to this individual's care, through the agency of Mr. Jukes, I was to be handed over;—and at the moment I would sooner have been hurled amidst the slimy folds of a coiled-up boa-constrictor, than be assigned to the power of that horrible lump of deformity. From his countenance those shuddering looks of mine were quickly reverted with the strongest recoil: for it struck me that there was something terribly malignant in his eyes as they surveyed me from beneath the shaggy overhanging brows, like a reptile looking out from a cave edged with furze. I beheld a tear trembling on Mr. Delmar's lashes: he hastily brushed it away; and assuming the air of one who musters all his strength of mind for the performance of a duty as painful as it is imperious, he said, "Rise, Joseph—and listen to what I have to say. You must hear it, my poor boy, sooner or later; and it is better you should know it at once."

I did rise; and I stood pale and trembling, with dismay and terror depicted on my countenance,—my looks again darting towards the humpback, and then being as quickly reverted to the benevolent countenance of Mr. Delmar. Oh! what a contrast between the villanous features of the former, and the serene but serious philanthropy expressed in those of the latter!

"Yes, Joseph—it is indeed true," continued my master: "you are about to leave me. But heaven knows with what sincerity I declare it is against my own inclination! Cast you off, my boy?——no, never—I could not have done so! But that person——that gentleman," he added, correcting himself, as if the first term which he had used constituted an incivility,—"has certain claims——"

"What claims?" I demanded with excited vehemence: "what claims?"—for Mr. Delmar, as he spoke, had glanced towards the humpback.

"That gentleman——Mr. Lanover," continued my master, "has been led by the advertisements which Mrs. Nelson inserted in the newspapers, to inquire after you: for he is——he is——"

"What?—in the name of God, what?" I in-

quired, gasping forth the words: for I felt a sudden faintness at the heart—a sickness—a sensation as if the blood were running down into my feet, and that thus life was on the point of ebbing quick out of me through my extremities.

"That gentleman — Mr. Lanover — is your uncle:"—and Mr. Delmar spoke with a hesitation amounting almost to aversion.

"My uncle!" I murmured: and I staggered back against the wall.

"Yes—my dear Joseph," said the humpback, now again advancing towards me, and speaking in his harsh disagreeable voice; "I am your uncle. Your father and mother are dead—I am your nearest relative—I come to take you home ——Embrace me."

I endeavoured to be calm: I exerted all the power of my youthful being to control the wild rush of horrified feelings that were surging up within me. The effort I thus made was stupendous: but those feelings were stronger than myself—horror, loathing, disgust, abhorrence, terror, and aversion, were all concentrated therein; and as he approached closer towards me, I shrieked forth, "No, no!"—covering my face with my hands as if to shut out a hideous monster from my view.

"Well, this is pretty, upon my word," said Mr. Lanover, stopping short.

"Joseph, I am ashamed of you," observed Mr. Jukes, in a voice of deprecating severity. "Mrs. Nelson, I am sure, never brought you up to such undutiful disobedience as this. You ought to fling yourself into the arms of this kind good uncle who is going to take you to a happy home."

"No, no!" I again screamed out. "I will stay with Mr. Delmar:"—but as I abruptly withdrew my hands from my countenance and turned a look of entreaty on my kind master, I was smitten with despair on seeing that he shook his head gloomily.

At this moment the door opened; and Edith Delmar—who, as I afterwards learnt, had heard in another room my piercing ejaculations—suddenly made her appearance. She seemed to me like a guardian angel: there was hope in the presence of that bright and beautiful creature. I flew towards her; and throwing myself at her feet, exclaimed passionately, "Save me, Miss Delmar—Oh, save me from that dreadful man!" —and I pointed towards Lanover.

"Save you, my poor boy," repeated Edith, her eyes sweeping round in astonishment upon the scene: and then her looks recoiled from the humpback with an abhorrence which, despite her good breeding and the natural generosity of her heart, she could not possibly conceal.

"Rise, Joseph—rise," said Mr. Delmar, hastening forward to catch me by the arm and lift me up from my suppliant posture. "You know that both I and my daughter would do whatever we could to serve you: but the claims of a relative are, I fear, paramount."

"A relative?" said Edith inquiringly.

"Yes, my dear," responded Mr. Delmar: then, as he indicated the dwarf, he went on to observe, "This gentleman proclaims himself to be Joseph's uncle. He saw the advertisements inserted by Mrs. Nelson in the newspapers, calling upon the friends or relations of Joseph Wilmot to come forward. He proceeded to Leicester; and hearing something that led him to apply to Mr. Jukes, he learnt under what circumstances Joseph had left that city and where he was now to be found. Mr. Jukes, in his capacity of a Poor Law Guardian of Leicester, considered it right and proper to accompany Mr. Lanover to London, to see that Joseph was duly assigned to his care. Certain particulars have been given me by Mr. Lanover in respect to Joseph's parentage: but it is unnecessary to mention them."

I listened with a wild trepidation to these explanations; and when they were finished, I darted my appealing looks first at Mr. Delmar, then at his daughter—then back again upon the father, and once more upon Edith. The young lady was evidently much distressed; and I am certain that she entered fully into the feeling of abhorrence and disgust which I entertained in respect to Mr. Lanover. For a moment—but only for a moment —my soul was smitten with remorse and sorrow at the betrayal of feelings into which I had been led in respect to one who, proclaiming himself my uncle, sought to embrace me and offered me a home. But the next instant that compunctious sensation passed away: for when I again bent my shuddering looks upon the repulsive countenance of the hideous monster, I felt that I never could acknowledge him as my uncle—and that even if he had announced himself as my father, I should have recoiled from him with the same insurmountable repugnance. I could not help it:—the feeling struck me as being unnatural, ungrateful, and wicked; but I had no power over volition—I was not master of myself—I could no more control my own sensations than I could have quieted the raging eddies of the Maelstrom.

"But perhaps," suggested Edith, "as Joseph feels happy here, Mr. Lanover will allow him to remain?"

"If you will," cried Mr. Delmar eagerly, "his livery shall be put off, and he shall be treated in a different manner."

"You are very kind," responded the humpback: and methought (but I afterwards reflected it might be mere fancy) that his apish mouth grinned malignantly: "you are very kind—but it is my duty to take charge of my nephew. When he comes to know me better, he will like me; and I shall forgive him this little ebullition of feeling which he has displayed towards me."

"If you wish me well," I exclaimed, with continued vehemence, "leave me where I am! In that case I shall be no burthen upon you—nor will I eat the bread of idleness here. I will work for my food. Leave me therefore—leave me."

"Well, I never saw such a boy," said Mr. Jukes, affecting to hold up his hands in amazement. "There is his kind uncle——"

"Come, Joseph—you must come," said the dwarf quickly: and he again advanced towards me.

"No, no!" I once more shrieked out, and rushed behind Mr. Delmar for protection,—clinging to that gentleman as if to the only barrier between myself and the vortex of despair. My good master was evidently irresolute how to act. Edith approached him; and I heard her whisper in his ear, in a tone of entreaty, "Do consider, dear

father, whether there be not some means of saving the poor boy from a fate which he views with such horror."

"Well," said Mr. Delmar, as if suddenly inspired by a thought, "I must take time, Mr. Lanover, to decide upon the course to be adopted."

"Oh! my heart's gratitude is yours, sir—and yours too, Miss," I said in a tone which though fervent, was nevertheless so low as only to reach their ears.

"What does this mean?" demanded Mr. Lanover, in a fierce voice. "What need is there for consideration? The boy is my nephew—I claim him, and I will have him."

"If you put the matter in this light," answered Mr. Delmar, "I shall assume the same high tone. Remember, sir, I have only your bare word for the claim you assert upon the lad: you have given me no documentary proof."

"This is truly ridiculous," rejoined the humpback, with a sneer. "Ask Mr. Jukes whether, when I sought him out at Leicester, I did not already know everything concerning the lad—how he was entrusted to the Nelsons, and all about him. And how could I have known this, if I were not his relation?"

"It's quite true, sir," observed Jukes, addressing himself to Mr. Delmar. "Mr. Lanover knew all about Joseph; and he told me at once those particulars respecting the boy's birth which he just now described to you. Joseph's mother was Mr. Lanover's sister——"

"But still," interrupted Mr. Delmar, "I must have documentary proof of these averments. It is a serious thing to surrender up a mere child like this to a stranger."

"What nonsense!" ejaculated Mr. Lanover. "Stranger indeed?—an uncle is no stranger. I am a respectable man, living on my means: you can inquire about me if you like. My house is Number —, Great Russell Street, Bloomsbury. I have a wife and daughter——But why should I stand arguing here? I insist, sir, that you give up the boy at once."

Mr. Delmar made no immediate response. I was still crouching behind him, and therefore could not see his face: but I judged that it expressed a return of irresolution, because Edith flung upon her father another look of anxious entreaty on my behalf. Oh, how I blessed her for it!—aye, I did so then and there, even amidst the whirl of my terribly excited feelings.

"Yes, sir," said Mr. Jukes, again putting in his word; "it's my duty to see the boy given up to his relation. He became chargeable to the parish of which I am guardian; and I am bound to assure myself that he is placed in the hands of one who will prevent him from being thrown back upon us at Leicester."

"Now I have made up my mind how to act," suddenly observed Mr. Delmar, in a tone of firm decision. "With respect to you, Mr. Jukes, I will send you a written undertaking by the post—an undertaking which my attorney shall draw up—to save Joseph Wilmot from becoming chargeable to your parish, or to meet all the costs if he should. So *you*, sir, have nothing more to do with the matter. In respect to *you*, Mr. Lanover, I am a justice of the peace, and I will treat the case magisterially. I decline therefore to deliver up this boy until you produce documentary evidence of a certain character,—amongst which must be the marriage certificate of your deceased sister with Mr. Wilmot, so as to prove that Joseph was born in wedlock: otherwise you can assert no uncle's claim upon him. Bring me such documentary evidence, and I will no longer oppose your demand. If you do not like this course, you have your remedy—you can apply to the proper tribunals—and I will meet you there. Now, sir, you have my decision; and it is needless to prolong this painful interview."

"Oh, very well!" ejaculated Mr. Lanover, in the harsh jarring sounds of his disagreeable voice—now rendered more than ever disagreeable by the concentrated rage which was expressed in its accents; "I will make you smart for this! My attorney shall enter an action against you——"

"Spare your threats, sir," responded Delmar, sternly: "your lawyer can have the address of mine whenever he chooses."

"Then he will send for it to-morrow," rejoined the humpback. "Come, Mr. Jukes—we will take ourselves off; and if there's justice in England, I will have it."

Mr. Delmar condescended to give no farther reply; and the two men quitted the room, the humpback banging the door violently behind him. No sooner had they disappeared, than with feelings of unspeakable relief I threw myself upon my knees at the feet of Mr. Delmar and his daughter, and poured forth my gratitude as well as I was able. But my voice was half suffocated with the emotions that seemed to come up into my very throat; and the tears rained down my cheeks. They spoke to me in the kindest and most soothing manner,—Mr. Delmar promising that he would not consent to part from me unless forced by the strong arm of the law. I besought him to tell me whether he really believed that the law could be thus used as a weapon against me: whereupon he said that, feeling he should be wrong if he lulled me into a false security, he must reply to the effect that should Mr. Lanover's statements be proved by documentary evidence, I must be given up to him. Then I asked, with renewed agitation, whether Mr. Delmar apprehended that the evidence would be forthcoming? He rejoined that it was impossible to conjecture.

"But," I exclaimed vehemently, "do you believe, sir, that he is in reality my uncle? How is it that I was seized with so terrible a repugnance towards him?"

"Without touching upon this latter point," answered Mr. Delmar, "let us look at the whole proceeding calmly and seriously: for, I repeat, it is better you should not be lulled into a false security. My candid opinion is that Mr. Lanover must be your uncle. The argument he used was a just one:—how could he possibly have become acquainted with all the antecedents of your life unless he were thus related to you? Besides, the story he told me of your birth, but which I need not repeat to you now, was consistent and plausible. It is true that Mr. Jukes might have told him all that he himself had learnt from Mrs. Nelson, and which you one day overheard: but then comes the question—why should Mr. Lanover claim you if he be not your uncle? why should he seek to burthen himself with your maintenance?

why should he have gone to all this trouble and expense to find you out?"

I was struck by the force of these observations —and my countenance fell.

"At the same time," continued Mr. Delmar, "I have my doubts whether Mr. Lanover will pursue the matter any farther, inasmuch as I have thrown such obstacles in his way. He must appeal to the tribunals; and the procedure will cost him a considerable sum. At all events, Joseph, keep up your spirits—do not give way to despondency—and rest assured that you will never want a friend so long as I remain alive. As for parting from you, I repeat my solemn assurance that I will only do so if actually compelled by the law."

"Yes—cheer up, Joseph," added Edith: "and perhaps all will yet be well."

I renewed the expression of my fervent gratitude for the kindness I had received: and then Mr. Delmar proposed that I should put off my livery and live upon a better footing beneath his roof: for he assured me that if Mr. Lanover's tale of my birth could be relied on as the truth, my parents had moved in a genteel sphere. But I would not listen to this generous offer: I was resolved not to be a positive burden to my kind benefactor;—and moreover, I represented that I could not assume the position of a gentleman until thoroughly convinced that I had been born to it, and that I should always have the means of maintaining it. Mr. Delmar consented to let me have my own way—at least for the present, until it should be ascertained whether Mr. Lanover purposed to take any farther proceedings, or not.

CHAPTER VI.

THE INCIDENTS OF A NIGHT.

THE reader will remember that I described the porter, who occupied the lodge at the entrance of the grounds, as a stern-looking man, and that he had spoken very sharply indeed to me and Taddy on the morning that we presented ourselves at the gate in the form of mendicants: but I subsequently found, on better acquaintance with him, that he was by no means a bad sort of person. The neighbourhood was however so often visited by vagrants, and his master's generosity had been so frequently abused in the grossest manner to the porter's knowledge, that his temper was soured in respect to such applicants; and he assured me that he had found it necessary to adopt the harshest demeanour towards those whom he judged to be undeserving of charity. He informed me that, at the very first glance, he had penetrated through Taddy's real character; and had concluded that he was accompanied by me in the hope of exciting a sympathy which he knew his own personal appearance would scarcely create. He farther stated that it was he himself who had caused the notice against vagrants to be posted up at the entrance to the park,—inasmuch as when his back was turned and the gate happened to be unlocked, they would walk in; and after prowling about the grounds, would very likely self-appropriate whatsoever they could conveniently lay their hands upon. It farther appeared that about two years previously, a burglarious attempt had been made upon the Manor; and that one of the desperadoes being arrested, was recognised as having visited the premises, no doubt to *reconnoitre*, as a whining mendicant a day or two before. Then was it that the board warning vagrants off, had been put up. It however seemed, from what I learnt, that it was much against the wishes of Mr. Delmar and Miss Edith that such a notice should have been reared upon the estate; and it was only in consequence of the earnest representations of the porter that it was allowed to remain.

The reader will not have forgotten that it was the porter's son who had lent me a suit of clothes, on my first entrance into Mr. Delmar's service, until my livery was in readiness. This lad, who was about my own age, was a steady, well-conducted, and intelligent youth; and I sometimes walked with him through the grounds. His father, whom I had at first supposed to be so very stern and surly, took a great liking to me, and always welcomed me into the lodge when I sought his son during a leisure hour. His wife was a kind woman, and exhibited the utmost sympathy on my behalf.

After the scene which has been described in the preceding chapter, Mr. Delmar considerately bade me go and take a walk, so as to divert my mind from anxious reflection upon the painful incidents which had occurred. It was now six o'clock in the evening: Mr. Delmar and Miss Edith sat down to dinner; and I, profiting by the permission accorded, rambled out. My first thought was to wander by myself and give way to my reflections; but remembering it was for the precise purpose of avoiding mournful meditation that my services for the evening were dispensed with, I bent my way to the porter's lodge to seek the companionship of his son Arthur. The porter and his family were at tea; they made me sit down with them; and when the meal was over, Arthur and I strolled forth. The estate consisted of about two hundred acres; and as it was now the end of August, the golden harvests were yielding to the reapers' hands. It was a delicious evening,—a gentle breeze breathing over the fields, and giving freshness to the air after the sultry heat of the day. We extended our walk until nine o'clock: I had regained almost my wonted cheerfulness of spirits; and as I had scarcely eaten a mouthful at tea, I experienced a somewhat keen appetite. On our return to the porter's lodge, Arthur's mother insisted that I should enter and partake of supper with them—an invitation which I accepted. It was about a quarter to ten o'clock when I left the lodge and began to hurry through the park towards the mansion, which was about a quarter of a mile distant.

The night had set in somewhat dark—the gentle breeze of the evening had strengthened into wind —and several black clouds were being borne quite fast over the deep purple sky. The servants' entrance was by a gate in a wall surrounding a courtyard at the back part of the house; and this gate was always kept locked after dusk. As I approached it, by a narrow path diverging from the carriage-drive, I was seized with a sudden alarm on beholding what appeared to me to be the forms of two men, moving rapidly away from the gate, and hurrying along the wall, disappear in the

darkness. I stood still and listened: but I could catch no sound of footsteps nor of voices; and therefore I thought it might be imagination on my part. Nevertheless, I determined to inquire; and when Edward answered the gate-bell, which I rang, I asked whether any persons had called within the last few minutes. He replied in the negative; and I explained to him wherefore I made the inquiry. He said that the two men might possibly be labourers returning later than usual from their work; and as there were two or three cottages situated about half-a-mile in the rear of the mansion—consequently in the same direction which those persons (if it were not my fancy) were pursuing — Frederick's explanation seemed probable enough, Therefore nothing more was said upon the subject; and after remaining a few minutes in the servants' hall, I took a candle and ascended to my own chamber.

When I went to bed, it was some time before I could get to sleep. Naturally enough, the incidents of the afternoon kept forcing themselves upon my mind: I grew feverish and uneasy with restlessness—I looked forward with apprehension to any farther designs which might develop themselves on Mr. Lanover's part—and I dreaded lest by pushing matters to extremes, he might compel Mr. Delmar to part with me. Gradually, however, my thoughts fell into confusion; and sleep came upon my eyes. Then the objects of terror which had been uppermost in my mind while I was awake, began to haunt me in my dreams. At first I fancied that Mr. Jukes, stern and implacable, was dragging me into the entrance-way of the gloomy workhouse at Leicester; and that the porter with the repulsive countenance, was grinning in fiendish mockery at my ineffectual endeavours to escape from my persecutor's clutches. All of a sudden Mr. Jukes appeared to have changed into Mr. Lanover, who was dragging me along: but instead of the place being the Leicester workhouse, it was some dark and dreadful cavern, with a steep descent down which I was thus being forced. Nevertheless, methought that though the yawning abyss was dark as a sepulchre, and with unseen horrors lurking in its depths, it appeared as if the form of Mr. Lanover was distinctly visible; and that instead of being apparelled in a new suit of black, his deformed shape was wrapped in the loathsome rags of beggary. I fancied, too, that his eyes—with their half-weasel, half-snake-like expression—glared at me, penetratingly though cold; and that his apish mouth grinned horribly in mockery and scorn. Again the scene changed; and I found myself, in imagination, accompanying Mr. Taddy through some of those vile dens and abhorrent scenes amidst which he had dragged me when we distributed the circulars. Methought that he was walking behind, compelling me to go on in front through fear that I should run away from him; and that some spell which I could not shake off, compelled me thus to remain subservient to his will. Horrors appeared to be deepening around me: the squalid shapes of poverty and nameless forms of vice, passing to and fro, assumed the aspect of hideous spectres and ghastly objects belonging to another world. I felt my blood stagnating and freezing into ice in my veins: my feet grew heavy as lead—I could not drag myself along any farther. I turned round to fix an imploring glance upon Mr. Taddy,—when all of a sudden I found it was the hideous-looking Lanover that had me in his power. Again he appeared to grin horribly: his form dilated into monstrous proportions, preserving however its distorted shape;—and as he stretched out his long baboon-like arms to fold me in his loathsome embrace, I awoke with a sudden start.

Was it indeed only a dream? My chamber was as dark as pitch, so that I could not satisfy myself by means of my eyes that I was really there: and such an awful consternation was upon me that I could not even stretch out my arms to grasp the curtains, to feel the texture, and thus convince myself that I was in my own bed. I lay motionless for upwards of a minute, while my thoughts settled themselves into a more composed state. The wind was blowing freshly; it appeared to moan round the building like human tones and lamentations of distress,—sometimes rising into a sweeping blast, the sound of which to my fevered imagination appeared to bear the cry of murder upon it. I was not at all inclined to be superstitious: but I felt alarmed—my mind had become attenuated by the hideous dreams through which I had been passing, and which I seemed to have the knowledge of having lasted for some hours. There was a sensation upon me as if a presentiment of evil were at work within me—as if, too, I had the intuitive consciousness of some dread deed of turpitude being accomplished. I recollected those two forms I had seen—or fancied to have seen—near the servants' entrance; and these shapes associated themselves with the forebodings which were in my mind. I felt that I should not be able to compose myself to sleep again for at least some time: I longed to get up, light a candle, and take a book to read: but so great was the nervous terror—vague and indefinite though it were—which was upon me, that I dared not step forth from my bed. I really had the apprehension that I should fall into the arms of Lanover, or else of some monster, if I did so. It was the first time in my life I had ever been under the influence of such an awful species of alarm; and vainly did I endeavour to reason myself out of it.

While I was lying in this condition, in the pitchy darkness of my chamber,—for the black night seemed to hang like a sable pall against the window facing the bed, so that the gloom which surrounded me was unbroken in its denseness,—methought I heard the sound of a gate closing with some little degree of violence, just as if having escaped from the hand of some one going out or coming in, it was banged to by the wind. I felt assured also that it was the gate of the servants' entrance, and not any other within the enclosure-walls. This circumstance gave renewed poignancy to my terrors, but turned them into another channel. I lost all sense of superstitious awe; and was smitten with the apprehension lest my foreboding with regard to real and positive wrong-doing should prove correct. That I *had* heard the sound of the gate, I felt convinced: but then, might it not have been accidentally left open? This was scarcely probable, as the servants of the establishment were steady in their habits and regular in the performance of their duties; and I knew that Edward the footman never retired to rest at night till he had seen the back premises

thoroughly secured. I was more than half-inclined to rise, seek his chamber, and tell him what I had heard: but I feared to disturb the household for nothing. Besides, I reasoned to myself that if any evil-disposed persons were about the premises, they would not prosecute their design after the occurrence of a sound so well calculated to attract the notice of any inmate who might not be asleep: while, on the other hand, if their design were already accomplished and the house was already plundered, it was too late to guard against it. I lay awake for two or three hours, in a condition of feverish nervousness,—despairing of being able to woo slumber again: but it nevertheless stole back upon me—and I slept till morning was considerably advanced. My usual habit was to rise at six o'clock: I was fond of being out early in the fresh air in the fine season of the year;—but on this occasion it was close on seven ere I opened my eyes. I thought, as I rose and dressed myself, of all that I had dreamt, imagined, and heard during the past night; and I had not finished my toilet when it struck me that considerable noise and confusion was going on in the house, with persons rushing to and fro: then, all of a sudden, a piercing scream in a female voice rang through the mansion. I felt convinced that those rending accents of ineffable anguish came from the lips of Miss Edith; and I was smitten with the most awful misgiving. Footsteps were now heard rushing towards my chamber—the door burst open—and Edward, pale as death, and his features convulsed with horror, made his appearance, exclaiming, "Oh! Joseph, Joseph—our dear master——"

But he could not finish the sentence—and staggered back against the wall, as if about to faint.

"Good heavens!" I exclaimed, more than half-anticipating the dreadful truth: "what is it? Our dear master——"

"Murdered, Joseph—murdered! barbarously murdered!"

I sank upon a chair as if annihilated. At first I could not even weep, nor give utterance to a word: I seemed petrified as to all vital power; and yet with a horrible sense of anguish burning within,—just as if I were converted into marble, but yet preserving the faculties of mind with a frightful vividness. Edward, recovering himself, darted wildly away, scarcely knowing (as he subsequently said) what he was doing, but thinking that nevertheless there was something to be done. I know not exactly how long I remained in that extraordinary state of physical numbness and mental keenness—nor how I got down stairs to the storey below,—whether I walked slowly or rushed precipitately: but I found myself amidst a throng of horrified domestics on the landing whence Mr. Delmar's chamber and likewise that of Miss Edith opened. That shriek—that piercing, penetrating, rending shriek, which reached my ears—had thrilled from the lips of the poor young lady when the awful catastrophe burst upon her. But let me explain how the atrocious deed first became known.

It appeared that some of the servants, who were the first to descend that morning, about half-past six o'clock, were surprised and alarmed at finding the shutter of one of the lower back windows open, and two of the iron bars belonging to that window wrenched away. It was clear that a burglary had been effected. The butler's pantry was immediately flown to: the door was broken open, and whatsoever plate had been left there was carried off. The bulk of the plate, however, was invariably taken up-stairs at night, and only a sufficiency left out for the family use. A farther search showed how the burglarious murderers had effected their departure,—the gate at the servants' entrance having been burst open from the inside; so that the presumption was they had in the first instance scaled the wall to accomplish their entry, but had subsequently availed themselves of the easier method of the gate to issue forth when their work of plunder and assassination was completed. The servants who discovered these evidences, supposed that the crime had been limited to mere robbery; and Edward hastened up-stairs to inform his master of what had taken place. He knocked at the door—but no answer was returned: he knocked again—and, still as no reply was given, some dreadful suspicion flashed to his mind amidst his already excited thoughts. For Mr. Delmar was habitually an early riser; and even if he were sleeping later than usual on this particular morning, Edward had never before known him so difficult to awaken. He accordingly entered the room,—when a ghastly spectacle burst upon his appalled and horrified view. His unfortunate master lay stretched in the bed, with his throat cut from ear to ear,—the sheets and the pillows saturated with blood. Rushing wildly from the room, Edward's looks indicated something dreadful to those who had followed him up to the landing; and before a word issued from his lips, the truth was suspected. In a few moments it was but too fully confirmed, as some of the servants made their way into the chamber, to which the horror-stricken Edward pointed with excited significancy. At that instant Miss Edith, hearing the noise and confusion on the landing, issued from her own room; and when the terrific tragedy burst upon her knowledge, the anguish of her soul thrilled forth in that rending shriek which I had heard and which had pierced my brain. She was borne back to her chamber in a state of hysterical frenzy; and the reader may imagine the amount of mingled confusion, horror, grief, and dismay which prevailed throughout the household.

When our feelings were somewhat composed,—or rather, when the first paroxysm of scarcely describable emotions had a little subsided,—the tragedy began to be spoken of in low shuddering whispers amongst the domestics. For some time however—at least an hour—I was so overwhelmed with grief and dismay at the barbarous murder of my kind benefactor, that I was incapable of deliberate reflection. My mind alternated between intervals of stupefaction and fits of inconsolable grief. At length, as I heard the servants conversing around me, I mentioned the circumstance of seeing the two persons near the gate on the preceding evening—and likewise that of hearing in the night the sound of the gate closing. Edward corroborated the fact of my having mentioned to him the incident of the two men: but when I was now asked—and indeed earnestly pressed, to reflect well whether I could give anything like a definite description of those persons, I assured my fellow-servants that so far from being enabled to do so, I

was not even certain at the time that it was aught more than imagination on my part.

Immediately after the discovery of the murder, summonses were despatched for the nearest medical man to attend upon the bereaved Edith; and a messenger was likewise sent off to the Mulgraves in Grosvenor Square. The surgeon came; and on viewing the corpse of Mr. Delmar, he pronounced his opinion that death must have been instantaneous, so effectually was the murderous gash inflicted—and that the unfortunate gentleman had been dead some hours. In the course of the forenoon Mr. and Mrs. Mulgrave arrived at the Manor; and the elder sister fell into a swoon the moment she entered the house of mourning. Instead, therefore, of being immediately enabled to minister unto the unhappy Edith, she herself required every attention. I learnt from Edward that Mr. Mulgrave appeared dreadfully shocked—and that when he repaired to the chamber where his deceased father-in-law lay, he buried his face in his handkerchief and sobbed audibly for some minutes.

The police, too, made their appearance at the Manor; and a second as well as more searching investigation of the premises was now instituted. It transpired that a bureau in Mr. Delmar's chamber had been broken open, and the contents of a cash-box abstracted. From some information which Miss Edith was subsequently enabled to give at the coroner's inquest, it appeared that her father was in the habit of keeping two or three hundred pounds in this box; but what amount there might have been at the time it was broken open, the young lady could not say. The drawing-room had likewise been entered, and some valuable articles and nick-nacks carried off. The dining-room too had been visited: for the side-board was broken open, doubtless (as the police suggested) in the hope of discovering the remainder of the

plate. It was not however there,—the butler himself being in the habit of taking it up to his own chamber; and thither no attempt at an entry had been made. From this circumstance the police came to the conclusion that the burglary had not been effected with the knowledge or connivance of any one inside the house; as all the domestics knew that the great bulk of the plate was nightly taken charge of by the butler. Beyond the rooms above mentioned, no other part of the premises appeared to have been forcibly entered: but it was difficult to say whither the burglars had really penetrated, or to what extent their researches had been carried,—inasmuch as no traces of foot-marks were discernible on any of the carpets or druggets—a circumstance to be explained by the very natural conjecture that the ruffians had taken off their boots or shoes on entering the dwelling. It should be added that the weapon with which the unfortunate gentleman was murdered, could nowhere be found; and therefore must have been carried away by the assassins. The surgeon who examined the corpse, pronounced it to have been some excessively sharp instrument—most probably a razor.

How that wretched day passed I scarcely know: for, as already stated, my own condition of mind was an alternation between paroxysms of frenzied anguish, and long intervals of blank, dumb, dread consternation. I do not believe, however—as well as I can recollect—that I once devoted a thought to my own peculiar lot, or selfishly speculated on what would now happen to myself: all my ideas were concentrated in grief and horror at the tragic fate of my beloved benefactor. When night came, I slept through downright exhaustion and the prostration of all my energies both physical and mental; and when I awoke in the morning, it appeared as if I had passed through the phases of some hideous dream. In the forenoon the coroner's inquest was holden; and I was called in to be examined relative to the two men I had seen in the neighbourhood of the servants' gate. But I could tax my memory to no greater extent than I had already done when questioned by the domestics: nor as to the hour of the night when I had heard the sound of the gate closing, could I give any more definite response. All the time I was being examined, I was in a state of dull bewilderment; and when I issued forth from the room where the inquest was held, the scene was so dimly impressed upon my mind, that I only retained a confused idea of having stood before a number of persons seated round a table, with a few others in the background: but the whole appeared something which I had seen through a mist. Later in the day I learnt that the verdict of the jury was, "Wilful murder against some person or persons unknown."

Several more days passed; and my mind began to regain a certain degree of composure—so that I was led to reflect upon my own position. The Mulgraves continued at the Manor,—every one now regarding the deceased's son-in-law as the master. The circumstances of a terrific tragedy had thus thrown me, as it were, into the service of him who had wished to have me: but whether he would protect me against Mr. Lanover's claims, should any farther assertion of them be made, I could not possibly conjecture. Miss Delmar kept her own chamber; and her maids described her as being completely overwhelmed and crushed by the weight of the horrible calamity which had rendered her an orphan. Mrs. Mulgrave, after the first few hours of successive swoons, had mustered a degree of fortitude to which her poor sister appeared utterly unequal; and in due course she assumed the part of mistress of the Manor, giving directions for the mourning of the female domestics,—while her husband did the same by the men-servants, and likewise superintended the arrangements for the funeral. As may be supposed, the atrocious deed excited a great sensation in the neighbourhood: a large reward was offered by Mr. Mulgrave for the discovery and apprehension of the assassins; and I understood that the police were indefatigable in their researches. But no clue could be obtained to the perpetrators of the foul crime.

Two days before the funeral took place, another visitor arrived at the Manor on the mournful occasion, and to be present at the last obsequies. This was the Rev. Henry Howard, a nephew of the late Mrs. Delmar, and consequently a cousin of the two sisters, Mrs. Mulgrave and Edith. He was a young gentleman of about four-and-twenty, and had only just been ordained. I understood that on entering holy orders, he had obtained a small living in Devonshire; and the remoteness of his residence had therefore caused the delay in his arrival at the Manor. He was exceedingly handsome—not above the middle height—slender and well made; and judging by his countenance, as well as by the affability of his bearing and the pleasing tones of his voice, he was of generous and amiable disposition. Three or four other distant relations of the family also arrived at the house: but of these it is not necessary to enter into any personal description.

The funeral took place; and never shall I forget what a day of gloom it was for us all. When I beheld the coffin with its sable pall borne forth to the hearse, it seemed to me—not as if I were parting from the remains of a master whom I had only known for a few weeks—but from the best friend I had in the world, a benefactor who was my only defence against whatsoever adversities might threaten. The funeral was a sumptuous one; for so Mr. Mulgrave would have it: and thus, even where Death marshalled his array of sable-clad mourners, did that gentleman infuse the spirit of his own love of pomp, ostentation, and grand display into the solemnity of the scene.

But let me hasten and bring this chapter to a conclusion: for it is to terminate with an incident that constituted an important point in my destiny. On returning from the funeral, the members of the family gathered in the library to hear the will read,—all except poor Miss Edith, who was still confined to her own chamber by severe illness. The party had not been congregated many minutes there—the hearse and the funeral coaches had scarcely taken their departure—when a hackney-coach rolled up to the front of the mansion. I was in my own room, sitting at the window in a mood of profound melancholy,—when the rumbling of that vehicle's wheels attracted my notice. I was instantaneously seized with a presentiment that this arrival regarded me. Nor was I deceived: the torturing suspense which I endured for a few

minutes, was put an end to by the terrible realization of my worse fears. I was summoned down to the hall; and there I beheld Mr. Lanover pacing to and fro—his hands behind his back—his humped shoulder protruding, methought, even more than I had noticed on the former occasion—his shape appearing more hideously deformed—his countenance more malignantly ominous. Perhaps this exaggeration of the monstrous ugliness of the man was at the time mere fancy on my part,—arising from the utter loathing and the dire apprehension with which I regarded him: but such was the effect his presence produced upon me. At the same instant that I reached the hall by one means of communication, Mr. Mulgrave was descending the principal staircase; and looking around, he demanded somewhat angrily, "Who is it that wants me?"

"Have I the honour, sir, of speaking to the present master of this establishment?"—and as Mr. Lanover thus addressed Mr. Mulgrave, taking off his hat at the same time, he darted from beneath his shaggy overhanging brows a quick malignant glance at me as I stopped short at a little distance.

"I am Mr. Mulgrave," responded this gentleman: "but whether I have a right to style myself master of the mansion, I know not as yet. The will of my lamented father-in-law is only just now about to be read. If you, as I naturally presume, have any claim upon the estate——"

"No, sir—that is not my business here," answered the humpback.

"Then pray, what *do* you want?" demanded Mr. Mulgrave, with an air of increased anger and astonishment. "I already thought it was sufficiently indecent of you to have me summoned away from a family meeting under such distressing circumstances: but now your conduct appears more indelicate still."

"I beg your pardon," said Lanover, with a humble demeanour: "but I really thought the funeral took place yesterday——"

"Have the goodness, sir, to explain your business," exclaimed Mulgrave curtly.

"It relates, sir," rejoined the humpback, "to this boy here, whom I claim as my nephew."

"What boy?"—and Mr. Mulgrave swept his looks rapidly around. "Do you mean Joseph?"

"Him—and none other," answered Lanover.

"Well—if he is your nephew, I suppose you wish to know whether he is to remain in service here? But no decision can be arrived at," added Mr. Mulgrave, "until it is ascertained who has the right to assume the position of master or mistress."

"You misunderstand me, sir," replied Lanover, with another quick spiteful glance at me. "I mean to take that boy away with me, and provide for him in another and better fashion."

"Ah! that alters the matter," observed Mr. Mulgrave. "Of course you have a right to do what you like with your nephew: but in any case I would cheerfully take him into my own service. I have told him so before—and I repeat the offer now."

"And I accept it, sir—most gratefully do I accept it!" I exclaimed, now rushing forward in the suddenly excited hope of finding another protector in my deceased one's son-in-law.

"No, sir—I beg to decline," said Mr. Lanover, in a peremptory tone. "The boy must come with me. Let him strip off this livery——"

"Nay, he is doubtless welcome to the livery," quickly rejoined Mr. Mulgrave: "for I believe, from what I heard, that when he first came to the Manor, it was in no very pleasant plight, poor lad, as to apparel. Well, Joseph, you see," he added, turning his looks upon my countenance, "there is no help for it: you must go with your uncle; and here are a couple of sovereigns as a little present for you."

"Joseph, sir, does not need your bounty," said Mr. Lanover, assuming a haughty air, which contrasted ludicrously with his wretched shape: "for I would have you know that I am as much a gentleman as you are, and able to keep him as such."

"At all events," retorted Mr. Mulgrave, "you need not treat me with this insolence. Under other circumstances I should resent it: but I am at present labouring under the impression of an incident of too painful a character."

"For heaven's sake, Mr. Mulgrave," I exclaimed, a prey to the wildest anguish, "do not abandon me—do not desert me—do not cast me off!"

"My poor boy," he answered, with compassion in his accents, "what can I do? It is your uncle who claims you. I wish you well—but I am unable to assist you further."

With these words he turned away and ascended the stairs: while the horrible humpback, clutching me by the arm, dragged me out of the hall to the hackney-coach, which he forced me to enter. A scream rose up to my very lips: but remembering it was the house of death which I was thus quitting, I stifled that expression of my heartfelt anguish;—and without being permitted to bid farewell to any of my fellow-servants, was I borne rapidly away.

CHAPTER VII.

ANNABEL.

I was now seated in the hackney-coach next to that man whom at the very first glance I had recoiled from with so deep a loathing, and whom I regarded in the light of a merciless persecutor. I burst into an agony of weeping as the vehicle rolled through the park; and so blinded was I with my tears, that I observed not, while passing the lodge at the entrance of the enclosure, whether the porter or any of his family saw me inside that coach. Mr. Lanover said not a word; and for a long time I thought not even of glancing up at his countenance. When the violence of my grief began to subside, and I longed to steal a look at his face—to ascertain if possible what treatment I was to expect at his hands—I dared not: I had not the courage. Oh! how could I ever regard that man as an uncle? how could I look upon him as a relative? If he were so, would not the voice of nature have cried up towards him from the depths of my heart, notwithstanding his ugliness?—should I have thus agonizingly shrunk in horror and aversion from his presence? But on the other

hand, how could I reasonably doubt that he was indeed nearly related to me? wherefore should he burthen himself with me if it were otherwise?

The vehicle proceeded in the direction of London; and already the northern suburbs were entered ere I could muster up sufficient courage to turn a furtive look upon Mr. Lanover. There did not appear to be anything spiteful in his countenance now. It was stern, cold, and implacable—but displaying no actual malignity. Still he said not a word: he met my look with his own chilling reptile-like gaze; and I withdrew my eyes,—shuddering from head to foot, and wondering what on earth was to be my destiny now.

To be brief, the coach rolled onward; and presently it stopped in Great Russell Street, Bloomsbury. The houses there are for the most part of a sufficiently respectable appearance: and it was at the door of one of these that the vehicle halted. Mr. Lanover curtly bade me alight; and the front door was opened by a female servant of middle age, with harsh features, and a sour crabbed look,—so that her very countenance appeared to furnish a continuation of the evil omens which attended every additional step of my acquaintance and connexion with Mr. Lanover. He conducted me into a parlour on the ground-floor, where a lady-like but very pale and sickly female, of about five-and-thirty, was seated.

"Here is Joseph," he said, in his usual hoarse, disagreeable, jarring voice, which was not even now modulated to any tone of kindness, although it was his wife (as I subsequently learnt) whom he was thus addressing. "See that you keep a sharp eye upon him—for he is a slippery young dog. I am going out on particular business, and will send round the tailor to measure him for proper clothes."

Having thus spoken, Mr. Lanover waited not for the meek reply which his wife gave in a voice rendered faint alike by indisposition and by terror of her husband: but he abruptly quitted the room. I was already prepossessed in favour of Mrs. Lanover; for her appearance was well calculated to inspire such confidence. Though pale and faded—pining away—and looking as if in a consumption—she retained the traces of a beauty of no common order; and there was something so mild and benevolent, so full of a pious resignation in the expression of her countenance, that even amidst my own griefs and troubles I could not help wondering, the very moment I beheld her, how it was such a being could possibly have any connexion with the hideous humpback. When we were alone together, she took me by the hand—gazed upon me with an affectionate sympathy—and kissing my cheek, said, "You are as welcome here, Joseph, as it is possible for me to make you."

But as she thus spoke, she sighed—doubtless involuntarily: for though she would not distress me in the first few moments of my introduction to the house, she could not help feeling how powerless she herself was to do aught for me beyond what her husband willed.

She bade me sit down, and began to question me concerning the recent events at Delmar Manor: but when she perceived what pain it caused me to discourse on those topics, and how the tears gushed forth from my eyes when I spoke of the murdered Mr. Delmar and the charming, amiable, and warm-hearted Edith,—she hastened to turn to another subject. So she proceeded to interrogate me respecting my earlier reminiscences; and I was surprised to find how little she knew concerning my antecedents.

"Did you know my parents," I ventured to inquire.

"No, my dear boy," she responded; "I was never acquainted with any members of my husband's family."

By this remark I found that it was indeed the humpback's wife with whom I was conversing, and as I had of course surmised her to be. Again therefore did the wondering—I may almost say wildering thought, occur to me, how it was possible that this interesting, lady-like, well-mannered woman could possibly have been led to link her fate with the most revolting lump of deformity that ever constituted a hideous caricature of the human shape? I think that by the manner in which I gazed upon her, she must have suspected what was passing in my mind: for the colour suddenly mantled upon her cheeks a moment before so devoid of vital hue—and a tear started forth upon the lashes of each mild blue eye. Light footsteps were at this instant heard descending the stairs: she hastily wiped away those crystal drops; and as the door opened, she said, "Joseph, this is my daughter—your cousin Annabel."

I rose to greet the relative who was thus introduced: but I was suddenly stricken as it were with wondering amazement at the presence of a being who appeared to me nothing short of a bright and beautiful vision. Annabel was about my own age—namely, fifteen: just at that interesting period for one of her sex when beauty is in its first virginal blossom. I had seen prints depicting the loveliest of females—in books I had read descriptions of feminine charms such as poets and novelists delight to give—but never aught in female shape which had thus been suggested to my mind, approached the ravishingly angelic creature that now stood before me. She seemed lovely beyond the possible loveliness of the romancist's happiest creation, or the poet's most worshipped ideal. Her countenance was one in which girlish simplicity was beginning to blend with a more thoughtful and serene expression; and over all there was a certain air of pensiveness—either the result of sorrows of her own experience, or else caught by reflection from a beloved mother's features. Nothing could exceed the softness of the large azure eyes; while myriads of ringlets of a golden hue waved around the exquisitely-shaped head. Her forehead was high and open: the softly rounded chin completed the perfect oval of the face. Her complexion was of the purest white,—not the white which finds comparison with the cold and death-like paleness of marble; but that clear living white whose colourless transparency constitutes its delicacy, and is relieved from an appearance of insipid sickliness by a healthful animation which rests upon it as the bloom upon the lily. The carnation wet with dew, would afford but a poor simile for the vivid carmine and moist freshness of her classically cut lips; and when these parted, they disclosed teeth which, for want of a better similitude, we must liken to two rows of pearls. Then her shape,—it

was chastely delicate in its taper slenderness, as that of a young girl of her age should be: but yet its fairy lightness and sylphid symmetry denoted the incipient expansion of charms budding towards the contours of womanhood. Thus the gentle undulations of the bust were defined by the neatly fitting dress; and nothing could exceed the admirable slope of her shoulders. She was tall for her age—upright as a dart—with a lithe willowy elasticity of figure properly belonging to girlhood, and yet fully consistent with mingled elegance and grace.

I could dwell throughout whole pages upon the lovely portrait of this sweet angelic creature as she first broke like a heavenly vision upon my view; and young though I was, I felt ravished—bewildered—amazed! Even then I experienced the etherealizing influence of Annabel's beauty. Around her appeared to hover as it were a halo of chastity: her presence exhaled the perfume of innocence: the spirit of girlish artlessness, female generosity, and all endearing qualities, appeared to shine as it were through her. The innocence of her age, the ingenuous candour of her disposition, and the warmth of feeling of which her generous heart was susceptible, were all expressed in the limpid azure of those large eyes, which, swimming in their clear whites, were fringed with dark brown lashes. And these lashes, as well as the arching brows, formed an agreeable contrast with the golden hues of her lustrous and luxuriant hair. I must not omit to add that her head was as gracefully poised on the delicate, slender, and flexible neck as a tulip on its graceful stalk; or that her hands were small even to a fault, with the fingers long and tapering, and crowned by pellucid nails, almond-shaped and rose-tinted: while her feet and ankles afforded no exception to the exquisite symmetry of all her other proportions.

Let the reader pardon me if I have dwelt thus long upon this charming portraiture—the most charming amongst the many to be introduced in my singularly varied and eventful narrative. Perhaps I did not fully comprehend all the matchless perfections of this fairy creature during the first few minutes that I beheld her—nor even during the first few weeks of our acquaintance: perhaps I was too young and too inexperienced to have such impressions made upon me. But in after years has my memory travelled back—and even while writing now, do my recollections thus retrace the vista of intervening time, and settle upon that precise day—that hour—those minutes, when Annabel and I first stood in each other's presence; and I know—I feel—I remember there arose within me the presentiment that this angelic creature was to exercise no ordinary influence over my future destiny.

I stood, I say, bewildered and amazed in the presence of that lovely vision. I was incredulous as to its reality: I could not bring myself to believe that it was otherwise than an angel-shape, permitted to appear to me, with its sweet countenance in which girlish simplicity, high intelligence, and soft pensiveness were all blended with an irresistible power of fascination. I was awakened from my sort of half-dream by Mrs. Lanover speaking, as she said, "Annabel, this is your cousin Joseph, whom your father led you to expect."

My cousin? Oh! how delightful to call this lovely girl by such an endearing name! She advanced towards me; and as a modest bashfulness tinged her cheeks with the delicate hue of the sea-shell pink, she extended her hand, which I at once clasped and pressed with a grateful fervour at being allowed to call her "cousin." But scarcely had this introduction taken place, when the ill-favoured servant-woman entered to announce that a tailor had come to measure me. The man was shown into the room—his business was speedily despatched—he departed—and I was again alone with those two whom I was told to regard as my relations. Ah! now I was scarcely sorry to be compelled to look upon Mr. Lanover as my uncle, —since by so doing I had found such an aunt and such a cousin! He need not have told his wife that I was "a slippery fellow," by which he doubtless meant that I should endeavour to run away unless carefully looked after: for I had not been an hour in the society of his wife and daughter, ere I had learnt to love them thoroughly.

But again and again did I marvel to myself that such a man could be so closely connected with two beings as unlike himself as the fairest and serenest clime differs from the horrid regions of hyperborean ice. I found that Annabel was, as her looks denoted, of the kindest disposition and most amiable character—without the slightest particle of affectation in her manners—and as thoroughly incapable of guile as an infant of being agitated by the stormy passions of grown-up man. She was evidently much attached—indeed devotedly so, to her mother, who, as I learnt in due course, was in a decline. But Annabel was ignorant of the real nature of her beloved parent's disease: she apprehended not that it must inevitably be soon closed in death. She only knew that Mrs. Lanover was very unwell—that she had long been ailing: but she hoped that this cherished and adored mother would eventually be restored to health. She ministered to her parent in the most affectionate manner, showing her all those little thousand and one attentions which are so many evidences of real genuine love, and which conduce so materially to the solace of the invalid. The mother, too, adored Annabel. And well she might!—not merely because in her she possessed the loveliest of beings and the tenderest of daughters—but because circumstances had rendered their love so mutually indispensable. For here—before entering into minuter details respecting my first experiences in Mr. Lanover's house—I may at once describe what I suspected from the first, but what I only had confirmed in the course of a few weeks. This was that the wretched humpback was the most remorseless of tyrants,—sometimes giving way to outbursts of terrific passion—at other times deporting himself with a brutal sullenness for days together—and then allowing an interval of calm to ensue ere the exhibition of some other phase of his varied and diabolic temper.

But what was Mr. Lanover? of what profession? what avocation did he follow? whence did he derive his income? He had represented himself to Mr. Delmar as a gentleman living upon his means. He had a back room fitted up as an office, where he sometimes received visitors on business —where he often sat writing for hours together—and also where he shut himself up for whole days

when in one of his sullen moods, appearing only in the parlour to take his meals. Sometimes, too, he was out a great deal both day and night,—always "on business"—but what its nature was, he never said. There appeared to be no lack of pecuniary means: he was evidently fond of good living, and the table was well supplied. The house was tolerably well furnished; and two female servants were kept. No duns knocked at the door: no creditor ever asked twice for his money; and Mr. Lanover did not stint his wife and daughter of any necessaries. But still he was a tyrant in his whole conduct: his will was a law from which there was no appeal: nothing could be done without his sanction;—and hence the evident misgiving which his wife had expressed on my arrival as to the amount of welcome I should experience beneath that roof.

But I must now return to the first day of my transference from Delmar Manor to Mr. Lanover's house. I sat conversing with my aunt and cousin—for so I was desired to call them—until four o'clock (it being about two when I arrived): and then the humpback came in to dinner. He spoke but little; and what he did say was in a harsh cross manner to us all three. When the meal was over, he bade me follow him into the back room, which was called "the office:" and making me sit down opposite to him, he eyed me for some time with a sort of sardonic satisfaction, as if in malignant triumph at having got me into his clutches at last. But I was so pleased with the society of his wife and daughter, that I felt I could endure much on the part of Mr. Lanover.

"Well," he said, with a sort of inward chuckle, "and so you are beneath your uncle's roof in the long run. Don't you think you played the game of a most ungrateful scapegrace when I first offered to take charge of you? But let me tell you this—that if you show any of your fine spirit here, I will take a leather strap and thrash it out of you, even though I cut your heart out at the same time."

There was something so diabolically horrible in these last words, that I shuddered visibly.

"Ah! I have touched you, have I?" exclaimed the humpback, with another and louder laugh, which jarred horribly upon my ears. "Take care you don't compel me to put my threat into execution. I know what you are—a scampish young fellow, fond of running away from people. But don't play that trick with me—or you will get the worst of it. You must never stir out of this house unless with my permission. I shall study your disposition well for a while; and then I shall see what I am to make of you: for of course you must look out for some profession or calling to earn your own bread in due time."

"I can assure you, Mr. Lanover——"

"Don't *Mr. Lanover* me!" he interjected with a fierce look. "Call me *uncle*."

"Well, uncle," I said, "I was going to observe that you may depend upon it I shall be only too delighted to have an opportunity of earning my own livelihood."

"This is mere cant—humbug and nonsense!" he exclaimed, with a grin of ineffable scorn and disgust. "I am not the man to be deceived by fine speeches. However, the chief and the only thing I wanted to tell you was this:—that if you take it into your head to run away from me, as you did from Mr. Jukes—or if you play the truant for even a single day—I will make you repent it as long as you live. And mind! when I do have confidence enough to let you go out, I will not have you renewing your acquaintance with those servants at Delmar Manor. You must not go near the place——at your peril will you do so! And what is more, if ever you happen to meet those Mulgraves, you will cross over to the other side, or pass them by, as if you never saw them before in your life. I will not have you cringing and humbling yourself by touching your hat as if you were still a page in menial service; and as they have only known you in *that* capacity, they will not recognise you in any other. Therefore, the best course is for you not to take any notice of them at all. Do you understand?—and what is more, do you mean to obey? Come, speak quick—and speak truly! Speak, I say, Joseph—speak!"

Mr. Lanover assumed such a fierce look, and appeared so very threatening as he fixed his half-weasel, half snake-like eyes upon me, with a cold vibrating glare, that I felt frightened; and I readily promised to fulfil his injunctions in all things. There the interview ended; and I returned to his wife and daughter in the front parlour. They did not question me as to what Mr. Lanover had been saying—they doubtless feared to do so; and I did not tell them of my own accord.

A few days afterwards my new clothes came home; and Mr. Lanover, having bade me pack up the page's livery, ordered me to address it in my own handwriting to the *Hon. Augustus Mulgrave, Delmar Manor, Enfield Road, Middlesex.* He then sent the parcel by his servant to some carrier's office, to be delivered at its destination.

"You see," he said, "that I will not let you remain under the slightest obligation to those Mulgraves; and this is the way to treat them. He told me not to have any of my insolence, did he?"—and then the humpback chuckled in his harshest and most disagreeably jarring tones.

I had been a week inside the house without setting foot over the threshold, and only taking a little exercise in a small yard at the back. Mr. Lanover now told me that he thought I had got "sufficiently domesticated" to be trusted out a little; and he bade me accompany him for a walk. We issued forth together, proceeding towards the West End. He called at three or four houses of good appearance,—desiring me on each occasion to wait for him in the street, and not to go far away from the range of view commanded by the front windows, as he should have his eye upon me. For several consecutive days he pursued the same course towards me; and then, again observing that I was sufficiently obedient and tractable, he told me I might walk out for an hour or two by myself. Thus another week passed; and finding that I always came back, he again expressed his approval, and bade me take my cousin Annabel on a shopping expedition. This I gladly did; and from that day forth I enjoyed comparative liberty,—Mr. Lanover appearing to feel that I had been put to a sufficient test, and that I had no inclination to run away. Nevertheless, he occasionally repeated his warnings against any endeavour of the kind,—accompanying them with

threats as diabolical as that which had so shocked and alarmed me on the first evening of my residence at his house.

CHAPTER VIII.

SORROW AND STRIFE.

One day—about six weeks after my introduction to Mr. Lanover's residence—Annabel and I were seated alone together in the parlour. Mrs. Lanover, being much indisposed, was confined to her own chamber; and as Annabel had been sitting with her for several hours, the kind and affectionate mother had desired her attentive daughter to descend to the parlour for at least a little while, so as to have a change of scene from the sick-room. Mr. Lanover was occupied in his office, which has been before described as the back room on the ground-floor, and therefore behind the parlour where Annabel and I were seated.

The young girl first of all took up her work: but I saw that she was in no mood to devote herself to it. She was unhappy—very unhappy, though she essayed as much as possible to conceal her feelings; and when I addressed her, she endeavoured to give smiling answers. But they were sickly smiles; and it was a sad, sad thing to behold such an expression come over the countenance of one so young, and so ingenuously, chastely, delicately beautiful. I conjectured but too well that she was sorrowing on her mother's account: I did not therefore like to allude to the subject; and the conversation drooped, until it ceased altogether. She bent that sweet face of her's over the work, which she however frequently laid down; and as I gazed upon her, I thought to myself that if I were rich and my own master, it would be the happiest moment of my life to place Annabel and her mother in complete independence of a man who was a brutal husband and a harsh, stern father. I remember that my young heart swelled almost to bursting, and the suffocating feelings came up into my very throat, as I contemplated that charming girl, and reflected that she was unhappy. Presently I beheld two large tears trickling slowly down her alabaster cheeks, and she appearing to be altogether unconscious that the emotions which were agitating in her soul were thus finding a vent. I could endure it no longer; but falling on my knees at her feet, I seized one of her hands; and while my own feelings burst forth in passionate sobs, I said, "O Annabel—dear Annabel, do not weep! It goes to my very heart to see you thus unhappy!"

Never shall I forget the look of mingled astonishment, gratitude, and pure sisterly love which Lanover's daughter fixed upon me as I gazed up into her countenance. She did not immediately speak: her young bosom was swelling with ineffable emotions; and then the tears gushed forth from her eyes, tracing their pearly path over the cheeks to which her varied and excited emotions conjured up a gentle flush.

"Do not weep for me, Joseph," she said, perceiving that my tears were flowing also; and the tones of her fluid voice, though tremulous and broken, as well as soft and low, were clear as the sound of purest silver: "do not weep for me! No amount of sorrow can amend my position; and it distresses me to see that you are likewise unhappy."

"Unhappy, Annabel!" I exclaimed: "how can I be otherwise when I see you weeping thus?"

"Sit down again, Joseph," she answered, suddenly wiping away her tears, and indicating the chair from which I had sunk upon my knees: then, with a manner of most melancholy seriousness, and a singularly touching pathos in her tone and looks, she went on to say, "You see, Joseph, how ill my poor mother is: or perhaps you do not see it with the same amount of apprehension that I do. But she *is* ill—very ill; and I begin to think that there is something more in this long indisposition of her's than I had hitherto imagined. For three or four weeks past these misgivings have been gradually creeping into my mind; and now they haunt me like spectres. You know not, Joseph, how I love that dear mother of mine. She has ever been so good and affectionate towards me; and if anything should happen——"

But here Annabel stopped short; and her grief burst forth anew. Nevertheless she essayed to stifle and subdue it as much as possible,—while her sweet azure eyes were flung in trembling apprehension towards the door; and I understood but too well wherefore. She feared lest her sobs and the sounds of weeping should reach the ears of her father: for it was a great crime in his estimation to give way to an extreme of feeling of any kind. Indeed, I believe that whether Annabel's silver laugh had pealed merrily through the house—or whether her voice sent forth the bitterest lamentations—it would have been equally sure to arouse his ill-humour and provoke the coarsest upbraidings on his part.

"Annabel—dear Annabel, do not go on thus!" I said. "Your mother is not dangerously ill: she is weak and feeble—and a few days' repose in her own chamber will restore her to health."

Annabel shook her head mournfully; and again conquering her emotions, she said in a whispering voice, "You know, Joseph, that you only tell me this to cheer me; but that you yourself think as I do in respect to my poor mother's illness. Oh! for the last few weeks I have given way to reflections which seem to have opened my mind to the better comprehending of many things, and to the widening of my experiences. It is a dreadful thing for a daughter to be compelled to speak thus of a father," she went on to observe, in the lowest whisper, and with another trembling glance towards the door; "but it is the truth—it is the truth!—his conduct is killing my poor mother by inches! When we were poor——and we have been very, very poor, Joseph —— Oh! we have known such poverty, I shudder when I look back upon it——my poor mother toiled all day, and half the night likewise, with her needle to support us. She was always ailing and sickly, ever since I can remember; and that close application to her work injured her health more seriously still. Does she not, therefore, deserve kinder treatment? Oh! she has been a good wife and a good mother: and should she be called hence, what will become of me, Joseph?—what will become of me?"

Poor Annabel literally wrung her hands as she thus spoke; and it was shocking indeed to behold

that fair young creature of fifteen thus speaking with the woe-experiences of a woman's mind—thus giving way likewise to an almost frenzied state of affliction. I said all I could to comfort and console her: I felt that I loved her dearly—Oh! so dearly, I would have caught her in my arms and strained her to my breast as if she were a sister.

"But I must not make you as unhappy as myself," she suddenly observed: and again exercising the strongest power over her feelings, she grew calm. "Let us talk for a few minutes, Joseph, upon something else, before I go up-stairs to my dear mother again. When you have been walking out, have you never happened to meet any one whom you knew at Delmar Manor?"—and I saw that she put this question, not with any particular motive, but merely for the purpose of giving the conversation a sudden turn.

"No—never," I answered.

"And will they not think," she continued, "that it is unkind on your part never to call and inquire after the health of the family? Have you not told me how good Miss Edith was towards you—how both Mr. and Mrs. Mulgrave experienced such sympathy in your behalf—and how all the domestics were so kind?"

"It is all true, Annabel," I answered: "but I dare not do that which my heart prompts. I long to know how poor Miss Edith is——"

"And you dare not go thither and inquire?" interrupted Annabel, gazing upon me in amazement. "Or is the distance——"

"Distance? Oh no!" I exclaimed. "Were it ten times as great, I would cheerfully proceed on foot to testify my gratitude for the kindness I experienced at Delmar Manor:"—then lowering my voice to a cautious whisper, I added, "My uncle—your father—has forbidden me to go near that house, or even to speak to Mr. and Mrs. Mulgrave, should I happen to meet them."

Again did Annabel gaze upon me with amazement: but she saw by my look that I was indeed speaking nothing but the truth.

"Poor Miss Delmar!" she said, in a compassionating tone, touchingly soft and meltingly pathetic: "from all you have told me of that young lady, I feel deeply interested in her. Perhaps she may not have survived the dreadful shock: but if she have, I sincerely wish her as much happiness as under circumstances she may possibly know in this world."

"So far as wealth can contribute to the fulfilment of your amiable wish," I answered, "she possesses that element of worldly felicity: for I happen to know that Mr. Delmar left his property in equal shares between his two daughters——"

At this moment the door opened with such abruptness—almost indeed with violence—that both Annabel and I started from our seats. Mr. Lanover entered the room; and the aspect of his countenance was but little calculated to tranquillize our alarms. I cannot describe the horrid look that he wore at the moment: his face was very pale—he seemed as if he himself had been frightened—or else that he was a prey to a convulsing rage, to which however he did not immediately give vent. He stood for a few moments gazing upon me with that dreadful look of his,—so that I shuddered and became cold to the innermost confines of my being.

"Go up to your mother!" he suddenly exclaimed in his harshest voice, and turning his diabolic look upon his angelic daughter: "go up to your mother, I say—and don't be gossipping here! Be off—quick—obey me!"—and the wretched humpback stamped his foot with rage.

Annabel had only paused to gather up her work: but her hands trembled so that she let it fall twice; and this trifling delay of a few brief instants appeared to goad her unnatural father to very madness. She hurried out of the room; and Mr. Lanover banged the door violently behind her.

"And so you have been complaining—have you—to my daughter, that I won't let you go to the Manor?"—and as he thus spoke he walked straight up to me with a reptile-glare vibrating in his deep-set eyes. "Now don't attempt to deny it: I overheard everything that has passed between Annabel and you. The minx—the hussy—the little wretch—she dared to talk of domestic matters and to upbraid me behind my back! But I will serve her out for it—that I will!" and the humpback's hideous countenance expressed a malignity truly fiend-like.

I shrank back so terrified that I felt as if he were about to murder me.

"Yes—I overheard all the whimpering, and crying, and the nonsense that has been going on," he continued. "But no matter. I shall know what to do. Killing her by inches indeed!"—and the humpback gave vent to that low, jarring, sardonically chuckling laugh which was so terrible to hear: but all of a sudden ceasing that hideous sound, and assuming a serious expression of countenance, he said in a milder manner, "What was it that you were telling Annabel at the moment I entered? How did you know anything about the way in which Mr. Delmar left his property? Not that it matters to me: but I don't choose you to go chattering about other people's concerns. Come—speak out—don't stand hesitating there! How did you know, I say, that Mr. Delmar made any such disposal of his property?"

"I do know, uncle," was my answer, "that the unfortunate gentleman made his will in favour of his two daughters equally."

"Well, but *how* did you know it?" demanded the humpback: "for I don't suppose that Mr. Delmar was likely to make a confidant of a boy like you—and that boy his page too at the time! Come, speak out!"

I saw that a tempest of rage was on the point of bursting forth again: for the humpback had stamped his foot as he spoke;—and therefore, in order to avert the menaced storm, I candidly explained how I had been rendered an unwilling hearer of the conversation which took place between Mr. Delmar and Mr. Mulgrave when I was engaged in the museum. The humpback listened without interrupting me; and when I had done speaking, he appeared to reflect for a few moments: then he suddenly exclaimed, "And don't you think you were a pretty sneaking pitiful scoundrel to stay in that place and overhear a private conversation between your master and his son-in-law?"

"I have already explained to you, uncle," was my response, "how I became an unwilling listener."

"Stuff and nonsense!" he ejaculated fiercely. "But I won't have a nephew of mine confess that he was guilty of any such dirty paltry meanness. So take care how I catch you talking again upon the subject. Mind, I say!—never let anything in connexion with that dishonourable conduct of your's pass your lips any more—or by all the powers of Satan, I'll cut the very heart out of you!"

The humpback shook his fist in my face as he thus spoke; and notwithstanding that he appeared a perfect monster of hideousness at the moment,—notwithstanding, too, that his countenance expressed all the darkest passions of the soul with such diabolic intensity as to be but too well calculated to make even a grown-up and strong man afraid,—I felt arising within me certain feelings which towards *him* I had not experienced before. The spectacle of his lovely, amiable, ingenuous daughter's recent affliction, so closely followed by his brutal and unmanly severity towards her, was vividly uppermost in my mind; and now that he dared to shake his fist in my face——Oh! boy as I was, this aggregate of provocations suddenly aroused within me a certain spirit of rebellion. Perhaps he beheld something in my looks which made him suspect all this: perhaps he saw indignant glances flashing from my eyes. But certain it is that he stopped and surveyed me with a singular earnestness—indeed, a scrutinizing penetration, for nearly a minute; and then, muttering something to himself, abruptly quitted the room.

It would appear that at this very moment Annabel was descending the stairs to procure something for her mother; and the humpback literally roared out, "Go up again—go up again, I say! No more of your sneaking tittle-tattle and your lies to Joseph!"

"Father, for heaven's sake do not address me thus," said the sweet voice of Annabel, in a tone

earnestly deprecating and full of pathetic entreaty.

"Go up stairs again, I say! go up stairs!" he vociferated still more furiously.

"I am descending to the kitchen," answered Annabel, meekly, "to fetch something for my poor dear mother."

"By the powers of Satan, the girl defies me!" thundered forth the humpback: and his words were quickly followed by a blow.

"O father, father!" murmured Annabel: and then she burst into tears.

He had struck her!—the wretch had struck that saint-like girl! The blow not merely smote my ears, but likewise my heart: the spirit of a tiger was excited within me—I rushed to the door—I tore it open—I sprang upon Lanover at the very instant he was about to deal his daughter another blow—I dashed him to the ground: I had the strength of a thousand at that instant.

Annabel threw herself between me and her infuriate sire, as he sprang up to his feet; and with passionate entreaties, she besought *me* to be calm and *him* not to hurt me. The servants came rushing up the kitchen stairs; and Mrs. Lanover, having thrown on a morning-wrapper, hurried down from her own chamber in wild affright.

"Go to your room, sir—go to your room, Joseph, this instant!" vociferated the almost maddened humpback; and his words were accompanied with a terrible imprecation.

"Yes, go—for heaven's sake go, Joseph!" whispered Annabel, with a look of the most imploring entreaty: and her words were echoed by Mrs. Lanover.

Reaction was already taking place in my own mind: I felt alarmed at what I had done,—and this was natural enough, considering my tender age. But still there was too much of my aroused spirit remaining to suffer me to proffer a syllable in the form of apology; and in a sort of half-affrighted, half-sullen mood, I began to ascend the stairs. Mrs. Lanover, clinging in feebleness and terror to the railings, threw upon me a look full of tender compassion as I passed: it was evident that she could not be angry with me for what I had done, even though it was her own husband on whom I had inflicted personal chastisement. I glanced back, and beheld Annabel gazing after me in a similar manner. Every shade of sullenness vanished from my soul; and I burst into tears at the thought that these two amiable beings should be subject to the tyranny of such a ruffian.

I ascended to my own bed-chamber; but not many moments had I been there, when I heard Mr. Lanover's heavy footsteps tramping quickly up the staircase: and locking my door with a violence indicating the furious rage that filled his soul, he drew forth the key. But he spoke not a word. I listened at the door to hear whether he purposed to vent his brutal spite upon his wife or daughter: the spirit of rebellion was again strong within me—and I had the settled resolution of bursting open that door and flying to their assistance, at the slightest sound which should seem to fulfil my apprehensions. But all continued silent for upwards of a minute; and then the violent banging of the front-door of the house made me aware that Mr. Lanover had gone forth in a towering passion.

CHAPTER IX.

FEMALE APPAREL.

It was about two o'clock in the afternoon when I was thus consigned a prisoner to my own chamber. As for the captivity, I cared nothing about it: nor did I devote much thought in speculation as to what might possibly be the result of my rebellion against Mr. Lanover's tyranny. Hot feelings were agitating within me: I was in a glow of rage and indignation at the treatment which Annabel had received. Her image—so ravishingly ingenuous, so angelically candid—was before me: methought I beheld her charming azure eyes looking with sweet melancholy into mine—methought that her countenance, surrounded with its bright hyperion locks, was gazing in melting tenderness upon me. I felt—or at least I fancied that I loved her as if she were a very, very dear sister: I did not then understand that it was a love of another species which had already taken root in my young heart. And, Oh! to think that this being of such ethereal beauty—that this charming girl, endowed with all the ingenuous candour of fifteen, should be subjected to the brutal tyranny of a despot father—there was something in the reflection that maddened me!

So active was my brain—such a whirl of thoughts kept pouring, eddying, and circling in it—that I noticed not how time went by. I was in a state of feverish excitement that I had never known before: I felt that there was something to be done—but what it was I knew not—and if I did, had no power to execute it. It was most probably some desperate idea of liberating myself and carrying off Annabel and her mother: but my brain was too confused for calm deliberation or the adoption of a settled purpose.

Thus some time passed away; and then I heard a gentle tap at the door, and Annabel's sweet voice spake to me in consoling and encouraging words. I thanked her—I blessed her—I besought her not to endanger her own peace and comfort on my account. She told me that her father had gone out; and she whisperingly added that she must not remain long at my door, as the servants would be sure to mention the incident to their master if they happened to become aware of it. When she had gone, her sweet silvery tones appeared still to be echoing musically in my ears: it was a delicious harmony, as if angel-voices had been whispering to me from the spheres. Every now and then, as often as she dared, did Annabel come back to my door; and when I heard her light feet approaching and the gentle tap of her fair fingers, my heart thrilled with a sense of delicious ecstacy. But hours passed on: evening came—and all this while Mr. Lanover remained absent. He had taken the key with him; and there were no means of conveying to me any refreshment.

"O Joseph! are you not very, very hungry?" inquired poor Annabel, in a trembling voice, at each of the visits which she now paid to the door: but I assured her that even if I had food in the room, I should not touch a morsel—for that I had no appetite: and I spoke truly.

The dusk set in; and I heard the nearest church-clock at length proclaim the hour of ten. Almost

immediately afterwards Mr. Lanover's well-known imperious knock at the front door reverberated through the house. He was returning; and now I wondered for the first time during these many hours of my captivity, what could have kept him so long absent. It is true that he was sometimes away from home for an entire day, and even the whole night,—always, as stated in a previous chapter, alleging business engagements: but it now occurred to me that his absence on this particular occasion had some especial reference to myself. Not that I however cared much: I was in that state of mind which almost defied the power of a new calamity to excite my feelings more painfully than they were already exasperated. I heard the front door close: then five minutes elapsed in silence; and at the expiration of that interval, the sounds of Mr. Lanover's footsteps ascending the stairs, reached my ears. Those sounds ceased at my door: the key was introduced in the lock—and the humpback, with a candle in one hand and a plate in the other, made his appearance.

"Here is something for you to eat," he said, in a voice sternly implacable: and now I noticed that he had a stout stick under his arm. "Yes," he added, with a look of malignant significancy; "I have thought fit to bring with me a ready means of dashing your brains out, you vile perverse boy, if you dare raise your hand against me once more."

"A coward who would strike a poor girl—and that girl his own daughter," I answered, my indignant spirit flaming up within me, "would not stop short at any ruffian-deed."

Mr. Lanover had already deposited the plate upon the table: quick as lightning his right hand, which was thus left free, grasped the stout stick—and I was felled to the floor; while a bitter imprecation, but low and deeply muttered on Lanover's part, accompanied that savage act. I was not stunned—but for an instant I was almost stupified. Then I thought he meant to murder me; and this dreadful idea, flashing to my mind, startled me into a wild terror. I was resolved to make a desperate struggle on behalf of my young life—and was about to precipitate myself on the brutal humpback, when he dealt me another blow which struck me down a second time. I was now thoroughly dismayed and cowed: my spirit was tamed down in a moment. Quickly as the dread of murder had flashed to my mind, did the certainty spring up within me that he did *not* mean to take my life, but that he was only punishing me; and I felt the necessity of submission.

"Now," he said, with a horrible grin, "I suppose you have had enough of it. Take and eat this food I have brought you."

"I do not want it," was my answer, given half in sullenness, half in affright.

"Very well—just as you choose," he responded. "Take off your clothes and get to bed: it's past ten o'clock."

I obeyed: for I still smarted under the terrific blows which I had received; and I dreaded a repetition of them. I accordingly laid aside my apparel, and entered the couch. Mr. Lanover proceeded to gather up my clothes: he opened my drawers and took out another suit which I had: even my very boots did he thus possess himself of; and as he was quitting the room with the bundle, he said, "Now, you young rascal, you have no chance of escape. You see I am prepared for any of your tricks."

The light of the candle flashing upon his countenance, showed that it was expressive of more than his usual malignity, blended with an air of fiendish triumph. He issued forth, locking the door behind him, and taking out the key. I was left again a captive, to the darkness of my chamber and the deep despondency of my thoughts. I could not go to sleep: I lay trembling with vague and undefined apprehensions. Mr. Lanover's conduct had been so desperately resolute—so remorselessly brutal—that I felt persuaded there was no punishment his imagination could devise, short of murder, which his fiendish nature would not enable him to inflict. I heard the neighbouring church-clock strike eleven; and a few minutes afterwards there was a knock at the front door. Then I heard Mr. Lanover's voice in the ground-floor passage, bawling out these words:—"You need not answer it: I know who it is—some one for me. You can get up to bed, both of you: I will see all safe."

These words were evidently addressed to the two servants; and accordingly I heard them both ascend in a few minutes to the chamber which they occupied on the highest floor, and which was above my own. Then again, for a few minutes, all was silent in the house—save the light tread of footsteps overhead, as the women-servants were retiring for the night. But now I heard the door of Annabel's room, which was on the same level as my own, gently open. I listened with suspended breath: for the idea struck me that the circumstance was to some extent connected with myself, from the simple fact that the proceeding was evidently conducted with stealthiness. I distinctly heard her fairy footsteps descend the first few stairs of the flight downward: light though these steps were, yet so keen were all my faculties at the moment, that I could have heard a pin drop. But when those sounds were no longer audible, I lay wondering what it could all mean. I lay listening too: but half-an-hour elapsed without any farther token of what was going on. So strong however was the intuitive conviction that Annabel was up and about the house for some purpose in connexion with myself, that I got out of bed and listened at the door. I had not been many minutes there, when I heard a door on the landing below open and shut gently,—the sound evidencing caution. I knew it to be the door of the chamber which Mrs. Lanover now occupied during her indisposition; and therefore I at once concluded that Annabel was up merely for the purpose of ministering to her mother, and that she crept about thus stealthily for fear of provoking some new outburst of passion and some fresh ebullition of violence on the part of her father.

I went back to bed, and gradually sank off into a state not exactly of slumber where all consciousness is lost, but into a kind of dreamy repose where the intellect loses not entire command over its reflections. Thus I was still experiencing, as it were, a continuation of the same ideas as before; when I was aroused by hearing a key turning in the lock of my door. At the same instant the church-clock began striking; and I knew it must be midnight, though I counted not the strokes,—

for some one was evidently entering my chamber. I was seized with a mortal terror: for the thought sprang up vividly in my mind that Lanover was coming to murder me. Such was the consternation which fell upon me, that I had no power to move; and yet it appeared as if a scream had risen up to my very lips, but that I was not enabled to make the exertion necessary to give vent to it. The door opened; and all in an instant my dismay was banished, as the whispering voice of Annabel said, "Joseph, are you awake?"

"Yes," I replied, speaking in a similarly low tone: for I was struck by the conviction that the utmost caution was necessary in the present proceeding, whatsoever it were.

"Do not be frightened, Joseph," she went on to say, speaking in a low, rapid, and tremulous whisper; and I had no difficulty in comprehending that she was striving hard to subdue her own agitation as well as she could. "Do not be frightened—and ask no questions: but you must leave the house——You must fly, Joseph—you must fly!"

"Fly? good heavens!" I said, in a paroxysm of terror: for a thousand unknown dangers appeared to be suddenly springing up around me.

"Hush! I implore you not to risk and ruin everything by any mad excitement:"—and these were strong terms for the mild and gentle Annabel to use,—smiting me therefore with the fearful importance of attending to her injunction.

"But whither am I to go?"

"Go, poor Joseph? Anywhere—so that you remain not here! For heaven's sake ask no questions! delay not!——Oh, I am myself half wild at the cause of all this! But you must fly—you must hasten away from London!—the greater the distance, the better. I have money for you——"

"But my clothes? Your father has taken them all."

"I know it—and I could not get them. Perhaps I risked my very life——O heavens, that I should say so!——to obtain the key. You must apparel yourself in female attire——There, Joseph, on this chair next to the door is everything you want. Get up and dress yourself: I dare not give you a light—and I shall remain outside the door until you are ready. I conjure you, delay not!"

Annabel then quitted the room; and the door was closed behind her as noiselessly as possible. The reader may imagine far better than I can possibly describe the state of excitement into which I was thrown—an excitement which made me tremble all over with a nervous feeling, in which there was even something hysterical. I got out of bed, and felt for the apparel on the chair. All my limbs quivered: but I knew that some terrific danger must indeed menace me in order to urge the pure-minded Annabel to have recourse to the present proceeding. I therefore gathered all my fortitude to my aid, and began to do my best to assume the female apparel which she had brought for the purpose. I will not enter into minute particulars on this point: suffice it to say that in about a quarter of an hour I was dressed in that raiment. It was her own that she had lent for the purpose; and considering the intricacies of such a toilet for one of the male sex, and that it was accomplished in the dark, I was surprised at my own expertness in mastering its difficulties in so short a space.

It was finished—and I gently opened the door. Annabel took me by the hand, and guided me to the stairs: for the passage was quite dark. Gently—indeed with aerial lightness—did we both descend. As we passed the door of her father's room, she pressed my hand with significancy—it was indeed with the spasmodic energy of direst apprehension—to warn me that the slightest incautious sound, such as too heavy a tread—a creaking of a board—a false step—even a breath too deeply drawn, would betray us and ruin everything. But we passed on unheard: indeed, no spectres ever glided more lightly;—and the passage of the ground-floor was reached.

"Now, Joseph, you stand upon the threshold of safety—and heaven be thanked!" whispered Annabel, in a voice so low that three yards off it could not have been heard at all: yet so clear was her musical voice that I lost not a syllable. "Here is a purse—take it—my mother sends it to you, accompanied by her blessing. It contains not much—but sufficient to bear you to a great distance hence——and the greater the better! O Joseph, you can judge what my feelings are when I tell you that your life is menaced—and by my own father!"

Here Annabel was for a few moments so overpowered by her feelings that she clung to my arm for support. I clasped her waist, and imprinted a kiss upon her cheek: it was cold as marble!

"Now, Joseph," she said, quickly recovering herself, "you must depart!"

"But you, Annabel—dearest Annabel?" I whisperingly answered: "to what perils am I leaving you exposed!"—and I was almost distracted at the thought.

"Be not uneasy, Joseph, on my account," she rejoined: "*my* life at least will not be menaced! Beware of my father——beware also of that man Taddy, who was here this evening. And now go!"

"No, no, Annabel—I cannot leave you thus!" I said: "there is madness in the bare thought! Rather would I dare everything——"

"Joseph, Joseph—I conjure you to depart! You know not what you are risking by this delay!"

"No, Annabel——"

"Joseph, if my father were to overhear us, he might in the first paroxysm of his rage——I shudder at the idea——you understand me——for *my* sake depart!"

"You will have it so, Annabel—and I obey you. O God, that the time may come, dear girl, when we may meet again!"

"Yes, yes, Joseph—we shall meet again: for there is justice in heaven—and you will not always be persecuted thus. And now away!"

I caught her once more in my arms: we embraced fondly—fervently. She opened the front door in the most noiseless manner possible; and as the light of the street-lamp beamed upon her countenance, I saw that it was pale as death, and that in each eye there glistened a tear—those two tears resembling twin-drops of the diamond dew. I would have seized her hand again—but she waved me away: the door closed—and she was lost to my view.

I hastened along the deserted street of midnight, reckless of the way which I took. Indeed my thoughts were in too wild a state of bewilderment for me to deliberate what course I should adopt or which direction I should choose. I looked at myself, and found that I was apparelled in a dark silk dress, with a shawl, a bonnet, gloves, and lady's shoes. Assuredly these last-mentioned articles were not Annabel's: for the shoes that belonged to her delicate feet would not have fitted mine. I therefore concluded they were her mother's. However, not to dwell upon such details, suffice it to say that I was apparelled as a young female; and there would have been something ludicrous in the adventure, were it not that this raiment had been assumed in order to save me from a murderous design. Ah! and I recollected the name of Taddy had been mentioned;—and that man was an acquaintance—nay, more, an accomplice of Lanover's! I had hoped that when I parted from him near three months back at the gate of Delmar Park, all connexion between him and me was severed for ever: but here I found his name suddenly blending itself in matters deeply and darkly concerning myself, and mysteriously associated with the progress of my destinies. What could it all mean?—why, I asked myself, should my own uncle (if such Lanover really were) seek my life? and wherefore should Taddy be likewise interested in taking it?

Such were my reflections as I hastened through the streets: but I was aroused from them by some ribald words which a half-tipsy rakish-looking gentleman addressed to me as he seized my hand; and breaking away from him, I rushed onward in vague affright. I found myself in Oxford Street. It was not quite so much deserted as Great Russell Street: several females were walking leisurely about—several rude and ill-mannered men also: several equipages, too, dashed by with their prancing steeds and their glaring lights. London was not yet asleep with all her Argus-eyes.

I continued my way, still in utter ignorance of what course I ought to adopt—but feeling impressed with the paramount importance of following Annabel's advice and getting out of the metropolis as quickly as possible. For a moment the idea struck me that I would hire a public vehicle, proceed to Delmar Manor, and beseech an asylum there: but then I reflected that this would be worse than absurd—it would be absolutely courting danger; inasmuch as the Manor was so close to London, and Mr. Lanover might possibly suspect that I had fled from his house in order to return amongst my former friends. So I went on, more and more bewildered how to act,—rejecting each scheme as soon as formed, and feeling the iron of utter friendlessness penetrating into my very soul. I was accosted by more rakish-looking men, old as well as young: I fled from them with a feeling of horror which I did not however rightly understand at the time. There was a veil to my bonnet; and I drew it down.

I turned out of Oxford Street, and found myself in a very large square, the name of which I did not know; and I thought not of looking up to read it against the corner-houses, although the lamps rendered the place light enough for the purpose. As I was proceeding onward, I suddenly found myself in the midst of a group of insolent young men, one of whom caught hold of me; and with a cry of terror I broke away from him. They did not pursue me; but their boisterous laughter rang upon my ears until I reached the opposite side of the square;—and then, through sheer exhaustion, I began to slacken my pace, just as I reached a diverging street, at the corner of which stood a post-chaise with four horses.

But at that very instant methought I again heard those sounds of laughter coming from behind; and seized with apprehension of farther annoyance, I hastened towards a footman who was standing close by the door of the post-chaise, for the purpose of beseeching his protection. He immediately opened the door, and hurriedly motioned me to enter the vehicle. In my bewilderment, fright, and confusion, I instantaneously complied,—naturally thinking that he was good-naturedly putting me there for protection against the rude persons whom he might see advancing. The door was quickly closed—the footman sprang upon the box, exclaiming, "All right!"—and the post-chaise darted away at the utmost speed of the four horses attached to it.

CHAPTER X.

AN ADVENTURE.

I WAS so astounded at this incident that I was for some minutes at a loss what to do: indeed, I felt as if it were all a dream. I threw up the veil which was over my countenance—looked from both windows to convince myself that I was really and positively awake—and then pressed my hands to my temples to still the throbbing of my brain and settle my ideas. Yes—I was indeed broad awake! It was no dream; and I found myself seated alone inside that chaise, and being whirled along at a tremendous pace. It was but too evident that some egregious error had occurred, and that I had been taken for some one else: because it was impossible to conceive that this post-chaise-and-four was waiting in readiness for *me*, or that Annabel's arrangements for my flight could have gone to this extent. I thrust my head from the window, and called to the footman, who was seated on the box. The rattle of the wheels and the trampling of horses created such a din that I could not hear what he said in reply: but I caught the words "All right," and "nothing to fear;" and I likewise perceived that he motioned vehemently with his hand, but at the same time in a perfectly respectful manner, for me to draw in my head from the window. Again I endeavoured to make him comprehend that some grand mistake must have occurred: again I caught the words "All right"—and then he urged the postilions to accelerate their speed.

I sank back in the vehicle in a strangely excited state of mind: and once more I began to suspect that, after all, the post-chaise might really have been intended for me. But if so, why had not Annabel mentioned it? Moreover, how could she possibly foresee that on leaving Great Russell Street my wandering steps would lead me in that precise direction where the equipage was waiting? No—it was out of all question; and therefore I

was again speedily led to the conclusion that the whole adventure was connected with a mistake which could only be accounted for by the supposition that I was taken for some one else. But now it occurred to me that after all it might prove a very fortunate incident. I was being borne rapidly out of the metropolis—that metropolis where dangers environed me, and where murderous intents might be tracking my footsteps. Wildly, and vividly, and terribly came back to my mind those warnings which Annabel had uttered, —warnings against her own father and the villain Taddy,—and therefore, instead of being grieved at an occurrence which was thus wafting me away from the scene of such frightful perils, I began to rejoice and to thank heaven for having so mysteriously and wonderfully saved me therefrom. As the sense of increasing security thus grew within me, I thought that it would be nothing less than downright madness to make another attempt to stop the chaise and give explanations to the footman. No—I would suffer the equipage to carry me as far as it might; for I reasoned to myself that whomsoever I should meet at the end of the journey, could not possibly be regarded as more formidable than the vile humpback and the detested Taddy. So I remained quiet inside the vehicle, and fell into a train of reflection in which Annabel's image was uppermost; and as I reviewed all that had taken place on this memorable night, I felt that the gratitude of an entire existence was due to that amiable and beauteous creature.

The streets of London were now left behind—the chaise was dashing along a road bordered with villa-residences—these dwellings soon became more and more straggling—until at length they yielded altogether to hedges and trees. We were now therefore out in the open country; and the fresh breeze of morning—for it was considerably past one o'clock—fanned my feverish cheeks. A sense of weariness came over me—an irresistible desire to compose myself to slumber; and beginning to feel that the air was somewhat sharp and cold, but yet not choosing to exclude it altogether by drawing up the windows, I merely put down the veil and folded the shawl more closely around me. I was sinking off to sleep when the equipage turned abruptly out of the main road, with such a sweep into a bye-lane that I was startled with the apprehension it was about to upset. So great was the terror thus suddenly caused, that I was aroused into complete wakefulness again; and glancing first from one window—then from the other—I perceived a high hedge on either side; so that the equipage was embowered as it were in the verdure which darkened the view. Along this shady lane it proceeded for about ten minutes—when it entered another main road, and stopped in front of a spacious mansion standing about a hundred yards back, and with an intervening shrubbery. Of all the numerous windows, lights appeared to be burning in only three on the ground-floor; and as the equipage came to a sudden halt, I likewise observed two gentlemen standing at the iron-gate which was set in the boundary-wall, and which stood open. Now, I thought to myself, the mistake would be discovered: and what if, after all, I should experience some very rough treatment in the paroxysm of rage which disappointment would be so well calculated to excite on the part of these individuals? What, too, if the female whom they were no doubt expecting, and for whom I had been taken, were to be made the object of some dreadful crime—even murder?—and that this doom might be inflicted upon me before it was discovered that I was *not* the right person? I was suddenly petrified with horror—stricken with consternation—as these reflections swept rapidly through my brain. The door of the chaise was quickly opened by one of the two gentlemen; and there was light enough to show me that he was young and handsome.

"You must alight here," he said, in a tone which indicated the resoluteness of a sternly settled purpose: at the same time he reached forward his arm to aid me in descending from the vehicle.

I obeyed mechanically. I strove to speak, if it were but a single word, to clear up the mistake: but I could not. My tongue clave to the roof of my mouth: my faculties were paralyzed with consternation. I descended: the two gentlemen took my arms—and hurried me through the shrubbery into the mansion. Another footman was standing on the threshold of the front door; and the instant we entered, he closed it. I was now in a large and handsome marble hall—still sustained between the two gentlemen, one of whom I have already noticed as young and handsome: the other was an elderly person, some five or six years on the shady side of fifty. Here I stopped suddenly short: the faculty of speech appeared to be returning—and I was about to say something, when the elder of the two gentlemen, whose sallow and wrinkled countenance denoted a stern and rigid decision of purpose, said curtly, "Not a word! You must submit."

The blood froze in my veins: all kinds of horrors sprang up like ghastly spectres before me: I was smitten with the conviction that murder was intended—and I the victim! A side-door opened; and I was hurried into a sumptuously furnished dining-room, where a clergyman in canonicals and an elderly lady were seated. This elderly lady was exceedingly pale; and I instantaneously read upon her countenance that same air of stern decision which I had already noticed upon the features of the two gentlemen. Wax-lights were burning upon a table in the centre of the room: but they only lighted it dimly—and the remote corners of that spacious apartment were enveloped in obscurity.

"Can this be Alicia?" quickly cried the lady, as if seized with a suspicion of something wrong.

"Pardon me—forgive me—for God's sake, do me no harm!" I cried, my tongue now completely unlocked; and I sank down upon my knees in the midst of that group of four by whom I was surrounded.

"Perdition!" ejaculated the younger of the two gentlemen. "Whom have we here?"—and the veil was snatched up from my face with such sudden violence that the very bonnet was torn off my head.

"Treachery!" was the instantaneous ejaculation on the part of the elderly gentleman and lady—while the young gentleman stood stupified with amazement; and the clergyman dropped from his hand a book which he had been holding.

"It is a boy!" cried the elderly gentleman.

"What does it all mean?" asked the lady: and indescribable was the confusion which prevailed.

"It was not my fault! it was a mistake—an error!" I cried. "I was told to enter the carriage——"

"Little fool!" thundered forth the elderly gentleman: "what mischief have you done!"—and in a sudden paroxysm of rage, he levelled a terrific blow at my head with his clenched fist: but the lady caught him by the arm, and held it back just in time to save me from receiving its full force.

"For heaven's sake, Ravenshill, do nothing rash!" she exclaimed. "Let us hear his story."

"Yes, my lord—pray be composed," said the clergyman.

"Composed!" echoed Lord Ravenshill,—for such appeared to be his title and name: "how can I be composed when all our plans——"

"Hush, father," interposed the younger gentleman, who now appeared to have recovered his self-possession: "let us take my mother's advice and hear this boy's story. Get up, sir," he said, sternly addressing me, as I still knelt in the midst of this excited group; "and explain what has occurred. But be careful how you deceive us: for you no doubt have sufficient insight into this matter to be aware that it is most serious. Come—speak frankly. Everything depends on the account you render of yourself."

"I repeat," was my answer, tremblingly given, "that I am innocent of any wilful intention to produce mischief."

"Your name? who are you?" demanded Lord Ravenshill imperiously.

"Joseph Wilmot," was the response quickly elicited by terror. "I implore——"

"But who are you?" again demanded the nobleman, stamping his foot with enraged impatience: "how came you in this female garb? By heaven!" he added, turning to his wife and son, "I do believe he is in some trick—and that he was dressed up for the express purpose of personating——"

"Hush, father! mention no names!" quickly interposed the son.

"But the height and figure—the shape—the appearance when the veil is down,—all are the same!" said the bewildered nobleman. "It cannot be an accident—a coincidence! it must have been intentional!"

"Do let the boy explain," said Lady Ravenshill.

"Yes—that is the best course," suggested the clergyman. "I do not think he is a party to any trickery: he looks too frightened. Let us hear what he says. Come—speak, my lad; and do not be afraid. You have nothing to fear, if you tell the truth."

While this hurried colloquy was going on, certain rapid reflections swept through my mind. I felt that it would be most unkind—most ungrateful, indeed, towards Annabel and her mother, to expose Mr. Lanover's iniquity: for *her* sake I was bound to spare *him*. I knew not to what extent I might entangle him with the law, if I were to give a complete explanation of his diabolic intentions towards me. Frightened therefore though I was, I nevertheless resolved to dare any amount of savage vengeance that might be inflicted by those with whom I now found myself, rather than reveal matters which, by affecting Lanover, might produce consequences to redound heavily upon the heads of Annabel and her mother.

"If your lordship," I said, addressing Ravenshill, "will listen to me for a few instants, I will explain as much as I can or may."

"By heaven!" ejaculated the young gentleman, "the explanation shall be most complete and satisfactory—or it will be the worse for you!"

"Hush, Walter," said Lady Ravenshill, in a deprecating manner to her son: "we must let the boy speak."

"I solemnly declare," I went on to observe, "that what I have already told you, is true. Ask the domestic who was in attendance on the chaise, whether he did not at once compel me to enter when I accosted him."

"Ah! you accosted him?" ejaculated Lord Ravenshill. "But wherefore?"—and he eyed me with keenest suspicion.

"Some rude persons were in pursuit of me," was my response; "and I flew to that servant for protection. This is the real truth: the man himself can corroborate my statement when he comes to reflect on the mode in which the mistake originated. But what is more," I went on to say, suddenly recollecting something, "I looked out of the window to inform him of the error and bid him stop: but he assured me that it was all right—he would scarcely listen to me—the chaise rolled on like the wind——"

"Well," observed the clergyman, "the boy speaks frankly and openly enough; and his looks corroborate his sincerity. It is clearly a mistake, my lord."

"And an accursed one too!" was the nobleman's deeply muttered response. "But this female garb?"

"Relative thereto," I answered, "I can give your lordship no further explanation than this:—that I was at a place where it became of paramount necessity to fly——But I conjure you not to imagine that I did anything wrong! On my soul, I did not! It was no fault of mine: some one had certain reasons for wishing me ill—I can mention no names—I can enter into no details of facts: there are mysterious circumstances connected with me which I myself do not rightly understand."

"I really believe the boy," remarked the clergyman aside to the others: but I nevertheless caught the words he thus spoke.

"Oh, yes!" I exclaimed: "as there is a God above us, I am telling you the truth!"

"Well, but what have you been? what is your station in life?" demanded Lord Ravenshill. "Tell us something more concerning yourself, that we may know what to do with you:"—and then he muttered aside to his wife, "It would never do to turn the boy adrift and let him tell the tale of this adventure to whomsoever he might meet."

"No—assuredly not!" responded her ladyship. "Come, boy—answer his lordship's questions. What have you been?"

"A page in a gentleman's service," I at once replied, not choosing to make any further reference to my sojourning with the Lanovers.

"A page—eh?" cried Mr. Walter. "And I presume you are in search of another situation?

Well," he continued, as I gave an affirmative response, "we shall see what is to be done for you. Here—come along with me."

Thus speaking, he took up a wax-candle; and I followed him from the room. No one was now in the hall: he led the way up a magnificent staircase to an ante-chamber communicating with a larger sleeping-room, and between which, as I afterwards found, there were double doors; so that the first and smaller chamber was fitted for the occupation of a page or valet in attendance upon any one using the larger apartment.

"Now, boy," said Mr. Walter, "you can sleep here to-night—or rather for as much of the night as there is remaining; and we shall see in due time what is to be done with you. Put a seal upon your lips in respect to the adventure which has brought you hither; or it will be the worse for you. Mind what I say. There is something in your looks which I rather like; and I am inclined to trust you. By the way, you shall have other and more suitable clothing in readiness by the time you will want to get up."

With these words the young gentleman deposited the wax-candle on a table and quitted the room, locking the door behind him. I made haste to put off my female apparel and get to bed. But exhausted though I was alike with fatigue and hunger, I could not compose myself to sleep. The adventures of this night were of so startling a character—they had hurried me along with such a wild excitement—they had succeeded each other with such fabulous rapidity—that they were sufficient to work the brain into a fever. More than an hour passed ere I could even settle my thoughts so far as to woo the approach of slumber; and just as I was beginning to doze I heard the key turning in the lock. The door opened, and Mr. Walter made his appearance. He stopped for an instant by the bed as he passed: but I did not open my eyes; and he continued his way into the adjacent apartment,—not however again locking the door which communicated with the landing: he doubtless reflected that I could have no inducement nor inclination for stealthily running away while the household slept. Perhaps, too, he thought that I was asleep; and in a few minutes I was really wrapped in slumber.

I did not awake until a late hour; and then I perceived by my bedside a complete suit of page's livery,—which, when I rose and dressed myself, fitted me almost as well as if it had been originally made for me. Scarcely had I finished my toilet, when the Hon. Walter Ravenshill—for such I found were his proper distinctions—made his appearance, he being already up and dressed. He surveyed me with some attention for nearly a minute—not so much, methought, to observe how the livery fitted, as to penetrate deeply into my character and disposition through the medium of my countenance. I also had now an opportunity of observing him more at my leisure than during the excitement which followed my first arrival at the mansion. He was not above the middle height, but slender and well made—remarkably handsome—with an aristocratic profile, a short upper lip curling haughtily, and an oval configuration of countenance. He had dark brown hair, whiskers of a still deeper hue, and well-arched brows. His eyes were of a deep hazel—but not with the softness that usually is associated with orbs of this colour: the fire of strong passions shone in those eyes. He was apparently about five-and-twenty years of age; and I should observe that he had a slightly dissipated air, but not sufficiently marked to render him sickly nor to impair his good looks.

"I have been thinking," he said, after having completed his scrutinizing survey of my countenance, "about all that has taken place—I mean in respect to yourself. You see, Joseph, you have dropped down amongst us as if from the clouds, and under such peculiar circumstances that we don't like to turn you adrift. There is evidently some mystery attached to you: but we will not seek to penetrate into *your* secret, if you promise to keep *ours*."

"I can assure you, sir," was my answer, "I have neither any motive nor desire to betray what took place last night. Indeed, as you may suppose from what little explanation I was able to give, I am at present friendless in the wide world."

"Well, it is not my intention," resumed Mr. Ravenshill, "to ask you any more questions. It happens that a few days back one of my father's pages left us suddenly: he was precisely of your height and make—and I see that his apparel fits you well enough. If you choose to take his place, you can do so."

"May I inquire, sir," I asked, "in what neighbourhood this house is situated?"

"At no great distance from Richmond," was the answer.

I had studied the map of London and its environs sufficiently to be aware in what direction the neighbourhood just mentioned lay: but still did Annabel's urgent warning suggest the prudence of placing a far greater distance than this between myself and the metropolis. I therefore said, "Pardon me, sir, for venturing to question you, and also for appearing to hesitate: but I have enemies in London——For heaven's sake do not eye me suspiciously! I take God to witness that I have never committed a deed of which I am ashamed."

"Do not be afraid—I believe you," replied Mr. Ravenshill; "and if you are afraid of being too near London, you may at once banish that apprehension from your mind: because under present circumstances,"—and he spoke with a sudden access of bitterness,—"the family will leave Ravenshill for the seat in Devonshire this very day."

He saw my countenance brightening up; and taking it for granted that I now considered myself installed in the place which he offered, he told me that I might seek my fellow domestics in the servants' hall as soon as I chose. He then quitted the room; but I remained behind for a few minutes to reflect upon the altered position of my affairs. And now I bethought myself of that purse which Annabel had placed in my hands on the preceding night, and which I had not as yet looked into. I drew it forth—not for the selfish purpose of seeing how much it contained, but because the idea had struck me that amongst its contents there might possibly be some written injunctions in addition to those which she had given verbally. There were ten sovereigns in the purse, and a

small scrap of paper. This I hastily opened; and read the following lines:—

"When the excitement of your hurried departure, dear Joseph, shall be over, you will naturally reflect upon the circumstances attending it. You may even fall into the society of those who will become interested in you (for that you must make friends for yourself, I am sure); and they may perhaps press you for detailed explanations. I beseech you to spare my father! I need say no more. The generosity of your heart is duly comprehended and appreciated both by my afflicted mother and by

"Your affectionate but unhappy
"ANNABEL."

I shed tears over this billet; and at first vowed that I would keep it as a memorial of its beloved writer: but a second thought induced me to destroy it—for I was afraid lest in the progress of some fresh vicissitudes it might fall into the hands of others. Poor Annabel! I wept bitterly as I reflected that if her father entertained the suspicion of her complicity in my flight, he would visit it with the most savage vengeance. I upbraided myself for having been persuaded thus to escape: I fancied that I had acted a cowardly part in consenting to a course which, while it ensured my own safety, would possibly compromise her. Oh, how I longed to be with her again! Never had she seemed so dear to me—that beautiful ethereal creature—as now that we were separated. But should I ever see her more? Yes! I remembered her own words—that there was justice in heaven, and that I should not for ever be pursued by my persecutors. The silver notes of her voice seemed to linger in my ear; and that assurance appeared fraught with the inspiration of prophesy. Ah! and even then, too—young though I was—I solemnly vowed within the depths of my own heart, that Annabel's image should serve as my good genius; and that if ever I were assailed by temptation to stray into the wrong course, the

memory of that image should keep me back in the right one. I vowed to devote my existence to Annabel; but that the offering should be worthy of her to whom it was made, I felt that this life of mine must be kept pure and uncontaminated;—for that Annabel herself would continue ever the same in virtuous principle,—no matter how the lapse of long, long years might dim the radiance of her charms, and alter her personal appearance,—I had not a doubt. That morning, as I thus sat reflecting in the chamber where I had slept, I invoked heaven's choicest blessings on thy head, thou angelic and charming Annabel!

Before I descended to the servants' hall, I looked forth from the window, and beheld an immense garden and pleasure-grounds at the back of the house, with paddocks and orchards adjoining, —and beyond, an undulating sweep of verdant meadows, where flocks and herds were pasturing. It appeared to be a beautiful spot—as the mansion itself, according to what little I had already seen of it, was spacious and handsome. I looked in the glass to see whether my eyes denoted that I had been weeping: I bathed them again—and then, satisfied that all traces of my tears were wiped away, I descended the immense staircase; and encountering the very identical footman who had brought me in the carriage, was conducted by him towards the servants' hall. But suddenly he stopped short; and clutching me by the arm, said with a half-smile and a sly look, "Of course, my lad, you will not talk about that little business of last night. It is only known to three or four of us, and need not go any farther."

I readily promised to comply with the man's injunction—as indeed it only enjoined the very course which I myself should have adopted of my own accord. He spoke civilly and kindly enough; and I was thus well pleased to observe that he bore me no rancour on account of the error into which he had been led through me during the past night. I found that the domestic establishment of the Ravenshill family was an extensive one:—but the servants were now all in the hurry and bustle of preparations for the family's departure. When breakfast was over, I was informed that the travelling-carriages would soon be in readiness, and that I was wanted by the Hon. Walter Ravenshill to pack up such portions of his own wardrobe as he purposed to take. To be brief, at about eleven o'clock, two equipages started from Ravenshill—one containing his lordship, her ladyship, and Mr. Walter—the other two valets, two lady's-maids, and myself.

CHAPTER XI.

CHARLTON HALL.

In one of the most delightful parts of Devonshire —about twenty miles to the south of Exeter—was situated an old manorial residence, bearing the denomination of Charlton Hall. This was one of the country-seats belonging to the Ravenshill family; and it stood in the midst of a vast estate, through which a stream meandered on its crystal way. This property had been in the family for several centuries: from time to time portions of the mansion had been rebuilt—but on each occasion retaining some part of the older structure; and thus the entire edifice combined several varieties of architecture, but without any ridiculous contrasts. The interior presented an old-fashioned aspect imperceptibly blending with the arrangements and improvements devised by notions of modern luxury and comfort. Thus the immense staircase up which a regiment of soldiers might have defiled, was embellished with fine statues and enormous vases: the spacious drawing-rooms were sumptuously furnished, but yet in a style to correspond with the elaborate carvings of the cornices, the huge projecting mantel-pieces, and the arched windows. The bed-chambers were so extensive, and in some the windows were so small, that they would have had a gloomy aspect,—were it not that they were furnished in a light and cheerful manner. Altogether, the sombre grandeur and massive adornments of by-gone ages were so relieved by the appliances of modern taste, and were brought to blend so imperceptibly with the artificial elegances of the present time, that the impression created by the interior of Charlton Hall was by no means a melancholy one.

The immense park was intersected from the entrance-lodge to the front of the Hall, by a well-gravelled carriage-drive, bordered by rows of superb beech-trees; thus forming a charming avenue of at least three quarters of a mile in length. Being perfectly straight, and gradually widening from the lodge towards the Hall, it afforded an imposing and gradually developing view of the immense mansion, to any one thus approaching the manorial residence for the first time. Clearly and brightly flowed the stream, at a distance of about a quarter of a mile on the right hand of the park: there seemed to be life in its crystal waters and spirit in its continuous rapidity, as it hurried on to join the river whereunto it was a tributary. On the alluvial borders of this stream and of that river, were situated the finest and richest meadows of the vast estate; and there countless flocks were grazing, and numerous herds of the red cattle of Devonshire browzed upon the emerald pasturage. On the left hand side of the park there was an assemblage of trees having the appearance of a perfect forest: but on a near approach, the rich fruitage gemming the boughs, and the regularity with which the trees were planted, enabled the observer to distinguish a well cared-for orchard from a wildly growing wood. The lands, seen from the windows at the back of the mansion, presented a rolling landscape of unparalleled beauty,—a succession of hills and valleys extending far as the eye could reach, until closed by some loftier heights in the horizon. The sides of the hills were clothed with verdant coppices, adding to the beauty of the valleys; and when the entire scene was bathed in the mellow light of the autumnal sun, it was a delicious picture over which the eye could wander without ever tiring.

Lord and Lady Ravenshill had but one son—the Hon. Mr. Walter; and this was the only issue of their marriage. The household establishment at Charlton Hall was an extensive one, and was continuously maintained on the same footing, inasmuch as the family were wont to pass at least seven or eight months out of every year on this

estate. There was a fine stud of horses, and four or five carriage-equipages. Indeed, my first impressions in respect to the Ravenshill family were that they must be possessed of almost illimitable wealth. I had fancied that Mr. Delmar's establishment was a very fine one: but it was literally insignificant in comparison with the extent of that into the midst of which circumstances had so singularly thrown me. The utmost profusion crowned the tables in the servants' hall; and every day we banquetted upon luxuries. Nevertheless, I had not been long installed in my new situation, before my mind gradually began to open to the conviction that there was a certain undercurrent of discontent amongst the domestics,—sometimes expressed by gloomy and disappointed looks—sometimes in whisperings amongst three or four together—and at other times in louder grumblings; but the nature of which I did not at first comprehend.

I must now observe that on the verge of the estate, about two miles from the mansion, there was situated a beautiful picturesque little village, taking its name from the domain, and therefore called Charlton. From the back windows the ivy-covered tower of the ancient church could be distinguished above the trees; and through an opening in that embowering grove, a quaint old-fashioned dark-red brick house, forming the parsonage, might be discovered. The stream flowed through this village, and turned a water-mill in the immediate vicinage. The nearest town was about three miles from the Hall; and it appeared that the Ravenshill family were accustomed on the Sunday to visit one of the churches in this town, and not that in the village of Charlton. I afterwards discovered that this was because the clergyman of the village,—having for the most part a humble congregation, chiefly consisting of rustics,—felt himself bound to adapt his discourse to their powers of comprehension; and as a simple sermon did not suit the high and lofty notions of the Ravenshill family, they had for a long time frequented the town-church, where there was a very eloquent and fashionable preacher. Perhaps, also, Lord and Lady Ravenshill, puffed up as they were with aristocratic pride, were better pleased to display their grand equipages before the towns-people than in the eyes of the rustic villagers; and moreover her ladyship's superb toilet would have been altogether thrown away upon the latter—while it was certain to make a due impression upon the former. And then, too, on coming out of church, there was the meeting with other nobility and gentry having country-seats in the neighbourhood, and likewise frequenting that fashionable church. As for the domestics, they also had their pew at the same town-church; and a sort of light and elegant omnibus-van conveyed thither on the Sabbath those whose turn it was to go to church. For in this respect her ladyship was exceedingly particular,—no doubt that the number of her domestics thus regularly attending, should likewise make its impression upon the towns-people, and enhance the pomp, ostentation, and ceremony which characterized all the proceedings of the Ravenshill family.

Immediately after our arrival at Charlton, a round of gaieties commenced at the Hall. There were dinner-parties three times a week, on which occasions numerous carriages from all the adjacent country-seats rolled up to the dwelling. There were moreover generally a dozen visitors staying at the house; and I used to think that the Ravenshill family maintained a sort of regal magnificence. On fine days, shooting-parties, fishing-parties, and riding-parties were formed: but if the weather were inclement, all kinds of amusements and recreations were devised for in-doors. The gentlemen lounged in the billiard-room—private theatricals were got up—and at night the festivities were maintained till a very late hour,—sometimes till the morning was far advanced. At first I wondered how the entertainers and the entertained could stand so much dissipation and gaiety: but my experiences during my career of servitude have shown me that the effects of those pursuits soon make themselves apparent in the pale and haggard looks of the male sex in high life, and in the prematurely fading beauty amongst the ladies: so that there is no wonder if succedaneous arts and cosmetics should be so profusely had recourse to, in order to conceal the ravages committed by heated rooms, late hours, luxurious feeding, and the incessant recurrence of exciting and wasting pleasures.

The Hon. Mr. Walter's principal valet was a man about thirty years of age—good-looking—and of very smart appearance. He was always genteelly dressed in black, and was scrupulously neat in his person. I became a favourite with the domestics generally: but this man, whose name was Charles Linton, took a particular fancy to me, and treated me with considerable kindness. Sometimes when we had a leisure hour, he would invite me to ramble out with him; and as he himself had received a tolerably good education, his discourse was something above ordinary commonplace style. I should observe that he was one of the valets who had accompanied the family down from Ravenshill House near Richmond; and therefore he was aware of the sudden manner in which I had been introduced into his lordship's service. But hitherto he had never spoken to me on the subject,—though from two or three words which he had occasionally let drop, it was apparent that he was not altogether unacquainted with the mysterious incidents of that memorable night. I should likewise add that he was one of the few servants on whose part I had not noticed any of those whisperings and grumblings, and that air of discontent, which I had perceived in respect to the great majority. Though thoroughly good-natured, he was indeed somewhat reserved; and was in the habit of speaking more to me than to any other of his fellow-domestics.

One afternoon, when we had been about a month at the Hall, we were strolling together along the bank of the stream. There was a pause in the conversation which had hitherto been going on; and the silence was presently broken by Charles observing, with a somewhat significant look, "Your wages were due to-day—weren't they, Joseph?"

"Yes," I answered: "but I had quite forgotten all about it. I suppose I must apply to the steward——"

"I am very much afraid," interrupted Charles, "that it will be precisely the same as if you had continued to forget it:"—then seeing that I gazed

upon him with astonishment, he went on to observe, "The fact is, Joseph, things appear to be coming to a crisis with the family. I see you don't understand me. Now, I am not in the habit of talking of his lordship's affairs, because it's no business of mine; and I must say that if our wages were regularly paid, the place would be a comfortable one enough. But the truth is, Joseph, that for the last three years there is scarcely a single soul of us that has received above one quarter of our due; and for four months past not a shilling has been paid."

"I thought his lordship was immensely rich," was my very natural observation: and my amazement was not altogether unmingled with incredulity—though I knew that Charles Linton was by no means likely to jest upon such a subject.

"Rich indeed!" he exclaimed: "his lordship ought to be rolling in riches. Look at this splendid estate—look at the pretty little property at Richmond—and then, too, there's a fine house, sumptuously furnished, in London: but everything is mortgaged over and over again. You don't exactly understand what I mean. The fact is, his lordship's father, and grandfather, and great-grandfather were all very extravagant, and borrowed large sums of money; so that when the present lord came into the property, he had nominally a revenue of forty thousand a year, but in reality not ten. He married her ladyship with the idea that she was possessed of excellent prospects, and at the death of an old uncle would have something like two hundred thousand pounds, which would go very far towards relieving the estates from their encumbrances. But Mr. Cuthbert, the old uncle, suddenly married again: two children were born—a boy and a girl—and all the property at the old man's death was of course left to them. Lady Ravenshill therefore got nothing. The boy died a short time ago—that is to say, about two or three years; and his surviving sister, Alicia Cuthbert——"

"Alicia!" I ejaculated, instantaneously struck by the name, it being the one mentioned by Lady Ravenshill on that night of mystery and adventure with the postchaise-and-four.

"I know why you look astonished," observed Charles: "you are aware that it was Miss Cuthbert who was to be carried off that night when you were so strangely taken for her? She lives with her mother in Hanover Square, leading out of Oxford Street; and it was at the corner of one of the streets nearest to Mrs. Cuthbert's house, that the post-chaise was waiting. Of course you now begin to have a greater insight into the matter than you had before. Alicia Cuthbert came of age a few weeks ago,—inheriting two hundred thousand pounds and upwards. She is a beautiful creature, delicately and slightly made; and therefore it is easy to imagine how you were mistaken for her. But you must not think that she wishes to espouse Mr. Walter: she hates and detests her cousin; and Mrs. Cuthbert has an equal abhorrence for the Ravenshill family. I believe that Miss Cuthbert is in love with some young gentleman of very slender resources; and against this match her mother sets her face. I do not exactly know what were the details of the stratagem to carry Miss Alicia off: but it is not very difficult to suspect that she was made to believe Captain Berkeley—for that is the name of the young gentleman alluded to—was waiting to elope with her. However, whatever the trick was, it failed, as you perceive; and bitter no doubt is the disappointment of Mr. Walter and his parents. They thought to get hold of the two hundred thousand pounds, which would have helped to clear away their embarrassments; and how it will all end, I can't say—but I have my fears; and I think from certain appearances that a crisis is at hand. I would have you know, Joseph, that Mr. Walter threw out several hints at the time that he should like me to manage the business of carrying off Miss Cuthbert: but I affected not to comprehend them—for I can assure you that even if the demand had been pointedly put, I should have refused to have anything to do with the proceeding."

Every word which fell from Charles Linton's lips, was a revelation for me: the mystery of that eventful night was now fully cleared up; and certainly the transaction did not display the character of the Ravenshill family in a very favourable light.

"But how is it," I inquired, "that such gaiety prevails at the Hall, when his lordship's circumstances are thus embarrassed?"

"For several reasons," responded Linton. "In the first place, the family has been brought up to certain habits which it cannot possibly shake off: they can no more get out of their extravagant ways than an inveterate drunkard can all in a moment become a water-drinker. In the second place, they doubtless flatter themselves that by keeping up these appearances, they conceal their real position from the knowledge of the world generally;—and in the third place, it is absolutely necessary for Mr. Walter to prop up the falling fortunes of his house by means of some brilliant alliance, which he can only hope to form by keeping his position in society. I am however afraid that though the nobility and gentry of these parts are ready enough to accept invitations to the Hall, eat his lordship's venison, drink his champagne, and encourage him in all his profuse hospitality—if hospitality it can be called—they will not be found so eager to bestow one of their daughters on the ruined Walter Ravenshill."

"But will not Mr. Walter have the property," I asked, "at his father's death? I thought I understood that the estates were what is called *entailed*."

"So they are," replied Linton: "and Mr. Walter will enter upon their nominal possession, the same as his father did before him: but from all I have learnt, I do not think that he will have a single farthing of revenue. The fact is, the moment he came of age he joined his lordship in a number of securities, and bonds, and fresh mortgages, and so forth; and in different ways he has pledged beforehand, as it were, all his own life-interest in the property. There never was such a cruel thing, between you and me, Joseph, than this conduct on the part of his lordship. Not contented with ruining himself, he ruins his son. I do believe that Mr. Walter naturally possessed some good qualities: but he has been spoilt—totally spoilt by the mode of his bringing-up. I speak to you in confidence, because you are a discreet and intelligent lad; and I don't mind talking

to you. Indeed, I feel as if this vent for my thoughts does me good. There are times when I really pity Mr. Walter; and when I see all that is going on, I wish that I was on terms sufficient to warrant me in giving him some little advice. But great folks look down upon us servants, and imagine that we care nothing at all for their interests as long as we are well dressed and well fed."

"Then you think, Charles," I said inquiringly, "that Mr. Walter is looking out for a wife amongst all these beautiful and dashing ladies who are staying or visiting at the Hall?"

"I don't think anything about it—I am sure of it," was Linton's reply; "and I am equally confident as to the result. It will be a failure, Joseph: mark my words, it will be a failure—and there will be a terrific smash soon: for how all the Christmas bills are to be met at the beginning of next year, is more than any one can say; and the towns-people are already refusing to give any farther credit. This is a positive fact, Joseph; and I know that the steward and butler purpose to have a serious conversation with his lordship this afternoon."

I was much shocked to hear that such was the condition of his lordship's affairs: for there was something painful in the idea that the possessor of such a vast estate should be so impoverished in his actual resources.

"It is very hard upon some of us servants," continued Linton, after another pause. "We work hard—and we have a right to expect regular payment; although I for one certainly have never greedily pressed for it. But the worst of it is that I really do believe my lord and her ladyship give themselves greater airs the nearer the hour of their utter ruin approaches. One would think, by the way they go on, they had not the slightest difficulty in paying their debts; but would you believe, Joseph, that her ladyship has actually borrowed money of her maids, and yet does not seem to think she is under the slightest obligation to them? By the bye," added Charles, suddenly turning the conversation, "we are extending our walk a little too far: in another quarter of an hour we should be in Charlton. Come, let us turn."

We began to retrace our way accordingly: and as we bent our steps homeward, Linton said, "Talking of Charlton, I don't think you have been there yet—have you?"

I answered in the negative.

"It is a beautiful little village," he went on to say; "and even now, though the trees are well nigh all stripped of their leaves, it has a picturesque appearance. I tell you what, Joseph,—you and I will walk over to church there on Sunday, if you like; and I can promise that you will hear a discourse a great deal more touching than the high-flown bombast of Mr. Prunella at the town-church. The village-parson has just come back: I understand he has been away for some months in consequence of a death in the family. I can assure you that he is much beloved by his parishioners. My lord and her ladyship don't like him because he is of retired habits and unassuming manners: he is not one of your champagne-drinking, sporting, gay and dissipated clergymen like Prunella——But, Ah! whose carriage is that rolling along the road yonder? I'll be bound it's going to the Hall. More visitors! more guests!"

We continued our way back to the mansion,—on nearing which, Charles strictly enjoined me not to mention anything he had been saying to me: but I assured him that no such caution was requisite. A new and splendidly painted equipage, drawn by two gorgeously caparisoned horses, and accompanied by servants in liveries not merely fine but outrageously gaudy, was standing in front of the Hall; and Charles, catching me by the arm ere we parted to attend to our respective duties, hastily whispered in my ear, "It's old Boustead's carriage; and I can guess what it means. I will tell you all about it presently."

Half-an-hour afterwards, as I was speaking to one of the servants in the Hall, Lord and Lady Ravenshill descended the staircase in company with a short, stout, vulgar-looking man, about sixty years of age, who talked very loud—exhibited great pomposity of manner—and seemed to have an extraordinary idea of his own importance. He had an immense red face and a very short neck; so that he looked exceedingly apoplectic. His gold watch-chain, depending from his fob, was of immense size, and was garnished with at least half-a-dozen seals. There was altogether an air of pretension about him which indicated the *parvenu*, or upstart; and though in one sense he was obsequious—filling his sentences with "my lord" and "your ladyship" to a nauseating extent—yet on the other hand he evidently strove to place himself on a most familiar footing with them. As he talked very loud it was altogether impossible to avoid hearing what he was saying; and I could not help noticing that he spoke uncommonly bad grammar, and appeared to have a wonderful ignorance of the proper use and meaning of certain words. Lord and Lady Ravenshill were treating him with a very marked courtesy,—which, though evidently forced, was nevertheless replete with that well-bred refinement which prevented its object from perceiving that it was thus constrained.

Behind this group Mr. Ravenshill was escorting a young lady who leant upon his arm, and whom I presently understood to be Mr. Boustead's daughter, delighting in the euphonious name of Euphemia. She was very far from being good-looking; and truth compels me to add that she was exceedingly ugly. Her hair was of a flaming red; and, as if determined to throw out its brightness with the utmost effect, the young lady wore a bright yellow bonnet. Her countenance was insignificant, notwithstanding a certain air of pretension, which she doubtless borrowed from her father. Her forehead was one mass of brown freckles; she had the most ignoble pug-nose that ever formed an integral part of a feminine profile; and it was so small that it might literally be said to be of Nature's "chiselling,"—for if Nature had chiselled much longer, there would have been no nose at all. But as if to indemnify her for this deficiency of one feature, that same Nature had presented her with a pair of very large coarse lips; and when these parted in a smirking smile, they revealed teeth which, though certainly white enough, had the longitude of tusks; and the two front ones were so far apart that a half-crown might have

been placed between them. In figure she was excessively thin, even to leanness; she had a short mincing step—and her form bent forward as it were with a sort of swaying movement, which was very ungraceful. There were both pretension and affectation in her whole appearance. Her toilet was outrageously gaudy and flaunting; and she was so bedizened with jewellery that it seemed as if she had studied every possible means of stowing about her person as many ornaments as possible. These, instead of imparting brilliancy to her aspect, could not fail to strike the most ordinary beholder as being in the very worst possible taste.

"Well, my lud," said Mr. Boustead, speaking in his loud, strong voice, and with his pompous manner, "we shall have the honour of cutting our mutton with your ludship and my lady to-morrow at half-past six. Phemy dear," he added, turning round to his daughter, "don't forget his ludship's kind provoke. By the bye, my lud, we give our grand *let-off* next Monday; and Mrs. B. will be quite unconsolate if you and her ladyship and the Hon. Mr. Walter won't accept an invite."

"I can assure you, Mr. Boustead," answered Lady Ravenshill, "that it will afford us infinite pleasure."

"Don't make it later than nine," resumed this gentleman: "for there's going to be a polytechnic display——"

"Pyrotechnic, pa!" suggested Miss Boustead, correctively.

"Well, my dear," responded her affectionate parent, "I dare say you know best: leastways you had ought to do so—for you cost me enough for your edification. But I don't begrudge it. One mustn't be equinoctial in these things, my lud."

"Economical, pa!" again suggested the amiable Euphemia.

In pleasant and agreeable discourse of this sort the party descended the stairs, traversed the hall, and proceeded forth to the carriage. Methought that Mr. Walter looked anything but happy, and that the smiles which he wore upon his countenance were altogether forced, as he handed the gaudily dressed Euphemia into the vehicle.

"Now pray, my lud, don't stand out here with your hat off," said the considerate Mr. Boustead: "the influential"—by which I suppose he meant the influenza—"is very much about. And you, my lady, will get a touch of rheumatiz."

Lord and Lady Ravenshill bowed their acknowledgments of this kind advice: Mr. Walter also bowed—and the equipage rolled away.

"Well, Joseph," said Charles Linton to me when we had an opportunity of speaking a few words together in the evening, "do you understand what all that meant this afternoon?"

"I think I do," was my response. "Mr. Ravenshill is going to marry Miss Boustead."

"That is to say, if everything goes on smooth," observed Charles. "I rather wondered that these Bousteads should have been invited to the last two or three evening parties: but now it's as clear as daylight."

"And pray who *is* Mr. Boustead?" I inquired.

"What he was in his earlier days, no one knows," returned Linton. "He does not appear to have made much sensation in the world before he kept a very small, but no doubt very respectable chandler's shop, about a quarter of a century back. The chandler's shop gradually expanded into a large grocery and tea-dealing establishment; and then, by some very lucky speculation—a sort of neck-or-nothing affair—Mr. Boustead gained fifty thousand pounds. The tea-dealing establishment was sold; and he went on speculating in this thing and in that; till at last he retired from business altogether, about four or five years ago, with at least half a million. You see what sort of a man he is: his wife is three times as vulgar. But they have got the money—his lordship wants it—and therefore I have no doubt," added Linton, lowering his voice to a significant whisper, "our young master will be sacrificed."

CHAPTER XII.

THE BOUSTEADS.

On the following Sunday, according to agreement, Charles Linton and I walked across together to the little village of Charlton. It did not contain more than about sixty houses,—most of these being cottages of the humblest description, tenanted by rustics who were chiefly employed upon Lord Ravenshill's estate. The church stood at the farther extremity; and the parsonage, as already stated, was close by. We arrived in good time, and took our seats in the gallery. Presently two ladies in deep mourning entered the pew nearest to the reading-desk, and which I therefore knew to be the clergyman's. From where I sat I could not immediately obtain a view of those ladies' countenances: but I saw that one was evidently by her figure an elderly person—while the other was quite young.

A few minutes afterwards the clergyman ascended into the reading-desk; and what was my astonishment on immediately recognising the Rev. Mr. Howard, a relation of the Delmars, and whom I had seen at the Manor on the occasion of the funeral. Then I recollected being informed at the time that he had a small living in Devonshire: but it so happened that though I had now been upwards of a month at Charlton Hall, the name of this village-clergyman was never once mentioned in my presence—or if it were, I had failed to be struck by it. I now surveyed those two ladies with renewed attention. The circumstance that they occupied the minister's pew, and that they were in deep mourning, convinced me they were his relations. Perhaps the younger one was his wife?—for I had not heard, when at Delmar Manor, whether he was married or not. I did not like to put any whispering questions to Charles Linton, as the service had just commenced. It progressed; and throughout the reading of the prayers, I had not the slightest opportunity of catching a glimpse of the countenances of those ladies. They were evidently much affected by several parts of the service, wherever allusions were made to *death*. It was not until the Rev. Mr. Howard was ascending into the pulpit, that my curiosity was gratified; and then, as the younger lady raised her eyes, I at once recognised the beautiful features of Miss Delmar. Yes: it was indeed Edith—but pale—Oh! so pale, that I saw at once how much she must have suffered and

how ill she had been. Almost immediately afterwards I was enabled to notice that her companion was, as I had suspected, an elderly lady; and her countenance, though much care-worn, and bearing the traces of deep mental distress, was full of benevolence and kindness. Throughout the service Edith never once glanced up towards the gallery; and when it was over, she and her elderly companion remained seated in the pew while the congregation issued forth.

I did not mention to Charles Linton that I had recognised any one who was previously known to me. I had never spoken of the Delmars by name to any inmate of the household at the Hall: I was too fearful of saying a word that by any accident might serve to afford a clue to the discovery of my whereabouts on the part of Mr. Lanover. But as I and Linton walked back to the Hall, he noticed that I was pensive—and kindly inquired the reason. I gave some evasive response, with which he was satisfied—or at least appeared to be so. When I went to bed that night, I reflected whether I should avail myself of the first opportunity to walk over to Charlton again and pay my respects to Miss Delmar: for I knew perfectly well that if I explained to her that there were certain reasons inducing me to wish my place of abode to remain strictly a secret, she would be the last person in the world to betray it. But then I reflected that she had doubtless come down into this seclusion in the heart of Devonshire, not merely for the restoration of her shattered health—but likewise to escape as much as possible from those associations and scenes in the vicinage of London which must be so painful for her: and I thought that my presence, so forcibly reminding her of one of the noblest as well as the last acts of true benevolence ever performed by her deceased father, would revive all the bitterness of her affliction. I therefore resolved to allow at least some time to elapse ere I would take any step that should so vividly recall the past to that young lady's mind. My pillow was moistened with tears this night, as the terrific tragedy at Delmar Manor was reviewed over again in all its diabolic and mysterious details.

On the following day, Mr. Boustead's splendid equipage arrived at Charlton Hall at a quarter to seven instead of half-past six: for this gentleman, his wife, and daughter no doubt considered it exceedingly vulgar to be exactly punctual. Mrs. Boustead came on this occasion; and without any inclination to exaggerate—much less to be malicious—I am bound to declare that any one of the scullery-maids dressed up in drawing-room costume, would have cut a much more respectable figure. She was about fifty years of age—exceedingly stout—with a face as rubicund as her husband's; and she had a peculiar waddle in her gait. Her arms, enormously coarse, were of a flaming red; and she had the folly to display them in their repulsive bareness. Her great red neck and shoulders were equally exposed: she wore a yellow turban surmounting a false front of flaxen hair: her dress was a bright blue satin; and she resembled a peripatetic jeweller's shop, looking as if she were completely hung in golden chains. Mr. Boustead wore knee-breeches, silk stockings, and shoes; and carried an opera-hat under his arm. Euphemia was dressed out in a style which I will not pause to describe, but the flaunting gaiety of which evinced the most execrable taste. I should add that Mrs. Boustead possessed a very hoarse loud voice, and spoke as if she had been taking lessons in vocal intonations from a boatswain—or as if she had been blowing a bassoon for the previous fortnight.

No other guests were invited to meet the Bousteads: it was evidently to be a family-party—and doubtless for more reasons than one. In the first place, the Ravenshills could not be over-anxious to bring the vulgarity of the Bousteads in contact with the exquisite aristocratic fastidiousness of their wonted circle of acquaintances; and in the second place, opportunities must be allowed for Mr. Walter to render himself as agreeable as possible to Miss Euphemia. I had to assist in waiting at table; and I must do Lord Ravenshill, his wife, and his son, the justice to observe that they manifested an exemplary forbearance and patience in listening to the discourse of their guests. Mr. Boustead was a purse-proud man; but though he would have given one of his eyes—and heaven knows what besides—to have been enabled to talk of his ancestors, he affected to make it his boast that he had risen from nothing. Yet he spoke of the "common people" as if he had never had anything to do with them—much less as if he had sprung from their very dregs. The words "riff-raff" and "mob," "rabble" and "unwashed," frequently interlarded his discourse. It appeared that he was a county magistrate; and he gave his lordship to understand "that he couldn't a-bear a poacher—that a vagrant was his abomination—a gipsy his horror—and a workhouse pauper a being of a degree infinitely below the most noxious of varmint." He was a rank Tory in politics, and threw out a hint that he should like to stand for the county in that interest at the next election.

Mrs. Boustead repudiated the principal rules of grammar and of correct pronunciation as boldly as did her husband: or rather I should say, she had no idea of their existence; and being exceedingly well satisfied with her conversational ability in their absence, she illustrated the bard's somewhat paradoxical aphorism, that "where ignorance is bliss, 'tis folly to be wise." She spoke a great deal of her house, which was of course "a mansion"—and of her gardens, which were of course "grounds." Her carriages and horses—the parties she gave—the titled guests she received—and the numerous invitations which poured in upon her, and which were so provokingly numerous as to be beyond the possibility of acceptance—these also entered into the staple commodities of her discourse. As for Miss Euphemia,—she ventured to talk of Byron, and asked Mr. Walter how he liked "Childe Harold"—pronouncing the *e* at the end of the first word, and therefore making it Child-e: then flying off at a tangent with vivacious frivolity, she entertained him with a long description of how she was invited to dance by young Lord Addlepate at the last county ball—and how she was so sorry that she was compelled to pain his lordship by a refusal—but she really could not help it—for she was already engaged thirteen deep to as many other noble lords, baronets, or honourables,—adding, with a disdainful toss of her head, that her "ma" was so particular, she never would allow her to dance with anybody who had not

some title or some connexion with the aristocracy. Nothing could be more affected than her manner—nothing more flippant nor insipid than her discourse; and when I reflected that the handsome, elegant, and fastidious Walter Ravenshill was compelled to smile, look pleased, dispense flatteries, and lavish compliments upon Euphemia Boustead, it was indeed enough to make the heart pity him.

Weeks wore on: the Bousteads were constant visitors at Charlton Hall—the Ravenshill family occasionally visited the Bousteads; and though it was not formally proclaimed that Mr. Walter was to wed the young lady, the match was nevertheless deemed a certainty. On the strength thereof—as I learnt from Charles—the tradesmen of the town continued to give credit; and the steward advanced some of his own money to pay the domestics an instalment of their wages. Once, in the course of conversation with Charles, I expressed my surprise that Lord Ravenshill had not already managed to borrow a sum in advance of Mr. Boustead, so as to pay off his most pressing liabilities: but Charles assured me that Euphemia's father was a very cautious and shrewd-dealing man, and that he was by no means likely to part with any of his gold until all preliminary arrangements for the marriage should have been accomplished to his entire satisfaction. Lord Ravenshill's attorney came down from London, with a large tin-box full of papers; and for several days his lordship was closetted with the man of business. Charles told me that they were making out a list of all the liabilities, and going deep into his lordship's affairs—a proceeding on which Euphemia's father had no doubt insisted. This gentleman himself, accompanied by his own solicitor from the town, was occasionally present at those conferences. At length his lordship's attorney went back to London; and in a short time it was a thoroughly understood thing that the Hon. Walter Ravenshill and Miss Boustead were engaged to each other, and that the nuptials were to be celebrated so soon as the marriage-settlements could be drawn up, and other necessary arrangements effected,—the period for the wedding being calculated for the end of March.

It was now the close of January of the New Year—namely, 1837—when an incident took place requiring especial mention. The intelligence was one morning brought to the Hall that a dramatic company had arrived in the town, and that the theatre had been engaged for one week. Some years had elapsed, as I was informed, since any theatrical manager had been bold enough to try his fortune in that town; and the incident therefore created a perfect sensation. The matter was duly talked over in the servants' hall; and every one expressed a hope that an opportunity would be afforded for the domestics generally to indulge in the recreation for which an occasion thus presented itself. The steward was spoken to; and he not only gave his consent—but settled the arrangements by which a portion of the servants should visit the theatre on one evening, and the other portion on the following evening,—the omnibus-van which was used for taking us to church, being placed at our disposal for these two occasions. A subscription was at once set afoot in the servants' hall to secure the requisite number of seats in the front row of the gallery; and one of the domestics went over to the town to settle this portion of the business. On his return, he brought with him several play-bills descriptive of the performances throughout the week for which the theatre had been engaged; and these were studied with the utmost attention and interest in the servants' hall. Amongst the various attractions thus set forth, was a dance to be performed by a number of "young ladies belonging to the company," and who would represent the spirits of a haunted lake,—the bill farther explaining that they would be led by "that inimitable *danseuse*, Miss Violet Mortimer—a young lady whose recent appearance in that capacity on the provincial boards, had already excited so much sensation and won such rapturous applause wheresoever she had as yet exhibited." Then followed a few extracts from critiques in some provincial journals; and these spoke of Miss Violet Mortimer as a "perfect prodigy"—"a ravishing creature"—"a young lady of spirit-like beauty as well as ethereal grace, and one who would prove a valuable acquisition to the London stage." In short, it was evident enough that Miss Mortimer was the star of the company, and that immense reliance was placed by the manager upon her attractions. The perusal of these details piqued the curiosity and enhanced the excitement of the domestics at Charlton Hall into perfect enthusiasm; and when lots were drawn to decide who should visit the theatre on the first evening, one would really have thought that it was a thousand pound prize to be thus contended for.

The number which I drew placed me amongst those who were to restrain their curiosity and curb their impatience until the second evening; and I must confess that I was rather annoyed at this;—for, mere boy as I was—not yet sixteen years old, and never having visited a theatre in my life—I was anxious to behold those marvels the bare idea of which had so excited all my fellow-servants. It was on a Saturday that the lots were thus drawn; and the theatre was to open on the following Monday. When the evening of that day arrived, it was with some little degree of envy that I beheld the more fortunate portion of the servants set off in the omibus-van for the town: but Charles Linton, who was in the same category with myself, said, "Never mind, Joseph; our turn will come to-morrow evening; and as you have never been to a theatre before, you shall sit next to me, and I will give you all necessary explanations. By the bye, my boy, you must not for a moment fancy that all the wonderful attractions set forth in these flaming bills are going to be realized: it is a mere manager's trick to draw a house; and all the fine talk of splendid decorations, dazzling costumes, and new scenery, will dwindle down into comparative insignificance. I dare say that even Miss—what's-her-name—Violet Mortimer—an excellent theatrical name by the way—will be no exception to the rule, and that those who have just gone in the hope of seeing something extraordinary, will return sadly disappointed. However, we will sit up, if you like—and hear what they say."

This I agreed to do: but it was near one o'clock in the morning before the domestics returned; and for once in his life, Charles Linton was altogether wrong. They came back in perfect raptures with the pieces, the decorations, the scenery, and the

performance—but chiefly of all with the personal beauty and the graceful dancing of Violet Mortimer. They declared that the representations in the play-bills were in no wise exaggerated—and that this young lady was a perfect prodigy of loveliness, elegance, and fascination. It appeared that the theatre was crowded to excess—and that Miss Mortimer was called before the curtain and enthusiastically applauded. My curiosity was now more than ever excited; and I noticed that Charles himself,—hitherto the only one who had talked coldly of the affair—began to be inspired with the same sentiment.

On the following evening I entered the omnibus in company with those of my fellow-servants whose turn it now was to visit the theatre. Lord Ravenshill had taken a box for this occasion—where himself, her ladyship, and Mr. Walter were to be joined by the Bousteads. During the drive of three miles to the town I sat wondering what a theatre was like, and joyously anticipating an experience of that pleasure which the other portion of the domestics had revelled in on the previous evening. On entering the establishment, Charles—according to promise—kept me by his side: we had front seats in the gallery, and could therefore command an excellent view of the stage and the whole house, every part of which was perfectly crammed. We beheld the Ravenshills and the Bousteads seated in a box near the stage; and, amongst the rest of the company, we recognised many of those families who were accustomed to visit at Charlton Hall.

The curtain drew up; and then, for the first time in my life, I beheld the attractions of a stage. I have since seen the great metropolitan theatres; and, as a matter of course, in comparison therewith, a small provincial one sinks into utter insignificance: but to me who was *then* contemplating the spectacle for the first time, it was fraught with the most pleasing and exciting interest. The actors

and actresses appeared to be magnificently dressed,—the former likewise having the air of the handsomest of men, and the latter that of the loveliest of women. Charles saw how much I was delighted; and comprehending the effect which tinsel and other theatrical delusions were making upon my mind, he smiled and whispered a few words of explanation,—letting me into the secret of what stage-apparel was, and how rouge and other succedaneous contrivances invested ugliness with attractions. Still I was pleased; and I asked which of those beautiful ladies was Miss Violet Mortimer?—but on referring to the play-bill, Charles informed me that she would not appear till the third scene, when the dance of the fairies on the shore of the haunted lake would take place.

The first and second scenes were terminated; and when the curtain ascended upon the third, the stage, darkened into semi-obscurity, represented a lake the banks of which were fringed with trees. The manner in which the water—or what served as water—appeared to send forth its glimmering twilight shine, struck me as being peculiarly effective. Indeed, Charles himself—though disposed to be hypercritical on the occasion—admitted that it was very well managed for a provincial theatre. The music began to play a low but not melancholy strain: it was to represent a cheerful harmony sweetly floating over the lake in the distance. Then, from either side of the stage, the fairies came gliding on,—looking most ravishingly beautiful with their light gauzy dresses, their azure wings, and their long hair floating over their bare shoulders. They held in their hands wands tipped with stars; and these glittered brightly with the reflection of the stage-lights that were hidden from the view. Moreover,—to enhance the delusion that these star-tipped wands themselves sent forth that soft argentine lustre which pervaded the scene,—a cold silvery light was by some contrivance shed from the sides of the stage. Altogether the scene was most effective. Again I asked which was Violet Mortimer?—but scarcely was the question put, and before it was answered, several voices exclaimed rapturously, "Here she is!"—and as another figure glided quickly in, with magically glancing feet, upon the stage, thunders of applause burst forth. But, good heavens! was it a shock of wonderment which seized upon me? or was it an overpowering sensation of pleasure which I at the moment experienced? Could it indeed be possible that in Violet Mortimer I recognised the loved and cherished Annabel?

CHAPTER XII.

BEHIND THE SCENES.

I DO not know whether an ejaculation expressive of my feelings burst from my lips—but I think not: I believe that whatever those feelings were, they must have stricken me speechless;—for neither Charles Linton nor any other person near me, observed that I displayed an unusual emotion, beyond that of pleasure and delight which appeared to animate all present. Violet acknowledged with a graceful curtsey the enthusiastic reception which she thus experienced; and then, as the applause died away, the fairy dance commenced. I sat rivetted to my place—my looks fascinated—all my feelings spell-bound. Was it indeed she? Yes—how could I doubt it? Could I possibly mistake that tall, slight, beautifully-modelled figure, whose every motion was poetry and seemed to correspond with the harmony of the features? could I mistake those clustering masses of golden hair which floated over her shoulders, like a thick veil of glossy silk thrown back? Did any other being on the face of the earth possess that brilliant animation of the skin—alabaster everywhere, save in respect to the coral lips, and where art appeared to have shed upon the cheeks the hue of the blushing rose? What *other* creature in female shape was endowed with so rare a beauty? And that figure, too, which seemed almost aerial—so that one might imagine that if the hands clasped the tapering waist the fingers would meet, and the slightest upward impulse would serve to whirl her up into that ethereal region whence, with the azure wings upon her shoulders, she appeared to have come down! I was too remote to catch the expression of her countenance; and yet the longer I gazed, the more was I enabled to picture to myself that mild look which Annabel wore, now somewhat elevated from its soft sweet melancholy into an animation bordering upon radiance.

For some minutes I was so entranced with mingled wonder and delight, that I was unable to analyze my own thoughts,—until I began to experience a painful under-current of feeling creeping in unto my soul. That Annabel should be *there*, naturally gave birth to the supposition that she must have fled from her home—and perhaps on account of me! How, otherwise, could she—the pure-minded, the ingenuous, the virtue-loving Annabel—have been thrown by destiny into the midst of a company of performers? how else could she have been driven into a pursuit which I should have deemed the last in all the world to be voluntarily sought by her, compelling her as it were to leap with a sudden bound from the seclusion of her recent existence into the dazzling, wildering, intoxicating blaze of popular favour? Was it really Annabel—that Annabel whom but a few months back I had known as the personification of charming goodness—the retiring maiden invested with the candour of sweet fifteen? Alas, alas! it must be I—and I *alone*—who had proved the cause of this wondrous—and not less painful than wondrous—change in her circumstances!

Such were the reflections which, after beginning with a gradual creeping to enter my mind, poured in like a trooping crowd, and surged up as it were into my very brain. But still I sat and gazed upon her as she led the fairy dance by the side of the haunted lake. Yes: every motion was in itself music,—so that the real music which was playing failed to be observed, and whatsoever harmony pervaded within those walls, seemed to be the effluence of a lovely form expending its spiritualized feeling in movements of the animal frame. Slowly began that dance—it grew more rapid—but I beheld only *one* of the dancers. On her my looks were rivetted: not for a single instant did they wander away from her: not for a moment did they settle elsewhere. Her exquisite figure seemed quickened by the etherealizing spirit into outlines

and attitudes of nature's own gracefulness,—changing from one to another in transitions which still grew more rapid as she went on gliding, and floating, and flying amidst the scenery representing shrubs and trees on the border of that imitation-lake. All those movements appeared to have the power of airy words—an eloquence all their own, even while the voice was not heard: for there was no speaking amongst the dancers—the music of the orchestra was alone the source of sounds, until the curtain slowly descended upon the scene; and then the enthusiastic plaudits from the audience burst forth anew.

Still I sat in a scarcely describable state of feeling; and twice did Charles Linton inquire whether I was pleased with the representation, ere I gave him a response. I remember not what I said: but it must have been something vague, and doubtless to his conception puerile to a degree; for he laughed, observing that my raptured state of feeling was far more complimentary to Violet Mortimer's talents than even the thunders of applause which had succeeded the descent of the curtain. I was about to express myself with a frankness which the excited state of my mind prompted,—when I suddenly remembered that I must forbear from mentioning the Lanovers, as that name had never once passed my lips during the whole time I had been in Lord Ravenshill's service: and so I held my peace. As the play proceeded, I watched eagerly for the re-appearance of Violet Mortimer: but she came not on again until the last act,—and then to lead another fairy dance. I will not recapitulate the poetic attractions of her performance, nor the feelings with which I contemplated her: it would be a mere work of supercrogation. The curtain descended again: and the first drama in the list of the evening's entertainment being thus over, she was summoned before the curtain. The manager led her on: the footlights were now blazing—she was enveloped in lustre—and again I asked myself whether it were all a dream, or whether I really beheld the idolized Annabel—the object of my boyish love—in that gauzy costume, thus displaying almost shamelessly her bare shoulders and neck, and with the flesh-coloured apparel revealing the symmetry of her limbs! Then too, at that moment, a sensation of sickness came over me; and I felt that I could have laid down my life cheerfully—Oh, so cheerfully!—to save Annabel such a destiny as this, if it could have been foreseen on that memorable night when she enabled me to escape from her father's house.

Yes: it was a sickness that came over me—a faintness, accompanied by a swimming of the brain and a dimness of the eyes,—so that I felt as if I were about to sink down in a swoon. But I was suddenly recalled as it were into full vitality again, by a fresh outburst of tremendous applause; and as I glanced towards the stage, I caught a glimpse of her fairy figure, as still holding the manager's hand, she disappeared from the view of the audience. Then a sudden idea sprang up within me. I must see Annabel—or at least I must see this Violet Mortimer: I must see her *close*—so as to leave no doubt in my mind that she and Annabel were one and the same. Doubt? I entertained no doubt! It was the last faint hope of very despair itself,—a hope suggesting that it was just possible it might *not* be Annabel after all. And yet—singularly paradoxical and contradictory as this explanation of my feelings may be—I had the firm conviction that it *was* Annabel, and could be no other! But I must see her—I must speak to her—I must implore her pardon for having been the cause of this tremendous change in her position! Yes—on my knees must I implore her forgiveness for having on that memorable night consented to save myself at the risk of leaving her exposed to all the most frightful consequences,—which consequences did indeed appear to have been most fatally realized: or else how was it that I now beheld her in that position?

I started up from my seat so suddenly that Charles Linton thought I was unwell; and catching me by the arm, he offered to go out with me. But I said that I should be back in a few minutes; and he did not attempt to detain, nor persist in his proposal to accompany me. I made my way amidst the crowd which thronged the gallery, treading upon the toes of some—disordering divers shawls, and achieving the discomfiture of sundry bonnets;—but scarcely waiting to apologize for each fresh act of hasty awkwardness, I reached the staircase. Down this I hurried precipitately; but on finding myself in the entrance-way or vestibule, I suddenly stopped short, not knowing how to proceed. Observing the man who had taken the gallery-tickets, I accosted him,—saying that I wished to speak to one of the performers. He asked me to whom I alluded? I replied, "Miss Mortimer:"—whereupon he remarked, perceiving that I was in livery, and had the well-known crest of the Ravenshill family upon my button, "I presume you have some message from my lord or her ladyship for Miss Mortimer?"

"Yes, yes," I answered quickly, at once comprehending that it was only by means of such a subterfuge my aim could be accomplished.

"Well then, my lad," continued the man, "go up the little narrow passage by the side of the theatre; and you will see the stage-entrance."

I thanked him and hurried away, delighted with the success of my application. Issuing forth from the theatre, I passed round into an obscure lane which divided it from the adjacent house—and speedily reached a little narrow door with an ascent of about a dozen dirty wooden steps, more like a ladder than a stair. Pushing open another door at the top, I found myself in the back part of the stage; and as the curtain was down, the carpenters and scene-shifters were busily preparing for the opening of the next piece. One of the "fairies" was standing near; and on beholding her thus close, I was struck—nay, positively shocked at her appearance. Beautiful as she had seemed in the distance, the dispelling of the illusion produced a cruel effect upon my mind. Her showy fanciful costume was of the coarsest muslin, covered with the tawdriest ornaments and the most worthless tinsel: her jaded look was by no means concealed by the deep patches of rouge upon her thin hollow cheeks. She could not have been more than two or three-and-twenty: she had evidently once been pretty—and these were the pitiful remains of that beauty! When viewed thus near, there was only that false glitter of appearance which betokened amidst its ruins something origi-

nally of superior things. Yes—I was shocked; and I was turning away with even a sense of loathing, when she suddenly spoke to one of the carpenters, giving utterance to a coarse jest in a hoarse broken voice. Still more was the illusion dispelled. I hurried on, plunging farther behind the scenes, with the sickening idea in my soul that such as this wretched creature now seemed, might Annabel soon become—unless snatched away from the health-wasting, soul-contaminating avocations and influences amongst which destiny appeared to have cast her. But all in a moment I stopped short: for, on the opposite side of the stage—leaning against a piece of scenery—appeared the object of my presence there.

And now my soul was suddenly smitten with another blow. She was listening, with a sort of half-bashfulness, half-pleasure upon her countenance, to something that a young gentleman was whispering in her ear; and this young gentleman I at once recognised to be Sir Malcolm Wavenham—a gay and profligate Baronet who had only recently come into a very large fortune, and who was a frequent visitor at Charlton Hall. But the moment after this suspicion, so injurious to Annabel, had entered my mind, I felt how ungenerous it was; and I strove to banish it: for I said to myself that it was not because Sir Malcolm was a dissipated rake, she must necessarily be giving him encouragement. And, indeed, scarcely had I thus conceived this thought in her favour, when I observed that she suddenly drew herself up in a dignified manner, and made some remark, which however I could not catch at that distance, but which struck me as being accompanied with a look of indignation. A feeling of joy warmed my heart: it was an infinite relief to the cruel suspicion which but a few moments back had sprung up there. Still, however, the conversation went on between herself and Sir Malcolm Wavenham; and I heard him say, "But, my dear Miss Mortimer, a young lady of your beauty——"

Then she interrupted him, raising her finger to her lip: I thought and hoped it was to imply that she was not to be addressed in so familiar a manner, nor in such terms of flattery. But still the discourse went on, again continued in a hushed voice on the part of the Baronet, and listened to by her with the downcast eyes of bashfulness, yet with a certain animation of the cheeks,—an animation deeper and more natural than the artificial rose which had slightly covered them. Oh! I thought to myself—why, Annabel—Oh, why listen longer to that man at all? And young though I was, I had no difficulty in suspecting that his aims and hopes were neither creditable to himself nor honourable to her. It was therefore with a reviving anguish of heart that I gazed upon that symmetrical form of sylphid shape, yet giving promise of fulness in its proportions;—I gazed, too, upon that countenance which my mind had so faithfully treasured up: but I could not now catch the sweet azure eyes—for they were bent down; and the long silken lashes, so many shades darker than the lustrous flood of her golden hair, reposed upon her cheeks. She had not as yet observed that I was near: she had not caught a glimpse of me. Oh! what would she think—what would she say, if raising her eyes, they suddenly turned to rest upon me? Ah! I said to myself, that if I had not thus beheld her in discourse with that young man, I should have sprung forward and caught her in my arms, unmindful of whosoever might have beheld the action.

I had been standing there some three or four minutes, thus gazing upon her, and while that conversation was progressing in its hushed tones,—when Sir Malcolm Wavenham, suddenly proffered his hand. She shook her head: I marked that an expression of annoyance, of mingled pride and anger appeared upon *his* features: then he said something about "altering her mind" and "letting him know to-morrow." This was all I could catch; and he turned abruptly away. She remained standing there with her looks bent down, and in an attitude of extreme pensiveness. While my eyes for a moment followed the retreating form of the young Baronet, as he traversed the stage towards the same door by which I had entered,—I noticed that one of the scene-shifters jerked his thumb significantly over his shoulder towards Violet Mortimer; and then in the same meaning manner, he indicated Wavenham,—his leering look having a corresponding expression; and the companion for whose behoof he accomplished this dumb-show, gave a coarse chuckling laugh. Good heavens! I thought to myself, that Annabel—the pure-minded, chaste-souled Annabel, as I had known her—should have become the object of the ribald significancy of these coarse men! Again I felt coming over me that sickening sensation which had seized me in the gallery; but she—the object of my presence here—was at the moment about to move away; and darting across the stage, I stood before her. Oh! now I was destined to experience another shock. She drew herself up with a kind of hauteur, and looked so coldly upon me——yes, so coldly with her beautiful azure eyes, that I was confounded. But this overpowering sense quickly fled; and in a voice fraught with a full gush of feeling, I said, "Annabel!"

She started—Oh, how she started, as if electrified! And, strange, as well as painful indeed, was the look which she bent upon me,—not cold and haughty *now*, but full of a mournful tenderness: and how ineffably, how pathetically sweet!

"Annabel—dear Annabel!" I said murmuringly as I caught her hand in my own: "you know not what pleasure and what pain I experience to meet you now!"

She burst into tears—drew back her hand with a sudden spasmodic violence—and the next moment disappeared from my view. I remained rooted to the spot like one annihilated. Darkness seemed to have suddenly sprung up where brightness had reigned an instant before. It was like a dream. I felt bewildered: my brain was turning. Suddenly recovering the power of movement, I hurried in the same direction where she had disappeared;—and I speedily became involved amidst a perfect maze of ropes, windlasses, spars, beams, and all kinds of theatrical machinery..

"Now then, youngster—where are you rushing to?" demanded a gruff voice.

"Here—stand back!" said another rough-looking individual, seizing me by the shoulder: and then a huge scene glided in front of me—so that I was quite bewildered and knew not which way to proceed.

"What do you want, my lad?" asked a tall man, decked out in a fancy costume of threadbare velvet, faded ribands, and tinsel ornaments.

"I wished to speak to Annabel," I exclaimed almost frantically.

"Annabel?" he repeated.

"Miss Mortimer, I mean," were my next words, also spoken with nervous rapidity.

"What for? who do you come from? have you got any message?"

"No," I said: "it is on my own account——"

The tall man laughed outright: and then catching me by the arm, he said, "You have no business here. How the deuce did you find your way behind the scenes?"

"Miss Mortimer will see me!" I exclaimed, struggling to release myself, as he hurried me towards the stage-door.

"Well, if that's the case," he observed, suddenly stopping short, "you shall see her. But we will inquire first. You must know, my boy, that I am the manager here; and things can't be done in this wild way:"—then beckoning to a woman, apparelled in the most tawdry style, and who was of course one of the actresses, he said, "Here, Polly, just go and ask Miss Mortimer if she likes to see a young chap in livery——By the bye, what name?"

"Joseph Wilmot," I answered quickly, and with the feverish hope that in a few instants I should again be in the presence of Annabel.

"Well—say Joseph Wilmot, then," continued the manager, again speaking to the tawdrily-dressed actress.

The woman disappeared behind some of the scenery; and in a few moments came back, saying, "Miss Mortimer knows him not—and declines seeing anybody."

"There, young chap—you have got your answer," exclaimed the manager: and with the strength of a giant, he hurried me over to the stage-door. A bell rang and the music struck up, just as he gave me a push which precipitated me down the steps: the door was closed at the head of those stairs—and I heard a bolt drawn.

I stood in the dark alley, with the tears rolling down my cheeks: I wept as if my heart were about to break. I said to myself in the wild bitterness of my anguish, "Annabel repudiates me! she will not know me! Is it pride because she finds me once more clothed in the garb of servitude? or is it because she cannot look me in the face as but a few months back she was enabled frankly and ingenuously to do? No, no—it is not pride: or else Annabel must indeed be strangely altered. But it is shame—it is shame!"

I remember that I leant against the wall in that dark alley for support: I was almost crushed and trampled down by the power of my tremendous anguish. I knew not what to do. How could I tear myself away without making another effort to have speech of Annabel?—but of what avail to renew the attempt, if she were so decided in not meeting me again? And now, too, occurred the reflection that it would pain her if I were to persevere in my endeavours to force myself into her presence: and, Oh! to inflict pain upon the heart of Annabel—I could not do it! Slowly I threaded my way down that alley towards the entrance: but just as I was about to emerge forth, my ear caught the sound of a well-known voice speaking in the street. It was that of Sir Malcolm Wavenham.

"I shall know all about it to-morrow," he was saying. "I could not get a decisive answer this evening. I can't make her out. She is either really a virtuous girl—or else a very adept in dissimulation."

"A virtuous girl, dancing on the stage!" ejaculated another voice, with an ironical laugh. "My dear Wavenham, you are mad to think such a thing. Come—let us smoke a cigar along the street, and talk it over."

The Baronet and his friend (some gentleman who was unknown to me) thereupon moved away: but once more had I been painfully shocked at hearing Annabel thus spoken of. I lingered for a few minutes to compose my feelings as well as I was able: for I saw the necessity of speedily returning into the theatre; or else my fellow-servants—Charles Linton especially—would consider my absence strange; and I should be overwhelmed with disagreeable questions. If so, I was determined not to answer them. I said to myself, "Annabel has a mother who cannot possibly have counselled her daughter to adopt this line of life. Perhaps she is even ignorant of it; and never from my lips shall any one learn that the daughter of so good a mother is identical with Violet Mortimer the dancing-girl."

I returned to the gallery. Linton thought I had been unwell: I did not undeceive him; and indeed my looks were so pale and troubled as to confirm his conjecture. I will not linger at unnecessary length upon this portion of my narrative: suffice it to say that I did not pay the least attention to the remainder of the performance, because the playbill showed me that Violet Mortimer was not again to make her appearance this evening. All the time that the other pieces lasted, I sat with my eyes fixed upon the stage, it is true—but gazing upon vacancy, and literally seeing nothing. I was glad when Charles told me that everything was over:—and when we were all once more seated in the omnibus, I lay back in a corner, wrapped up in the most sorrowing reflections. My fellow-servants thought that I slept through weariness; and during the whole ride they joyously discussed the details of the evening's amusements.

That night the pillow on which my aching head reposed, was plenteously moistened with tears; and fervid were the prayers which I poured forth, that heaven would extend its shielding influence over Annabel, and save her from those designs—too obviously criminal—which were entertained towards her by Sir Malcolm Wavenham.

CHAPTER XIII.

FATHER AND SON.

I CAN scarcely tell how the next two days passed. I walked about like one in a dream—but performing all my ordinary duties with a kind of mechanical regularity. My exterior aspect must have been one of unnatural composure, as my fellow-servants did not observe that there was anything

extraordinary on my part—save and except Charles Linton, who on two or three occasions inquired if I were unwell, as he said that I looked very pale. I answered that I was: whereupon he observed that the heated atmosphere of the crowded theatre had probably upset me—but that I should recover myself in a very short time.

During these two days I revolved a thousand wild plans in my mind in respect to her whose image was ever uppermost in my soul, and in whose welfare I experienced so deep an interest. At one moment I thought of writing to her mother, even at the risk of the letter falling into the hands of the dreaded Lanover: and it was not the fear of *this* which prevented me—for I would have sacrificed my life for the benefit of Annabel: but I reasoned that the mother herself might have left her home at the same time as the daughter—and that even if it were otherwise, I should be interfering in Annabel's affairs in a way which might provoke her indignation against me. A hundred times during each of those two days, did I think of making another attempt to see Annabel: for it would not be difficult to obtain permission to visit the town under pretence of making some necessary purchase. But here again, that same fear of seeming to be an impertinent meddler with her proceedings, held me back. I thought of Edith, whom I believed to be still residing at the adjacent village; and I was half inclined to seek out that young lady, tell her everything relative to Annabel, and beseech her good offices on behalf of this fair young creature. But here again would there be direct interference in her affairs: and moreover I knew that Miss Delmar must have sufficient sorrows of her own to engage her attention, without mixing herself up in the pursuits of another person. In short, whatever plan suggested itself to my mind, had to be abandoned: I was bewildered—and knew not how to act.

It was the morning of the third day after the visit to the theatre, that one of the footmen, who had been over as usual to the town to fetch his lordship's letters from the post-office, came into the servants' hall with an expression of countenance, which showed that he had some intelligence to communicate.

"What news?" inquired one of the other domestics.

"News?—pretty news indeed!" ejaculated the footman. "Such a scene as there was at the theatre last evening!"

I was about to leave the room at the moment to perform some task which I had in hand,—when these words, fraught with a sudden interest for me, kept me there: but smitten with the presentiment that I was about to hear something relative to her whose image filled my soul, I had the presence of mind to linger at a distance from the group of domestics, and to keep my looks averted from them.

"A scene at the theatre?" ejaculated several voices.

"Yes," answered the footman: "the place was crowded as usual to see Miss Mortimer—but when the time arrived for her appearance, she was not forthcoming. The scene was delayed—the audience grew clamorous—and the manager was obliged to come forward and give some explanation. All he could say was that Miss Mortimer had not been to the theatre the whole evening: he had sent to her lodgings—she had left them early in the afternoon—and no one knew whither she was gone. The audience would not at first receive this explanation: they fancied there was some trick in it. But soon certain scandalous whispers began circulating about: laughs and jeers broke forth; and the name of Sir Malcolm Wavenham passed from lip to lip."

I remained to hear no more: already had I heard too much;—and hastening up to my own chamber, I sank upon a seat, weeping bitterly—violently—convulsively! I mourned as heaven might be supposed to mourn over a fallen angel: the idea of associating the lovely image of Annabel with guilt, was something which appeared to rive my heart to its very core. When, after the first gush of almost mortal anguish, I was capable of deliberate reflection, I remembered how but a few months back I had sat in the chamber at Ravenshill House, meditating upon Annabel after reading the note which I found in the purse,—how I vowed that her image, *then* to me so saint-like and so angelic, should serve as my good genius—and how I indulged in the pleasing conviction that, under all circumstances, Annabel was sure to remain in the path of rectitude. Oh! had she indeed fallen? Again went up the voice of agony from my soul, asking this question! Had she indeed fallen? or was it not a hideous dream? No—it was a frightful reality:—for had not the footman spoken positively? and was not the catastrophe at which he had hinted, a sequence of the incidents which had come to my own knowledge?—I mean the attentions that Sir Malcolm Wavenham had paid to Annabel at the theatre, and the discourse which I had overheard between himself and his friend in the narrow dark lane adjoining. But now for an instant—and, alas! only for an instant—did the idea spring up in my mind that Annabel had possibly fled with Sir Malcolm to become his wife. No: the terms in which the footman had spoken of those scandalous whisperings—those laughings and jeerings, which had occurred on the previous night at the theatre,—together with the known dissipated and profligate character of Sir Malcolm Wavenham,—all forbade the thought with which for a moment I had endeavoured to cheer myself.

I felt as if I had really nothing worth living for in the world; and if death had come to me then, its presence would have been most welcome. But scarcely had I said this to myself, when a secret voice within my soul whispered that the thought was a wicked one—and that it was sinful for a human being to wish to anticipate his destiny as ordained by Providence, just because another human being had gone astray. I felt that I ought to take courage—to resign myself as much as possible to whatsoever amount of sorrow I now experienced on Annabel's account—and that, above all things, I must not by my altered demeanour or saddening looks, lay myself open to be unpleasantly interrogated by my fellow-servants. Accordingly, having dried my tears, I hastened from my chamber to attend to my duties, and not without the hope that in the bustle and activity thereof, I might to a certain degree lose the keen sense of extreme affliction. For some purpose or another, I had to seek Mr. Ravenshill's own private apartment,—on entering which, I per-

ceived that gentleman seated at a table with his countenance buried in his hands; and at the moment I opened the door, a convulsive sob met my ear.

It is even a sadder thing to behold a man than a woman weeping. Women are more inclined to tears for slight causes than members of the sterner sex; and it must always be some potent cause of bitter anguish indeed, which can plunge a man into such woe as that wherein I now saw my young master immersed.

"O my God, what a sacrifice! what a sacrifice!" he ejaculated, suddenly springing up to his feet. "Anything were preferable——anything!——aye, even suicide!"

These words were uttered with a vehement excitement; and as Walter Ravenshill turned round, he beheld me quickly retiring: for I did not of course like to intrude upon such a sacred scene as that of the unfortunate young gentleman's excruciating anguish.

"Stop, Joseph—stop! come hither!" he exclaimed, rushing after me: and as in my confusion and bewilderment, I did not at once show signs of obeying—but, on the contrary, was continuing my retreat, he seized me by the arm, and dragged me into the room. Then, shutting the door and placing his back against it, he demanded in a low hoarse voice, and with a very pale face,—"How long had you been standing there?"

"Only a few instants, sir," was my answer.

"Only a few instants?" he said, repeating my words. "But you heard what fell from my lips? Now, Joseph, shall you not mention every particular of this scene to your fellow-servants?"

"Certainly not, sir," I responded energetically. "In order to avoid hearing or seeing more, I was hastening away——"

"True!" he observed. "But why did you not knock at the door?"

"I did, sir; and as no answer was returned, I concluded that no one was here."

"And you are sure that you will not mention what you beheld or heard?"

"Not for the world, sir:"—and then I added with a certain flaming-up of my natural spirit, "I am no spy upon your actions."

"Well, Joseph, I know you are a good boy," continued Mr. Ravenshill, after a brief pause, during which he contemplated me earnestly. "And now tell me the truth—do not the servants talk amongst themselves about the—the—approaching marriage?"—and a ghastly expression of anguish swept over his countenance as he with difficulty brought himself to give utterance to these words.

"I hope, sir," was my answer, "that you will not induce me to become a tell-tale—especially as if I were, you would no longer have the full confidence that I should forbear speaking of your own concerns."

"Ah!" he ejaculated, pressing one of his hands to his brow, "I understand but too well that it is so! Yes—yes—I am laughed at and ridiculed behind my back! By heaven, it is intolerable!"—then, as if suddenly repenting, or rather vexed with himself that he should thus have given way to his feelings in my presence, he caught me by the shoulder, saying in an excited manner, "Do not think any more, Joseph, of what you have heard fall from my lips: blot it out from your memory!"

With these words he abruptly quitted the room; and I had no longer any doubt that the unfortunate young gentleman regarded with loathing and abhorrence the marriage into which family circumstances were about to force him.

That very same evening the Boustead were to dine at Charlton Hall. They came, a little before seven o'clock, in their gaudy equipage; and dinner was almost immediately served up. I had to assist in waiting at table; and it struck me that Mrs. Boustead spoke in a hoarser voice than usual, and with a certain degree of incoherency. I could not help looking at her; and I likewise observed that she was drinking a great deal of wine. Presently I saw Euphemia making signs to her mother, when the young lady fancied herself unperceived by any one else: but Mrs. Boustead paid no attention to them, and actually helped herself to wine—a proceeding of which no well-bred lady is ever guilty. Lord Ravenshill looked uncommonly grave: her ladyship exchanged with him a rapidly significant glance: Mr. Ravenshill appeared downright distressed. As I went out into the hall to fetch something that was needed, I heard one of the footmen say to another, "The old lady is getting quite jolly, and will be blazing drunk presently."

The scene of the morning with Mr. Walter came vividly back to my mind; and I could scarcely wonder at his utter repugnance to form a matrimonial alliance with such a family. When I went back into the dining-room, I heard Euphemia saying, "My dear ma, I am sure you are unwell: you had much better retire and lie down a little. You know when you *do* have these dreadful headaches——"

"Lawk-a-daisy, Phemy, dear!" interrupted Mrs. Boustead, speaking very thick with her hoarse bassoon-like voice; "I hav'n't got never a headach: I am quite right. Dear me! what a pretty young page you have got, my lord. When the event comes off," she added, looking with a sort of half-vacant significancy towards her daughter and the Hon. Mr. Ravenshill, "we must manage to get the young couple just such another likely-looking boy, and stick him into a nice livery like that."

I felt myself blushing up to the very hair of my head at thus being made the object of Mrs. Boustead's remarks; and turning away towards the side-board, affected to be very busily engaged in arranging the dessert dishes.

"By the bye," said Mr. Boustead, most probably catching at the first subject that came into his head, in order to put a stop to his wife's garrulity,—"has your ludship heard of Sir Malcolm Wavenham's precious exploit?"

"I cannot say that I have," answered Lord Ravenshill; and now I was all attention—but painfully and nervously so; for I was not at a loss to conjecture the subject about to be introduced.

"Why, he's took away that dancing gal," continued Mr. Boustead,—"Violet Mortimer I mean—which we saw t'other night at the theatre. I wonder you hav'n't heard tell of it: it was the talk of the whole town when I was there this morning. And such a shindy as there was at the theatre last night——my eyes, such a shindy!"

I felt that my emotions were overpowering me

—so keenly were they re-awakened by the turn which the discourse had thus taken; and I hurried from the room. My duties however compelled me to go back again in about ten minutes; and then I found to my infinite relief and satisfaction, that the conversation was progressing on some other topic. Mrs. Boustead was now swaying from side to side on her chair in a visible state of inebriety. I should observe that no other guests were present—which circumstance was doubtless a matter of ineffable self-congratulation on the part of the Ravenshill family. The cloth had been taken off the table—the dessert was about to be placed on—when all of a sudden Mrs. Boustead, losing her equilibrium, plumped down upon the carpet. Euphemia screamed—and either fainted in reality, or else thought it requisite to simulate a swoon. The utmost confusion prevailed—the lady's-maids were summoned — and the men-servants hastened to quit the room on a signal from his lordship. But before crossing the threshold, I could not help casting a look back upon that deplorable scene. Lady Ravenshill sat as if transfixed in her chair: his lordship, who had risen up, looked cold and stern: Mr. Boustead had hurried to the assistance of his wife, whose turban and false front had fallen off with the tumble: Mr. Walter was conveying Euphemia to a sofa. In the hall the butler and the footmen who had witnessed the scene, hesitated not to express their disgust in no measured terms: but I did not hear a single syllable of pity vouchsafed for their young master. On the contrary, the butler emphatically declared that it served him right for thinking of throwing himself away on the vulgar daughter of such upstart persons. About half-an-hour afterwards the Bousteads' carriage was ordered; and they took their departure,—Mr. Boustead talking very loud, as he traversed the hall, about "his good lady having fallen into an apoplectic fit, to which she was subject."

In the servants' hall nothing was spoken of all the rest of the evening but the incident just related. I myself was much excited by the varied feelings that were agitating within me. The image of Annabel haunted me like the pale ghost of her own former pure self; and I was moved with an illimitable compassion for the unfortunate Walter Ravenshill. The discourse of my fellow-domestics increased the painful nature of my feelings: my blood was hot and feverish in my veins —my brows throbbed with racking pains. I went forth into the garden to woo the cold night air of February. There was an arbour formed by evergreens;—and into the darkness of this embowering retreat I plunged, as if feeling it necessary to seek the completest solitude and seclusion for my torturing reflections. I had not been there many moments, when I suddenly became aware that footsteps were approaching along the gravel-walk; and almost immediately afterwards, other footsteps—more hurried—came from behind the individual who was thus advancing. Then I heard voices.

"Walter—my dear Walter, do not afflict yourself thus!" said Lord Ravenshill, who had thus evidently hastened after his son.

"Afflict myself, father?" ejaculated my young master, in tones full of bitterness: "how would you have me be consoled?"

They had both stopped short exactly in front of the arbour in which I had plunged myself;—but hoping that they would speedily pass on, I did not choose to issue forth at once and thus make them aware that I had overheard a single syllable of what was being said. But there they remained; and as the impassioned dialogue went on, I felt that it was too late to emerge thence—as they would naturally be angry that I should have tarried even for a single moment. I was thus against my will rendered a listener of all that took place.

"How would you have me be consoled, father?" repeated Walter Ravenshill, with a degree of anguished bitterness that it was very sad to associate with one who was thus in the spring-time of his existence. "Look at the fearful sacrifice I am called upon to consummate! Even if the girl were the loveliest of her sex, and herself a model of gentle breeding and polished courtesy, it would still be a horror to enter that family! No, father—I cannot do it! Ruin may overtake us—your creditors may seize upon everything—we may be driven forth from the home of our ancestors—but even *this* would be a less painful degradation than the necessity of my taking such a wife, and calling such a man my father-in-law—such a woman my mother-in-law!"

"Walter, do not speak thus!" said Lord Ravenshill, in a tone of the most earnest entreaty. "Think you not that I feel it all as much as you? think you not that my heart bleeds at the idea of this alliance? Yes—indeed it does! But what is to be done? The alternatives are before you. On the one hand immediate ruin for us all—on the other hand marriage with this girl."

"Marriage with that girl!" exclaimed Walter, with augmenting vehemence. "No—I tell you, father, it is impossible! And now hear me. I am young—and the world is before me. You have interest, and can procure for me a Government situation—a diplomatic post—or at least a commission in the Army. I would sooner remain poor, than marry that girl as the condition of becoming rich. I am decided — nothing shall change me; and to-morrow you can write to Mr. Boustead to inform him of my resolve."

"And to-morrow, when this shall be known," answered Lord Ravenshill, in a low deep voice, "there will be an execution put into the house. The creditors are merely holding back under the promise of having their demands liquidated when this marriage takes place."

"Then let the creditors come!" ejaculated Walter passionately—almost fiercely. "Why am I to be sacrificed to stave them off? Look you, father! —the ruin which is about to fall upon our house, if not commenced by you, will at least have been consummated by you. The very day that I came of age, you asked me to sign certain papers, with the assurance that they were mere formalities necessary on the part of your heir. I did so. I troubled myself not to read their contents—I did not think that my own father would rob, and plunder, and defraud me!"

"Walter!" exclaimed the nobleman: "these words——"

"Oh, they may be harsh—but they are true!" exclaimed the young gentleman, with a still increasing storm of anguished passion. "Yes—they

are true; and you know it! Did you make any sacrifice for me? did you tell me frankly and candidly the difficulties of your position? did you offer to go abroad for some years, that the estate might be nursed? did you propose to put down a single carriage or sell a single horse? did you suggest the propriety of breaking up one of the three establishments? did you, in a word, volunteer the most trifling reduction of your own expenditure to pay off the terrific liabilities which were engulfing the property that is my birthright, and which I ought at your death to receive free and unencumbered? No—nothing of all this did you do! Far from it. But you induced me to sign documents rendering me a joint contractor with yourself in ruinous mortgages: and then, as soon as my eyes were opened to the fatal truth, what alternative was there but that I should plunge recklessly onward in the descending path where your foul treachery had placed my footsteps? This has been your conduct, father!"

"Walter, Walter—I conjure you, spare me!" interrupted the wretched nobleman, in the convulsing voice of shame, remorse, and anguish.

"No—hear me out!" continued the son, now stern and implacable in the vehemence of his excited feelings and his infuriate rage: "hear me out, I say—and then you will see how little reason you have to reproach me for the decision to which I have come! I repeat, therefore, that not one single sacrifice did you yourself offer to make. All on your part was selfishness—aye, intense selfishness: and on my mother's too! Yes—egotism was at the bottom of the conduct of both. That ye might maintain your state and dignity, your son was led week after week, and month after month, to pledge his birthright in detail—to make away with it parcel by parcel—to sell himself by degrees to

the black demon of Ruin, as a man in desperation sells period after period of his life to Satan! No—not a single sacrifice on your part!—but I am to make ten thousand! And now you think to render this hideous marriage the crowning one of all? But it shall not be."

"Walter, you asked me to listen to you," replied Lord Ravenshill, in a tremulous and almost broken voice; "and I have done so. But now hear me. Yes—I confess that I have been guilty of some wrongs towards you; and, thank heaven! we are thus speaking in the dark, so that a father may be saved the painful humiliation of having to blush in the presence of his son. But still you have viewed my conduct in the severest light, and have painted it in the blackest colour. You have gone too far. Think you that if your mother and myself sought to sustain a certain position, it was for ourselves alone? No—it was still more for you. Oh! can you not imagine that your poor mother and myself have passed many and many a sleepless night—have endured many and many an hour of poignant agony—when we have been compelled to envisage the difficulties of our position? But our hope still was that you—with your handsome person, your fine intellect, your courtly manners, and the proud name you were destined at my death to bear, would amend all by a brilliant alliance."

"And *this*," ejaculated Walter, in thrilling tones of bitterest scorn and keenest irony—"*this* is the brilliant alliance you have found for me——Boustead's daughter!"

Here the young man sent forth a loud and mocking laugh, which rang with the horrible sardonism of a very fiend. It was a laugh such as in the extreme of despair would be wrung from a breaking heart in defiance of a threat holding out the infliction of some fresh misfortune: it was indeed one of those laughs which grate along all the nerves, make the blood run cold in the veins, and cause the soul to shudder at the frightful potency of passion whereof the human mind is capable.

"Walter, you will drive me mad!" exclaimed Lord Ravenshill: and I heard his foot stamp upon the frozen pathway.

"Drive you mad?" cried Walter, in that same tone of bitterest irony. "I am mad already! Now, father, it is useless for us to remain in conversation here. My resolve is taken, and you know what it is."

"Then listen, Walter!" rejoined the nobleman: and for a few instants there was a solemn pause, which was broken by his lordship's voice sounding, deep and hollow in its accents, as he said, "Adhere to your resolve, if you will: but mistake not the warning I am about to give. You will be the murderer of your father!"

An ejaculation of horror burst from the lips of Walter Ravenshill.

"Yes," the nobleman went on to say: "do not mistake me! Within the very same hour that the bailiffs take possession of Charlton Hall, do I put a period to my existence. Now, Walter, have you the courage—have you the heartlessness to drive me to this horrible catastrophe?"

"No, my God—no!" exclaimed the wretched young man, in accents of wildest anguish, but no longer fraught with irony nor sardonism: "not for worlds would I do this! But is there no way, father, of extricating ourselves from this web of difficulties which is closing in around us, save by the consummation of that hated alliance?"

"None, Walter," was the response,—"unless another and a better bride could be found, with a quarter of a million as a dower, and another quarter of a million in the perspective: for this is the wealth which Boustead's daughter will bring."

"Another bride?" said Walter, slowly and musingly repeating his father's words: then with a sudden outburst of excitement, he cried, "Oh, that I had but a few months' respite!—oh that I had but another chance of rendering myself acceptable to some wealthy damsel whose appearance, whose manners, and whose family would not disgrace us! Father," continued Mr. Ravenshill, his voice suddenly sinking into the more subdued tone of deliberate seriousness, "there is a matrimonial field which I have left unexplored. If the daughters of the aristocracy be for the most part portionless,—those of bankers, merchants, and wealthy London citizens are not so. Some of these families are as well brought up and almost as refined as those of the sphere to which we belong——"

"True, Walter!" ejaculated Lord Ravenshill, as if pleased with the idea thus suggested.

"Ah! you consent that I shall essay this one chance of delivering myself from the necessity of marrying Boustead's daughter? Look you, father," continued Walter; "my proceedings are plain and easy. I return to London without breaking off the present engagement: if within a few months I form an alliance better suited to my tastes, and equally eligible in a pecuniary sense, we shall be satisfied——nay, more, we shall be happy. But if I fail, then must I adopt the alternative of espousing Boustead's daughter; and in the meantime I shall at least have sufficient leisure to reflect upon what may be my probable destiny, and thus be enabled to meet it with more courage than I can now display. Do you approve of my plan, father?—and do you not think that you can make sufficient excuses to the Bousteads to postpone the wedding-day for a few months, as well as to account for my absence during the interval, in such a manner that they may not suspect what is going on?"

"All this would be easy enough," replied Lord Ravenshill, "if the creditors themselves would wait. They are anxiously looking forward for next month, when it is presumed the nuptials are to take place."

"I can suggest a plan!" eagerly interrupted Walter. "Let a paragraph be inserted in the county newspapers to the effect that 'the nuptials of the Hon. Walter Ravenshill with the beautiful and accomplished daughter of Titus Boustead, Esq., the eminent contractor, are postponed until the first week of August, in consequence of a death in the family of Lord Ravenshill.' Let such a paragraph, I say, be inserted: the vanity of the Bousteads will be tickled by it—the creditors will have patience. They will say to themselves that the marriage is really to take place; and that in respect to their claims it is a mere matter of time, with the certainty of eventual settlement. Cannot all this be done, dear father?"

The contrast between the tone which Walter Ravenshill was now adopting towards his sire, and that which but a little time back he had been

using, was very marked and striking,—it being evident that he in his turn was now calling cajolery to his aid in order to obtain his ends. I heard Lord Ravenshill give his assent to all the details of the scheme suggested by Walter; and then they walked away together, still farther discussing the proposed arrangements as they leisurely retraced their steps to the house.

I then emerged from my place of concealment; and hurrying up to my own chamber, retired to rest. But it was long ere sleep visited my eyes: my mind was tossed upon the agitated sea of varied thoughts,—in which the image of Annabel, the disgraceful conduct of Mrs. Boustead, and the discreditable machinations of Lord Ravenshill and his son were blended and jumbled together.

CHAPTER XIV.

A DEVONSHIRE SUPERSTITION.

On the second morning after that discourse which I had overheard, the Hon. Mr. Walter Ravenshill took his departure for London, attended by his valet Charles Linton; and it was rumoured at the Hall and in the neighbourhood, that a very distant relative of the Ravenshill family—from whom the family itself entertained some pecuniary expectations—had just died in the metropolis. But his lordship hinted to one of his valets, and her ladyship to her maids, that this deceased relation was of too remote a kinship to render it necessary for the family to go into mourning: and thus the falsehood being told, an equally deceptive pretext was rendered necessary for the avoidance of what would have been a most impious mockery. Little did Lord and Lady Ravenshill think that there was one beneath their roof who could have unmasked their hypocrisy if he had chosen: but it was not my business to say a word,—the more especially as I had only become possessed of the secret by an accident, which, if I opened my lips, might be construed into a wilful and impertinent eaves-dropping.

I must now remark that the seat of Sir Malcolm Wavenham was about three miles distant from the Hall, and only one mile beyond the little village of Charlton itself. In the course of a few days after the incidents just related, I overheard some of the servants talking about Sir Malcolm; and I thus discovered that he was for the present staying in Exeter with her who was denominated Violet Mortimer. Exeter, as already stated, was about twenty miles from the Hall; and thus, even if I still entertained the idea of making another attempt to see the Baronet's victim, and persuade her to abandon the path of frailty,—the distance would have precluded the execution of the design. I did not however harbour the project: I said to myself that if Annabel was weak and criminal enough thus to yield to temptation, no words which I might utter would endow her with strength or re-imbue her with the virtue sufficient to emancipate herself from the ways of transgression. Moreover, I should have dreaded to meet, under such circumstances, the being whom I had known in her purity, and whom my boyish heart had learnt to love so fondly. I therefore resigned myself, as well as I was able, to the weight of my sorrow; and endeavoured to the best of my ability, to banish Annabel's image from my thoughts——but, alas! this was not so easy.

Weeks went by—they grew into months—the trees began putting forth their verdure again, the singing of birds joyously proclaiming the presence of Spring. The primrose grew upon the banks—the violet veiled its more modest beauties under the green hedges. All this while the Hon. Mr. Walter Ravenshill remained absent: the Bousteads continued to visit at the Hall: not a whisper circulated as to the possibility or probability of the match being broken off; and the creditors continued patient as well as obliging. Often and often did I think of visiting Charlton again, in order to pay my respects to Miss Delmar: but feeling how much she must be afflicted, I dreaded to show myself in her presence. As for the amount of success which Mr. Ravenshill was experiencing in the metropolis with regard to his matrimonial researches, I had no means of obtaining any information, even if I were curious on the point,—my friend Charles Linton being absent with his master. Thus time wore on—and the month of June arrived.

One forenoon, I was rambling by myself during a leisure hour or two along the bank of the stream, when I suddenly heard the sound of voices speaking loudly and in a very excited manner. They evidently came from some little distance a-head of where I was walking at the time; and a group of trees, growing on the bank—their overhanging boughs dipping in the crystal waters—concealed from view the persons whose voices thus reached my ears. Judging however by the excited accents that something unusual was taking place—and even fearing, as the voices swelled into cries, that it was an accident of a serious character—I sped along, scrambling through the trees and the underwood. The instant that I emerged on the other side, I beheld a scene which I shall not readily forget. Five or six labouring men were dragging forth a corpse from the stream, which was exceedingly deep and ran very rapid in that part of the estate. The corpse was that of a young labourer whom I knew well by sight, and had often seen passing through the grounds. His name was Benjamin Cowper; and he lived with his parents in the village of Charlton. His father—an old man of past sixty—was amongst those whom I thus descried upon the bank; and when the corpse was drawn forth, the bereaved parent flung himself upon it with such heart-rending lamentations that the tears, bursting from my eyes, blinded me for a few moments. The unfortunate young man was dressed in all his clothes; and therefore I at once concluded that he must have fallen in by accident, and being unable to swim, was drowned——unless, indeed, it were an act of suicide: but, as I subsequently ascertained, for this belief there was not the slightest ground. It was within half a mile of the village that the dreadful discovery was made; and I learnt the few following facts from one of those who had just dragged forth the corpse.

It appeared that on the preceding evening, Benjamin Cowper did not return home at his usual hour from labour; and this was considered the

more extraordinary, inasmuch as he was very regular in his habits, an exceeding steady young man, and had made a particular appointment with a young woman, named Catherine Allen, to take her out for a walk. The young couple were engaged to each other; and it was at the cottage of Benjamin's parents that she was waiting for him. As hour after hour passed—night came—and he returned not, the most serious apprehensions were entertained. He was sought for in the village alehouse, though but little accustomed to cross its threshold: but he was not there—neither had he visited it. Hurried calls were made at the neighbours' abodes: but all in vain. The Rev. Mr. Howard, learning of this mysterious disappearance, went out with several of the villagers to search amidst the adjacent fields,—thinking that possibly the missing one might have fallen down in a fit. Far into the night was the search protracted—but all in vain: the anguish of the parents and poor Catherine continued unrelieved. In the morning the search was resumed: the villagers divided themselves into scouring parties for the purpose—the missing young man's father accompanying one of the bands. It was this particular party which—while passing along the bank of the stream, where, as before said, it was wider, deeper, and more rapid than elsewhere — beheld the corpse lying on the pebbly bed at the bottom. Thus did I arrive upon the spot at the very instant the unfortunate young man was dragged forth.

Never shall I forget the anguish of that bereaved father! It displayed itself not merely in the bitterest lamentations, but also with a pathos which would have moved the hardest heart. But now the deep and touching interest of this tragic scene was to experience a new phase, and to develop fresh features of indescribable woe. Two females who had followed this searching party, came up to the spot:—frantically flying thither, did they come, having seen from a distance enough of the ominous proceedings to make them suspect what had occurred. One of these women was the drowned man's mother: the other his betrothed Catherine. The latter was a fine, tall, stout, buxom girl—and might even be pronounced handsome. She was not above eighteen; and as I subsequently learnt, was naturally of the gayest and liveliest disposition in the village—full of exuberant spirits—but of a purity of conduct which never had afforded the slightest scope for the malignity of scandal. She was a good young woman—an orphan living with an old aunt, who kept a small shop, and whom Catherine industriously assisted in the little household and the business.

The two poor women—mother and betrothed—threw themselves upon the dead body of the loved and lost one with an anguish and an agony as great as that which the father had experienced—and was indeed still experiencing. Again did the tears trickle down my cheeks as I contemplated that scene; and I believe that amongst the assembled villagers, not an eye-lash was dry. But I was presently struck by the bitter self-accusings that mingled with the lamentations which the unfortunate Catherine sent forth.

"Oh, it was my fault!" she wildly cried: "it is a judgment of heaven upon me for my wickedness! Oh, the impious folly of which I was guilty!—oh, the sinful attempt to penetrate the future! It was my fault! I have provoked heaven's wrath!—it is done to punish me—and for that purpose *he* is made the victim! Wretched, wretched creature that I am!"

The kind-hearted villagers gathered around the almost frenzied girl; and in their own rude but well-meaning manner, said what they could to console her. Afflicted as I myself was with this heart-rending scene, I could not help observing that Catherine's passionate self-accusings produced no surprise upon these men—but that, on the contrary, they appeared fully to comprehend what she meant: for they exchanged gloomy and significant looks amongst themselves,—shaking their heads solemnly, too, in mournful as well as awful corroboration of the poor girl's words.

"Alas, alas, Katy!" said the bereaved mother, in a broken voice and amidst torrents of tears, "that you should have done that! Oh, fatal Midsummer's Eve! My poor boy is gone—the life is out of him! But we will not reproach you, Katy—we all know how you loved him——"

Here her voice was choked with sobs; and for some minutes not another intelligible word was spoken by either of the three mourners: they mingled their tears, their convulsing grief, and their agonizing moans. At length, these first paroxysms of ineffable agony having somewhat subsided, the villagers gently but firmly drew the father, the mother, and Kate Allen away from the corpse,—over the countenance of which one of them threw his garment. Then the mournful procession towards the village was formed: but I could not endure the spectacle any longer—I had already seen enough to cause my heart to ache for a long time to come. I turned away; and retracing my steps with a profound melancholy in my soul, took the nearest path to the Hall,—avoiding the bank of the stream with a kind of vague and ominous dread of those crystal waters which were so deep and rapid there. At a short distance from the spot where the scene had taken place, I sat down on the step of a stile to compose my feelings, if possible, before I returned to the house. I fell into such a train of melancholy reflection that I observed not how time was passing—and must have tarried there at least an hour, not having the energy to rise up and continue my way. I was aroused from that painful dreaminess of thought, by the sounds of footsteps approaching along the pathway leading from the village. I rose up—and beheld one of the labouring men who had assisted to drag forth the corpse.

"It's a sad, sad thing," he said, with the gloomiest sorrow depicted upon his honest sunburnt countenance: and he himself was a young good-looking man, somewhat resembling his drowned comrade. "Such woe and tribulation as there is in the village! I could endure the sight no longer, and was forced to come away. Ah! it's a pity that Kate should have ever done what she did!—but she'll never again be the gay and happy being she was. If this isn't the death of her at once, she'll pine away slowly and sink down by degrees into the grave."

"It was indeed a most melancholy spectacle," I observed: then, after a pause, I said with some little degree of hesitation—for the subject appeared too painful a one to be prolonged for the mere gratification of curiosity,—"What meant

those bitter self-accusings of the poor girl? and why did you just now say that it were better if she had not done it?"

"Ah! it is a sad history altogether," responded the man: "but I'll explain what you want to know."

He seated himself on the stile, and I resumed my place upon the step: then, after an interval of mournful reflection, he related in his own peculiar dialect the following extraordinary narrative, which I do not however attempt to give in that provincial phraseology.

"Last Midsummer's Eve there was a goodly party of us assembled at the Cowpers' cottage: for it was the old man's sixty-fourth birthday; and Mr. Howard—that's our minister, you know—had sent him the wherewithal to make merry. Kate was of course there; and with her joyous spirits and her innocent mirth, she seemed the life and soul of the little party. We had a good supper—I think there were altogether ten or a dozen of us; and the cup went round often enough to make us cheerful, without doing us any harm. Well, it was a little past eleven o'clock—and I don't know how the conversation took such a turn, or who was the first that broached the subject—but I remember well that we found ourselves talking about fairies, and pixies, and all the little elfin people that are supposed to haunt certain spots. Some expressed their belief in the existence of these beings: others ridiculed the notion—and amongst these was Ben Cowper himself. But no one spoke more emphatically in this latter sense, than did Kate Allen. She laughed outright at the idea of putting faith in those things—and declared that she never was superstitious, and never could be. Her lover echoed all her sentiments: and the subject was argued amongst us in a manner that deepened into seriousness, but in perfect good-feeling: for wherever Kate was, it was impossible to lose one's temper. Gradually the discourse turned upon spectres, apparitions, and ghosts: several tales were told of remarkable occurrences in connexion therewith: but here again Kate Allen and Ben Cowper were altogether incredulous. They vowed that the circumstances detailed were mere coincidences, or else the effects of imagination. This point was likewise argued with increasing seriousness, and still in a friendly spirit. One person present observed that he would not for worlds walk through the churchyard at midnight; whereupon Kate replied that she would not hesitate to do so: but she did not say it in a vain-glorious or improperly boastful manner—it was the genuine expression of a courageous mind. Another of the party suddenly remarked that it was Midsummer's Eve: and this observation reminded us all of a particular belief associated with that night. This is to the effect that if any one at midnight, on the eve of Midsummer Day, looks into a church, he will see those persons who, being known to him, are destined to die within the ensuing twelve months, walk slowly through the interior of the building. This superstition, which very generally prevails in Devonshire—and I believe in other parts of England—was repudiated by Kate Allen and her lover as energetically as the previously discussed questions; and as the greater number of those present were firm believers on the point, Kate offered to repair to the church, look through one of the windows as the clock was striking twelve, and thus convince us that there was no ground for the superstition. We were all so much interested in the matter, that as far as I recollect, very few remonstrances were offered; and Kate accordingly set out. Before she left the cottage—which is within a stone's throw of the churchyard—she proposed that two or three of us should follow at a distance and assure ourselves that she did not shrink from the performance of what she had volunteered: but we knew that we could take her word—and so we decided on remaining where we were."

Here the narrator of this episode paused for a few minutes: and I awaited with intense curiosity and interest the continuation of the story. Speaking in a tone of increased solemnity, he resumed his tale as follows:—

"Kate went forth. It was a beautiful night—the stars were shining brightly—and one could almost see to read in the open air. From the cottage-window the old church might be viewed with its ivy-covered tower: but the wall bordering the churchyard being high, we could not see Kate making her way amidst the tombstones. After she had left us, the conversation ceased—a certain feeling of solemn awe came over most of us—and I believe that several present felt sorry that the young damsel had been suffered to proceed upon her enterprise. Such was not, however, the sentiment of her lover, Ben Cowper, who, on the contrary, was proud of his betrothed's courage: but it was the feeling of his parents—and I know that it was also mine. About ten minutes after Kate left us, the church-clock began to proclaim the hour of midnight. We sat silent, some of us exchanging significant glances, which methought were sombre and gloomy. Another ten minutes passed by; and then we beheld Kate issuing forth from the churchyard and approaching the cottage. Ben Cowper and myself were gazing from the window; and it struck me that instead of walking with her usual airy and lightly tripping pace, she advanced slowly and with a certain appearance of solemnity. As she passed by the window too, methought her face was pale; and when she entered the room, all eyes were at once centred upon her. She *was* pale, and evidently troubled—although she strove to conceal her feelings. Her first words were, 'Did any body play me a trick? who left the room during my absence?'—and she spoke with tremulous accents. The question she thus put, caused great excitement and suspense, not even excepting Ben; for we all felt assured that something had really happened. Old Mr. Cowper, speaking for the rest, positively declared that no one had left the cottage while she was away. Her eyes settled upon Ben in a searching manner: he repeated his father's assurance—and poor Kate, no longer able to restrain her feelings, sank down upon a chair bursting into tears. We were all very much afflicted by this spectacle; and the girl's lover, now reproaching himself bitterly for having allowed her to go to the church, conjured her in the most affectionate manner to conquer her emotions. Repeating an argument on which she herself had so much insisted when the subject of ghosts was previously discussed, he said that whatever had happened could only have been fancy on her part.

Suddenly wiping away the tears, Kate appeared to grow calm: but several minutes elapsed before she would explain the cause of her previous excitement. Then, what she did say was in a few words, amounting only to this:—'that as she looked through the church-window, she saw the form of a man pass close by that window, but within the church; and that she did not recognise his face.' No one pressed her for any farther explanations; though we saw plainly enough that she had not told *all*—and we were at no loss to conjecture what it was she had left unsaid. The party broke up gloomy and out of spirits: and we withdrew to our respective homes. For some weeks I thought that Kate Allen was not the same smiling light-hearted girl she used to be; but by degrees this impression on my mind wore off—she recovered her wonted spirits—and the incident, which at first had made some little stir in the village, ceased to be spoken of. One day,—it must have been about three months ago,—I and Ben Cowper had work to do in the same field; and while talking together, the occurrence I have been relating was somehow or another revived. He then told me that it was five or six weeks after Midsummer's Eve before he could get out of Kate what she really had seen on that particular night: but at length she had yielded to his entreaties and given the fullest explanations. What she said was that she *did* recognise the countenance of the figure that passed the window inside the church: for that while so passing, it turned its face towards her—and that face was as pale as the dead! It was the face of Ben Cowper himself. But at the time that Kate thus completed her narrative to her lover, she said that having since reflected upon the incident, she felt assured it was only her fancy; and she moreover confessed that on passing through the churchyard—finding herself amongst the tombstones and the green graves—then hearing the solemn striking of the clock—and looking into the church, the very gloom of which was displayed by the star-light pouring in,—she was seized with a superstitious awe which but a few minutes previously she had little imagined herself to be capable of experiencing. It was therefore, she thought, that under this influence her imagination had conjured up before her the being who was oftenest in her mind, and concerning whose welfare she was naturally so solicitous. Such were the explanations which she gave to Ben Cowper soon after the occurrence, and which he recited to me three months ago. He himself entertained exactly the same view of the matter as Kate did,—attributing it all to her fancy; and therefore the incident did not trouble him in the least: for he never had been inclined to superstition. I can't say that I was equally well satisfied upon the point: but of course I pretended to be—as I would not for the world frighten either Ben Cowper or Kate Allen by seeming to attach any importance to the affair. When last night I heard that Ben was missing, the thought flashed to my mind in a moment that something was wrong, and that Kate would have to pay too dear, poor girl! for her freak of last Midsummer's Eve. So it has proved; and I don't think she will ever get over it."

When the man had ceased speaking, I sat pondering for several minutes upon the extraordinary tale he had related. I myself was far from being superstitious. Mr. and Mrs. Nelson, at the school where I was brought up, had always discouraged such a tendency on the part of the pupils—and had frequently laboured to prove that there were no such things as spectral visitations from the dead, nor warnings of a preternatural character. I therefore concluded that it was in reality only the effect of an excited imagination on Kate Allen's part; though the accidental death of her lover within the year, might seem to give it a more awfully solemn complexion. Besides, I thought to myself that whether Kate had gone to the church or not, this same fatal accident would have occurred all the same, whatsoever cause had produced it; and that it would be questioning the justice of heaven to suppose that the decree for the young man's premature death had gone forth as a punishment for any act of thoughtless impiety or daring levity on the part of his betrothed.

"Is it surmised," I asked, at length breaking silence, "how the poor young man came to be drowned?"

"Yes," was the labourer's response. "Ben was in the habit of setting lines to catch eels; and the knowledge that he did so, made me and my comrades just now follow the bank of the stream when we were on the search. It is to be supposed that Ben, on his way home last evening, tarried to lay his lines and fell in: but whether his foot slipped, or whether he was seized with a fit, can never be known. Poor fellow! it is a sad affair—a very sad affair."

With these words, the kind-hearted peasant wished me "good day," and struck across the fields—while I pursued the path leading back to Charlton Hall. On reaching the house, I told my fellow-servants all that had happened; and the tragic circumstances furnished ample food for conversation, not merely during the rest of that day, but for several days to come.

CHAPTER XV.

MIDSUMMER'S EVE.

The lamentable incident produced a great impression upon my mind; and I could not help very frequently meditating upon it. I reviewed all the arguments which my ingenuity suggested, to prove that the spectral apparition in the church was mere fancy on Kate Allen's part, and that her lover's death within the year was to be accounted for as one of those singular occurrences which, while appearing to be the fulfilment of a previous warning, in reality belong only to the chapter of accidents. But there was nevertheless within my mind a certain uneasy and superstitious doubt as to the validity of those arguments. The domestics were allowed access to certain shelves of books in his lordship's library; and I searched amongst the volumes for any works which I could find treating of supernatural appearances. I discovered several; and the longer I read, the greater was the avidity with which I devoured their contents. I was astonished at the seeming authentication of several of the narratives which I thus perused: I had never before imagined that there

were any accounts of that nature which appeared to be so genuine. For instance, revelations made by the spirits of the departed to their survivors in this life, had proved the means of wills being discovered—had led to lawsuits—and had come under the cognizance of legal tribunals: while the persons seeking to benefit themselves by these appeals to justice, could not possibly have obtained the information on which the suits were brought, save and except by preternatural revealings. I found, moreover, that the idea of apparitions being seen only at night, and never by more than one person at a time, was a mere vulgar error—that is to say, if the accounts in these books could be relied upon: for here were numerous instances of spiritual types of departed persons being seen in the broad daylight and by several individuals assembled. In short, the volumes which I thus greedily devoured,—staggered, bewildered, and amazed me. I did not like to admit, even to myself, a complete concession to the mass of evidence contained therein: but yet I did not see how it could reasonably be rejected.

I am not ashamed to admit that for the time being I was not merely staggered by that course of reading into which I thus plunged—but I was more or less unnerved by it. When I retired to my chamber at night, the least unusual noise before the candle was put out, would make me start and glance around with a vague dread of beholding something terrible: and when stretched in bed, and with the light extinguished, I was a long time before I could get to sleep, every now and then opening my eyes with the shuddering fear of beholding a white face looking in at me through the curtains. My mind was thus to a certain extent fevered—my imagination rendered morbid: vainly did I wrestle against the superstitious belief which was gradually obtaining a firmer hold upon me—I felt that my thoughts in this respect had all become changed under the influence of the books I had been reading. Deeply did I regret that I ever read them at all; and every night on seeking my chamber, I vowed that I would not return to them. But on the following day an irresistible feeling of morbid curiosity led me back to the same study; and when I could find no fresh works of the same character to peruse, I re-read the most remarkable narratives in those which had already gained my attention. Thus a belief in preternatural warnings and spiritual apparitions was taking a strong hold upon my mind.

It will be remembered that the tragic occurrence which has occupied the preceding chapter, took place at the commencement of June. Three weeks passed away; and as the incidents I have next to record, must be particularized as to date, it is necessary to observe that it was the 23rd of June whereof I am about to write. On that day a rural festival was given by the Bousteads, at which Lord and Lady Ravenshill had promised to be present, they still keeping up their intimacy with Euphemia's parents—a circumstance, by the bye, from which I argued that Mr. Walter's search after a rich wife in the metropolis, was not progressing as favourably as he could wish. On this particular day, however, of which I am speaking, my lord and her ladyship proceeded at about eleven o'clock in the forenoon to the Bousteads' residence: and it was therefore a sort of holiday for the greater number of the servants. I had nothing particular to do; and having for the past three weeks spent all my leisure time in reading, I resolved to recreate myself with a good walk. I really felt that I required it; for my spirits were desponding—my natural gaiety had left me: I was a prey to gloomy thoughts by day, and to superstitious fears by night.

It was about noon when I issued forth by myself; and after a little reflection, I determined to stroll across to Charlton. I had two objects in this proceeding: one was to inquire how poor Kate Allen bore her dreadful loss—the other was to ascertain if Miss Delmar was still in that village. For I now thought that I might pay my respects to her, if she were: I felt that it would do me good in one sense to see that dear kind young lady again,—though in another it might wound my heart by the spectacle of her affliction. Nevertheless, I naturally argued that the bitterness of her woe must have experienced some mitigation during the many months which had now elapsed since the murder of Mr. Delmar; and at all events I considered that to see Edith was a duty which ought no longer to be delayed. True, it was but a humble liveried page who entertained this idea, which may look like presumption: but I experienced the liveliest gratitude towards that young lady, and was anxious to prove it.

I accordingly walked across to Charlton. It would be impossible to conceive a more sweetly picturesque village than this appears in the summer time,—almost completely embowered as it is in emerald verdure. The cottages, though of humblest aspect, look not merely neat, but cheerful with the jasmine and roses climbing over their porticoes, and the clematis shading the little lattice windows:—the stream, flowing through the village, and becoming broader the nearer it draws to its point of confluence with the river, adds to the beauty of the landscape; and the old-fashioned water-mill, with its comfortable homestead adjoining, constitutes a feature which an artist would be careful not to omit. On entering the village I first repaired to the churchyard, which indeed was in my way; and there I lingered for some little time, reading the quaint epitaphs, alike in prose and verse, which did more honour to the hearts than to the heads of the mourners who had caused them to be inscribed upon the stones marking the resting-places of the loved and lost ones. Presently a grave which had only been recently filled up, arrested my attention; and though no stone was as yet placed there as an index of who slept beneath, I nevertheless felt assured that the newly-arranged turfs covered the remains of the unfortunate Benjamin Cowper. While I was still regarding that grave, I heard the gate of the churchyard creak on its hinges; and glancing in that direction, I beheld a young female in deep mourning enter the enclosure. It was Catherine Allen: I recognised her at once——But, good heavens, how altered! On the day that I saw her for the first time, three weeks back, she was a fine stout damsel: and though I had beheld her under the utmost disadvantage,—convulsed with grief over the corpse of her lover,—yet it was *then* by no means difficult to estimate the amount of her personal attractions when in her wonted mood of

cheerfulness. But, alas! that cheerfulness was gone, never to return: her beauty was blighted—the colour had forsaken her cheeks—she looked as if she had passed through the anguished sufferings of years, so great a wreck had three short weeks made of this recently blithe and buxom creature!

She advanced with the slow pace of a mourner: full well I knew that she was approaching the grave wherein all her earthly hopes of happiness were interred; and from a feeling of respect for the sanctity of a grief which might not be intruded upon, I hastened to a little distance. She did not see me; or if she did, paid no particular attention to my presence within the enclosure appropriated to the dead. I could not help lingering for a few minutes to observe her. For a short while she stood motionless as a statue by the side of the grave—her eyes bent down upon it, and her hands joined in a drooping manner before her: then, all of a sudden, a sob burst forth, so loud in its convulsing anguish that it reached my ears;—and falling on her knees, she threw herself over the grave, giving vent to the most passionate lamentations. My first impulse was to hasten and raise her up: but then recurred the thought that her's was a grief of a sanctity not to be intruded upon; and this idea held me back. I issued from the churchyard by the opposite gate from that through which she had entered; and wiped the tears from my face as I passed on into the village. I had no need *now* to inquire how Kate Allen bore her loss: my eyes and ears had furnished me with evidence—alas! too painful—that it was beyond endurance.

I made my way to the parsonage, which was in the close vicinage of the church, and which stood in the midst of a spacious and well-kept garden. A female-servant was issuing forth at the instant that I reached the gate; and as she wore a half-mourning dress, I judged that she belonged to the establishment of the Rev. Mr. Howard. I accordingly inquired whether Miss Delmar was residing there?

"Oh, no," she answered: "the poor dear young lady has gone for the benefit of her health to the sea-side. She went three months ago, accompanied by her aunt, Mrs. Howard."

"Mr. Howard's mother, I presume?"

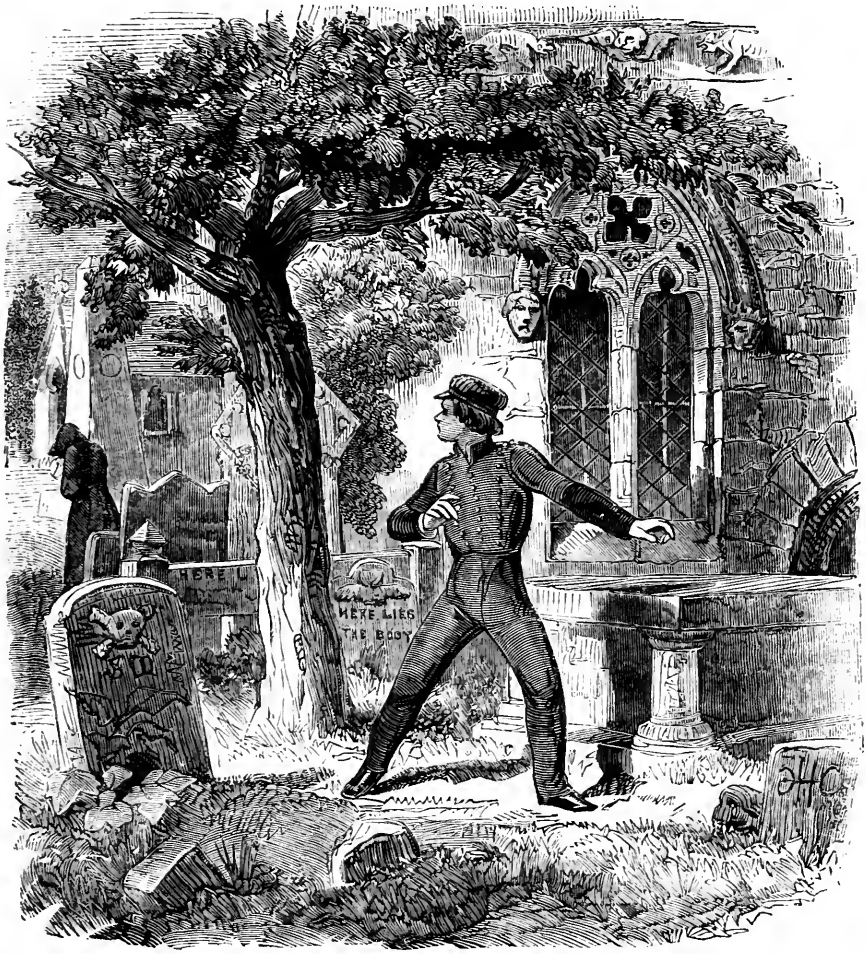
"Yes—and a kind good lady she is," responded the servant-girl: then observing the crest on my buttons, she said, "Do you bring any letter or message from the Hall for Miss Delmar?"

"No," I answered; and I knew not exactly what excuse to make for having inquired after her: but feeling that it was necessary to say something, I observed, "I merely wished to ask concerning the young lady's health: for I was once in service in London, and saw her two or three times."

With these words I turned somewhat abruptly and hurried away: I was so fearful of committing myself to anything which might travel elsewhere, and by reaching the metropolis find its way to Mr. Lanover's ears. But when I was at a little distance, I regretted not having asked more particularly how Miss Delmar bore up against her calamity. Alas! it was scarcely necessary to do this: for the little intelligence I had received, made me but too painfully aware that her health was broken—and therefore the bitterness of her affliction must have been keen indeed. I passed through the village; and on gaining the outskirt, was about to turn into the fields to retrace my way to the Hall,—when I heard the rapid tramplings of horses' feet; and round a bend in the road, each side of which was skirted by trees, there came a gentleman and lady mounted on splendid steeds, with a groom in a handsome livery following at a short interval. I stood aside to observe them; and as they dashed by me, the name of "Annabel!" was ejaculated from my lips. Whether she observed me I knew not: but certain it is that she did not seem to do so;—and as the party were riding at a rapid pace, they speedily disappeared from my view.

I stood there, upon that spot, continuing to gaze in the direction which they had taken, long after they were out of sight: it seemed as if the images of a dream had swept by. But who was her companion? Sir Malcolm Wavenham; and he was addressing her in loud and joyous tones at the moment they passed. For a few instants only was she within the range of my vision: but the impression left behind was as strong and as vivid as if I had thus contemplated her for an hour. How beautiful did she appear in her long flowing riding-habit, which set off the symmetry of her slender shape to all the advantage of its graceful litheness and its elegant proportions! How the riding-hat, with the floating veil, became her! And that veil covered not her countenance at the time, but waved upon the current of air which the rapidity of her course created,—thus revealing that angelic face which appeared at the moment lighted up with an animated pleasure amounting almost to radiance. It was such an expression that I had never seen upon the features of Annabel, when beneath her father's roof: for *there*, when she smiled, it was always with that sweet pensiveness and softly ingenuous melancholy which methought inseparable from her countenance. Oh! again did I feel my heart bleeding at the idea that she was happy in her shame and her transgression!—for much rather would I have seen the tears of contrition trickling down those lovely cheeks than the flush of joy mantling upon them. And, Oh! methought likewise that I had done well not to renew my attempt to see her six months back, after the cruel rebuff I experienced at the theatre, when she sent out that message to the effect that she knew me not. As I wended my way across the fields, I wept in bitterest anguish: the keenness of my affliction on Annabel's behalf was all revived again; and I felt that I would rather have known she was dead than beheld her radiant with joy in the midst of her wanton shame. But what had become of her poor mother?—this was the question which over and over again did I ask myself.

I returned to the Hall; and seeking my own chamber, sat down to pursue my reflections. The visit to the churchyard and the presence of the unhappy Kate Allen at the grave of her dead lover, gave an impulse to those superstitious meditations in which I had latterly fallen; and they now blended strangely with the other thoughts which the spectacle of the riding-party had conjured up. All were melancholy enough; and the longer I gave way to them, the more morbid became my mind. The hours passed—evening began to close in: I sought the servants' hall in the



hope of escaping somewhat from the unpleasant reflections that were pursuing me—but I could not: and returning to my chamber, I mechanically took up one of those volumes which had latterly so much engrossed my attention. There I sat reading, by the dim light of an unsnuffed candle, until my brain was filled with superstitious thoughts. But I did not feel frightened now: I looked not around in terror: I glanced not over my shoulder to assure myself that no spectral shape was standing behind me. It seemed as if I had suddenly become calmly courageous, as the conviction deepened in my soul that all I had been reading was strictly true. Suddenly I recollected that this was Midsummer Eve. Just one year had elapsed since poor Kate Allen—then in the glow of her joyous spirits and in the bloom of her hoyden charms—had paid the visit to the churchyard; and within this year which had since elapsed, the warning she then received had been but too fatally fulfilled. Such were my reflections. I did not now seek to reason against the preternatural semblance of the tragedy: on the contrary, I believed it was strictly true in *that* respect. Solemn thoughts moved in my mind. A strange curiosity was springing up within me: the superstition connected with Midsummer's Eve appeared to blend with the circumstances of Annabel. And now it struck me also as singular, that I should have seen her dashing past me in the radiance of her loveliness and in the very glory of her shame, so soon after I myself had been weeping bitter tears in a churchyard!

"Ah, Annabel! unfortunate Annabel!" I said, apostrophizing her aloud: "what if you yourself could read the book of destiny? Full of life and spirits as you were this day, perhaps it is decreed that within the year which is to ensue, you also may be chill and inanimate in the grave!"

I know not how it was—I can only account for

it by the exceeding morbid state of my mind at the time, as well as by the strange and unnatural manner in which various ideas and reflections, so really opposite in themselves, were jumbled and blended together; but certain it is that the words I had thus thrown out, left behind an impression like a presentiment. It appeared as if I had received some instinctive revelation—some incomprehensible intuitive warning—that Annabel was really to perish within a twelvemonth. So strong did this idea become, that I could not possibly put it away from my mind. I rose from my seat—shut the volume I had been reading—and thought of retiring to rest: for I knew that it must be past ten o'clock. But there was upon me such a peculiar sensation, I knew I should not be able to sleep: strange longings too were inspiring me—a morbid curiosity had me in its spell-like power. Midsummer's Eve!—and this was the night on which that yearning curiosity could be gratified!

A feeling stronger than myself, urged me to do what my thoughts were suggesting. It was easy for me to steal forth unperceived from the house: no one would come to my chamber to ascertain whether I were there or not. I was not alarmed: had a spirit from the dead really arisen before me *then*, I do not think that I should have been frightened: I believe that I should have had the courage to question it calmly and firmly. I put on my hat—stole down the servants' staircase—and issued forth from the Hall. It was a lovely night: the heaven was studded with countless stars—the smallest print might have been read with facility: the very serenity of the heavens, with their unclouded azure, appeared to strengthen me in the purpose which I had in view. If I had seen black clouds—if the night were dark and gloomy, and Nature had threatened to speak forth in the thunder-voice of the storm, and to send her lightning glances gleaming vividly athwart the sky,—I should have been appalled—I should have shrunk back to my own chamber. But it was far otherwise: brightness, serenity, and silent loveliness filled the atmosphere. I proceeded across the fields: nearer and nearer I drew to the village of Charlton. I reached the stile where the peasant had told me the tale in connexion with the tragedy; and there I rested for a few minutes. My way was soon continued: there was a kind of serene awe in my soul: I was still without fear—still resolute in the purpose which I had in hand. As I approached the village, no sound reached my ears:—all was still. It was close upon midnight: the ale-house was shut: not even a single straggler or belated individual was to be seen. I entered the churchyard; and though the tombstones gleamed ghastly white in the silvery effulgence poured down from heaven, they were fraught with no terrors for me: nor did my imagination conjure up spectres from those graves which were thickly scattered around. I looked up at the clock, the dial of which plainly revealed its hands and its figures; and I saw that it wanted five minutes of midnight.

The church had a row of long, narrow arched windows, set high up in the wall; and several small square ones so close down towards the ground as to enable even a young child to see through them into the church. I approached one of these, and gazed into the interior of the edifice. Through every one of the casements poured the starlight, so that scarcely any dark places were seen within. There were the ranges of pews, humbly fashioned as they are in small village-churches—there was the pulpit against the wall facing the very window through which I looked: I could see the communion table at the extremity—the baptismal font in one of the aisles. Outside the church, the silence, though complete, appeared serene:—within, its reign seemed to be profoundly solemn.

And now, for the first time since I had issued forth from the Hall, a sort of vague terror began to creep over me—a sensation of awe, not so much inspired by the graves of the dead surrounding the exterior of the church, as by the deep solemnity of the silence which appeared to prevail therein. That sensation of terror augmented: I felt my blood getting colder and colder, and appearing to stagnate more and more in my veins:—I wished that I had not come. Indeed, I was about to quit my post at the window,—when suddenly the first stroke of twelve smote my ear. Deep and solemn appeared to speak the metallic voice of Time: its sounds sank down into my heart with the awe which is produced by the roar of the thunder. That iron din seemed to smite my very brain: I was transfixed to the spot; and with an irresistible fascination my eyes were fixed upon the window—or rather upon the interior of the church seen through it. Stroke after stroke clanged forth, booming deeply and solemnly through the hitherto serene air, and raising echoes within the building which likewise met my ears. I counted those strokes—counted them mechanically: I was no longer the master of my own actions—I was under the influence of a spell-like feeling impossible to be described!

One—two—three—four—five—six—seven—eight—nine—ten—eleven—twelve! And scarcely had the last stroke rung forth—still was the metallic sound vibrating in the air—when a female form, clad in a light dress that seemed like the garment of the grave, appeared just within the casement, as if passing slowly down the aisle on which that window looked. An ejaculation of terror burst from my lips—a face, white as that of the dead, was turned towards me——It was Annabel's——and with a louder and wilder cry I fell back senseless.

CHAPTER XV.

THE LAST VISIT OF THE BOUSTEADS.

When I came to myself, I was lying in the churchyard, close by the window where I had fallen down,—the light of the moon and stars still flooding the atmosphere, playing upon the graves, and throwing forth the tombstones in ghastly relief around me. Though the night air was warm, yet I felt cold as if the blood had all frozen in my veins: I was shuddering and shivering, too, with vague terrors and dreadful thoughts. The hand of death seemed to be upon me: the memorials and emblems of death met my wild glances in every direction as they were flung around: graves and tombstones—tombstones and graves—in uninterrupted succession! My looks were again turned towards

that window where I had seen the pale white face of Annabel: but it was no longer there. Could it have been imagination on my part? was it the result of a fevered fancy morbidly excited at the time? Or was it a dread reality—a terrific presage of the untimely fate in store for that fair young creature?

I rose up from the ground—I leant against the wall of the church—I pressed my hands to my throbbing brows, and endeavoured to steady my ideas. I grew calmer:—not that I could fling off the dread superstitious impressions which either the real or the ideal sight of that face had left upon my mind; but I said to myself, "If it be the will of Providence that Annabel is to be taken away, it is doubtless for the wisest and the holiest of purposes—perhaps to save her from plunging still more deeply down into the vortex of guilt, and losing all her angel-beauty in the pollutions of utter degradation. For myself, I know not whether I have committed a dread impiety in coming hither this night for the purpose of looking into the future: but I feel not as if I had committed a crime. If I have, sincere shall be my repentance!"

Having thus silently spoken within the depths of my own heart, I moved away from the spot; and was retracing my steps through the churchyard, when I suddenly beheld a black object in human shape moving amongst the graves and the tombstones. I stopped short: again was I seized with a cold terror;—but as the shape became more distinctly visible, a suspicion of the truth flashed to my mind, fraught with a sensation of infinite relief. Keeping myself in the distance, and screened from view, I observed the direction which that afflicted creature took. For it was Kate Allen, apparelled in her mourning garb, visiting at that midnight hour the grave of her lover! How I longed to hasten forward and minister consolations to the afflicted being!—but her's was a grief beyond the reach of such solace, and likewise too holy to be intruded upon. Issuing forth from the churchyard, unperceived by her, I took the path homeward. My reflections during this walk were filled with a superstitious awe—a mysterious solemnity—the nature and depth of which I never can forget. The longer I meditated upon the sight that I had seen through the diamond-shaped panes of the church-window, the less inclined was I to attribute it to a morbid imagination—but the more inclined to invest it with the terrible certainty of truth. At length I experienced some sort of relief in tears, as looking back for comparatively a few short months, I thought of Annabel as I had *then* known her—pure and chaste, etherealized with innocence, and having the prospect of a long life; and from this picture turned my mental vision upon her position *now*—so changed, so altered—alas, how much!—and with her days, perhaps her very hours numbered!

I succeeded in re-entering the Hall and regaining my chamber without the slightest difficulty and without disturbing a soul. I feared, as I sought my couch, that I should not be enabled to sleep: but scarcely had my head touched the pillow, when slumber stole rapidly upon me; and when I awoke at about seven o'clock, I did not remember that my dreams had been disagreeable. But then, as the tremendous incident of midnight flashed back to my mind, I asked myself whether the whole were not a dream? whether I had quitted my chamber and visited the church at all? I closed my eyes again, and lay quite still to collect my thoughts. It appeared to me that it must have been a dream,—a dream in which the incidents were depicted with a startling vividness, and without that dimness and that shadowy mystification so generally hanging around the circumstances which fill the visions of the night. But, ah! were there not the means of clearing up all doubts at once? Yes: and leaping forth from the bed, I proceeded to examine my garments. They bore upon them the unmistakable evidences of having come in contact with the earth and the grass of the churchyard: they proved that I must indeed have lain upon the ground! It was impossible any longer to feel uncertain on the subject: it was no dream—it was a reality. But now I felt that I had done wrong to indulge the morbid feeling of curiosity which had led me to the church and put to the test the preternatural belief associating itself with the hour of midnight on Midsummer's Eve. I solemnly vowed that I would not again pore over those volumes of ghostly apparitions and superstitious warnings, which for three weeks past had been my study: for the conviction was strong in my mind, that if I persisted in such a course, my imagination would become gloomily diseased—my fancy morbidly desponding. And I a mere boy of just sixteen!——Oh, I was too young to fall into such a deplorable mental condition—a condition the bare idea of which sent a chill shuddering throughout my entire frame!

But did I need any farther proof that my visit to the churchyard was no dream? If so, this proof appeared to be furnished by a very lamentable and affecting piece of intelligence which reached the Hall in the course of the day. It was that poor Kate Allen had been found, at an early hour in the morning, stretched lifeless upon the grave of her deceased lover. She was completely cold when thus discovered by some labourers proceeding to their work; and it was evident that life had been extinct for some hours. Her heart had broken! Poor creature!—doubtless I was the last person who had seen her alive: but little did I suspect at the time that she was thus seeking the grave of her lover to render up her own existence on the turf so recently placed upon the spot where he slumbered in death! I was much affected when the sequel of that tragic episode thus reached my ears: but, for obvious reasons, I spoke not a word which might lead any of my fellow-servants to suppose that I had seen the unfortunate young woman in the last hour of her life.

Three weeks passed away: it was now the middle of July—and the rumour began to circulate amongst the domestics that the Hon. Walter Ravenshill was not, after all, going to marry Miss Boustead—but that he had proposed to the daughter of a wealthy London citizen, and was accepted by the young lady and her parents. It seemed that Charles Linton, having occasion to write to the steward of his lordship's household at the Hall, had thus slightly glanced at these circumstances. A couple of days afterwards I myself received a letter from Charles,—in which he assured me that he had often thought of me during

the five or six months he had now been absent—that he had frequently intended to drop me a few lines, but that something had always interfered to prevent him. He then proceeded to acquaint me that there was every prospect of the Hon. Mr. Walter becoming the husband of Miss Jenkinson, the only daughter of a retired merchant of the City of London. It was generally rumoured that Mr. Jenkinson would be enabled to give his daughter a dowry of three hundred thousand pounds, and that she would inherit as much more at his death. Charles described her as a good-looking and genteel young lady, of about twenty-one—well educated and accomplished—and therefore in every respect calculated to form a most excellent alliance for Mr. Walter. It farther appeared that the Jenkinson family dwelt in a palatial mansion in Piccadilly; and that if they were not received in the very highest circles, they nevertheless moved in what might be termed "good society." Charles concluded by observing that he had seen what was going on for some little time past, and how his young master was evidently paying his court to Miss Jenkinson; but that he had not deemed it prudent to write and communicate to his fellow-servants at the Hall anything of the matter. Now, however, as the engagement was formally announced to the friends of the Jenkinson family, there was no necessity to be any longer guarded on the subject.

Considering these words to convey full authority to me to explain the contents of the letter to the other domestics, I did so; and the feeling of satisfaction amongst them was very general at the improved prospects of the Ravenshill family. The wages were all terribly in arrears: and until something decisive in respect to the immense liabilities of his lordship should be done, we all felt that the tenure of our places was somewhat precarious. For my part, however, I rejoiced through less selfish motives at the idea of Mr. Ravenshill making a better match than the one originally intended for him,—inasmuch as I, more than any other domestic of the household, was acquainted with the thorough horror and loathing with which he had regarded the prospect of conducting Euphemia Boustead to the altar. But now I wondered what the Bousteads would say or do, when the startling intelligence should reach their ears that the Ravenshills had been playing them false and that Euphemia was to be jilted. I must not omit to add that I now observed that my lord and her ladyship appeared in better spirits than for some time past they had been. Not that they ever showed very visibly whatsoever cares were pressing upon their minds: for these sources of anxiety were for the most part veiled by their cold aristocratic pride and look of dignified reserve. Nevertheless, it *was* apparent that they were now happier in their minds than heretofore; and observations to the same effect passed between his lordship's valets and her ladyship's maids, when discoursing together in the servants'-hall.

It was in the afternoon of the very same day on which I received the letter from Charles Linton, that the glaring equipage of the Bousteads drove with its accustomed rapidity up to the front-door of the mansion. At that very moment Lord and Lady Ravenshill were about to issue forth together for a walk through the grounds; and as I was in the entrance-hall at the time, I thus accidently became an observer of the scene which took place. The Bousteads—father, mother, and daughter—alighted from their carriage; and Mr. Boustead, in his loud coarse voice, exclaimed, "Well, my lud, we've come to take you by storm! We had nothing better to do to-day; and so we made up our minds, by way of desecration——"

"Recreation, pa!" was Miss Euphemia's rebuking corrective.

"Well, my dear—*respiration* then," proceeded Mr. Boustead. "And so, my lud, we mean to plant ourselves upon you for the rest of the day."

Mrs. Boustead laughed in her bassoon-like tones, as if she thought it a capital joke which familiar friends might play towards each other—namely, to come suddenly and uninvited to dinner: while Miss Boustead giggled and simpered as if she fully participated in the diverting character of the incident. Now, but a few weeks back—and perhaps even only a few days—Lord and Lady Ravenshill would have put the best possible face on the matter—would have forced themselves to laugh—and would have assured their "excellent friends" the Bousteads, that they were most welcome: but the letters recently received from their son in London, had evidently produced a marvellous alteration of circumstances. Lord Ravenshill drew himself up with the coldest aristocratic dignity: Lady Ravenshill stepped back, and acknowledged with a glacial reserve, the forward and familiar advances of the Bousteads. I believe that his lordship did unbend so far as just to permit Mr. Boustead to get possession of his forefinger instead of grasping the entire hand: but I am confident that Lady Ravenshill affected not to perceive that the hands of Mrs. Boustead and Euphemia were stretched out at all. It was impossible, with all their self-sufficiency, vanity, and conceit, that the Bousteads could avoid observing this marked and deliberate alteration in the demeanour of Lord and Lady Ravenshill. They *did* notice it: they were at once struck by it—and for a few instants all three stood transfixed, perfectly confounded.

"Why—what the dickens does this mean?" at length ejaculated Mr. Boustead. "I hope no offence, my lud?"

"Offence? Certainly not," was his lordship's response, delivered in the most chilling accents. "Only her ladyship and I regret very much that we shall be unable to have the *honour*"—with a slight accentuation on the word—"to receive Mr., Mrs., and Miss Boustead to-day."

"Come, come, my lud," exclaimed the capitalist, "this is being rayther too stiff and formular:"—he meant formal; but the mistake passed this time uncorrected by his daughter.

"Mr. Boustead," answered Lord Ravenshill, with immense and overwhelming dignity, "I allow no man to set himself up as the judge of my actions."

Again did the Bousteads look completely confounded: it was evident to them that they had *not* mistaken the demeanour of Lord and Lady Ravenshill—but that it was studiously, deliberately, intentionally cold.

"My lud," said the capitalist, now suddenly

assuming an insolent air of defiance, "I demand explanations. When friends come in this promiscuous way, they had no ought to be treated with difference."

"I am not aware," responded the nobleman, "that Mr., Mrs., and Miss Boustead were ever entitled to consider themselves the friends of the family whereof I have the pride and honour to be the head."

"Then, by Jove!" thundered forth Mr. Boustead, "we have been completely humbugged! I have been made an ass of: you, my dear,"—speaking to his wife—"are a fool; and you, Phemy, are jilted!"

Miss Boustead sent forth a piercing shriek, and immediately went off into hysterics,—from which however she recovered as rapidly;—for her father, shaking her roughly by the shoulder, while the mother held her in her arms, exclaimed in his coarse voice, "Come gal—none of this nonsense! Let's show that we are as good as them any day in the week. Why, what's a pauper broken-down Lord, that hasn't got a guinea to bless himself with?"

"John," said Lord Ravenshill, turning with calm and stately dignity towards one of the footmen standing near; "kick this insolent plebeian down the steps:"—but John, not exactly thinking his master was serious, contented himself with saying, "Yes, my lord," and only shuffled about on the spot where he stood.

"I'll be revenged for this!" thundered forth the capitalist, marching back to his carriage.

"And so you call yourself a lady?" cried Mrs. Boustead, throwing this taunt at my mistress. "In my opinion a lady is a lady which can keep up appearances as such."

"You may tell your coxcomb son that I never *could* bear him!" shrieked forth Euphemia, her whole form convulsed and her accents inflected with hysterical rage. "I meant to have written him a note to-morrow to break off the engagement—that I did! Pa knows it—and ma too!"

"But we'll have our action for breach of promise," roared forth Mr. Boustead from the interior of his carriage, into which he had very courteously and politely rushed before handing in his wife and daughter.

Lord and Lady Ravenshill paid no farther attention to the irate family; but, descending the steps, proceeded in a leisurely manner along the gravel-walk in one direction—while the vehicle, turning round, rolled off in another.

Such was the scene of which I became a witness. I do not however think that Lord and Lady Ravenshill foresaw that it would assume quite so violent an aspect, when they first put on that air of cold reserve wherewith to receive the Bousteads, and which they probably thought would overpower and annihilate them completely. It was now evident enough that all ideas of a matrimonial alliance in that quarter were completely abandoned, even as a last resource and as an alternative which it was at all worth while reserving to fall back upon: so that the inference to be drawn, was that the Ravenshill family were perfectly sure of the match with Miss Jenkinson coming off.

On the following day fresh letters arrived from London for my lord and her ladyship; and immediately after their receipt, commands were issued that preparations should be made for their prompt departure for the metropolis. At first I was terribly alarmed lest I should be included amongst those domestics who were to accompany my lord and her ladyship: for I by no means relished the idea of returning to the capital, and thus standing a chance of falling into the power of Mr. Lanover. But I was soon relieved from this apprehension, as only one travelling-carriage was to set out—one valet and one maid only to accompany it. That same day they set off,—my lord and her ladyship being no doubt very anxious to be introduced to their future daughter-in-law: and in the servants'-hall it was surmised, from something her ladyship had let drop to one of her maids, that the nuptials of the Hon. Mr. Walter with Miss Jenkinson were to be celebrated very shortly.

I could not help remarking that within the next few days there was an almost incessant calling of tradesmen from the town, at Charlton Hall, for the purpose of seeking interviews with the steward, the housekeeper, and the butler. Tradesmen from Exeter, who likewise furnished certain goods to the mansion, paid similar visits; and I gathered from the conversation of my fellow-servants that in consequence of the report of the match being broken off between Mr. Walter and Miss Boustead, as well as by reason of the apparently abrupt departure of my lord and her ladyship—the tradesmen had experienced quite a panic, fearing lest the report of another marriage being on the *tapis* was a mere delusion. It was however apparent that they for the most part received satisfactory assurances from the chiefs of the domestic household; as in the great majority of instances they went away contented. But still it was not invariably so: for five or six of them grumbled openly and loudly,—not even hesitating to hint that from something they had heard, his lordship's affairs were in a state hopelessly beyond redemption, no matter how brilliant an alliance Mr. Walter might contract. It was tolerably evident—and indeed, was soon known for a certainty—that Mr. Boustead, furious at the disappointment of his hope to become connected with the Ravenshill family, had been doing his best to produce this panic amongst the tradesmen, and that he had availed himself of his own peculiar knowledge of his lordship's affairs to propagate these very serious rumours to which some of the creditors alluded.

I remember that one tradesman — a wine-merchant residing at Exeter — was exceedingly plain and peremptory in the nature of the observations which he made. He arrived in his gig one afternoon—was closetted for some time with both the steward and butler—and when he issued forth from the private room of the former, he looked particularly dissatisfied.

"Well," he said, as he stalked along the passage towards the servants' entrance, at which his gig was standing,—and he spoke very loud as he addressed himself to the steward,—"you understand me. I have waited long enough. Two thousand seven hundred pounds to a provincial wine-merchant is rather too much. I have got his lordship's warrant-of-attorney; and if within one month from this date, my claim is not paid, I will send the bailiffs into the house. So don't let his

lordship be deceived in the matter: for I am resolved. It has been nothing but promises, and shufflings, and puttings-off, and subterfuges for a long time past."

The irate wine-merchant ascended into his gig: but again, ere he drove away, he bade the steward bear in mind what he had said, and fail not to communicate his intentions to Lord Ravenshill. A few days afterwards I heard the servants talking about something fresh which had come to their knowledge respecting Mr. Boustead's proceedings. It appeared that his lordship had a great many bills of exchange floating about in the town and likewise at Exeter: and all those which were not yet due, the jilted Euphemia's father was getting into his own hands,—evidently for the purpose of rendering himself a creditor of Lord Ravenshill, so that he might have the satisfaction of accelerating the ruin which he predicted as close at hand.

Three weeks had elapsed since the departure of my lord and her ladyship, when one morning—as I entered the servants'-hall, shortly after the letter-bag had been brought from the town—I was struck by the mysteriously foreboding looks of my fellow-domestics, and the ominous whispers which were passing amongst them. Presently one of the footmen said, addressing himself to me, "Well, Joseph, I am afraid it is all up with that affair in London: the match is broken off—and young master has been wounded in a duel."

"Mr. Walter wounded in a duel!" I exclaimed in perfect astonishment, and likewise much alarmed: for with all his faults, there was something in him that I liked, especially as I was aware how cruelly he had been deceived and duped in money-affairs by his father.

"Yes—such is the report which by means of a few hurried lines written by her ladyship's maid to Emily,"—alluding to another of the tire-women,—"has just reached us. But we know nothing more of the details—not even with whom Mr. Walter has fought. My lord and her ladyship will be back at the Hall to-night."

CHAPTER XVI.

MR. RIDLEY.

Between seven and eight in the evening, the travelling-carriage was descried entering the park; and as it approached the mansion, those domestics who were assembled in the hall to receive my lord and her ladyship, expressed by their countenances the anxiety they felt as to whether the looks of those who were coming would confirm the inauspicious tidings received in the morning. It was indeed a very serious thing for the servants generally, on account of the large arrears of wages due to us all; and there was likewise a feeling of regret at the prospect of the downfall of the family and the triumph of the vindictive Bousteads.

The travelling-carriage rolled up to the entrance: Charles Linton sat upon the box—the valet and the maid in the rumble behind; and the expression of their features was indeed at the first glance but little reassuring. The door of the equipage was hastily opened: his lordship descended first—and presented his arm to assist her ladyship in alighting. His countenance was more than usually pale: it looked haggard and careworn. He trembled too with an evident nervousness, as if he had received a shock. Her ladyship was ill and suffering; and she leant with visible heaviness upon her husband's arm as she ascended the flight of steps to the entrance-hall. But Mr. Walter had not accompanied his father and mother home! My first impression therefore was—and equally that of the other domestics—that he must have been very seriously wounded indeed. How cruel in such a case for his parents to have abandoned him, and to have come away without him! Such was the thought that flashed to my mind; but as I presently learnt, I did them an injustice: for in the servants' hall it was soon known that his wound was slight—that he might have travelled if he had chosen—but that under existing circumstances he had refused to come back to Devonshire.

But I must return to Lord Ravenshill and her ladyship, as they first appeared when alighting from the carriage. They had about them that undefinable but yet intelligible air which too painfully denotes the consciousness of blighted expectations, ruined hopes, and approaching downfall. Whatsoever attempt they might both have made to veil or subdue the betrayal of all they felt, was now but too ineffectual: their cold aristocratic pride—their severe patrician reserve—afforded not a mantle wherein to enwrap their emotions. They passed on into the dining-room; and there it was immediately requisite to supply wine-and-water for her ladyship, as she was overcome to such a degree as almost to sink off in a swoon.

That night—before the hour for retiring arrived—Charles Linton beckoned me to accompany him for a walk in the back-garden; and when we were alone together, he said, "Now, Joseph, all my worst fears, which I expressed to you many months ago, are about to be confirmed. So surely as you behold those black clouds gathering over the sky and threatening a storm, are the dark clouds of ruin already assembling quickly above this mansion, full soon to burst!"

"Are his lordship's prospects indeed so hopeless?" I asked, with a feeling of deep sorrow.

"A miracle alone can save this devoted family, Joseph," responded Linton, in gloomy accents; "and it will not be wrought, because the age for miracles is gone by. No man has ever played his cards worse than his lordship did on that day when he broke off with the Bousteads. Contemptible as such an alliance would have been, it nevertheless might have proved his salvation. Now all is over; and in a few days the officials of the law will doubtless be in possession here."

"Is the contemplated match between Mr. Walter and Miss Jenkinson completely broken off?"

"Most completely," was the response. "That duel, and other circumstances——"

"Ah, the duel!" I said: "but with whom did Mr. Walter fight?"

"You remember," rejoined Charles, "that I one day gave you some little explanations about a certain Miss Alicia Cuthbert, and the gentleman who was supposed to be enamoured of her—namely, Captain Berkeley. It was with this Captain Berkeley that Mr. Walter exchanged shots, and by whom he was wounded in the right arm.

You will have no difficulty in guessing that the duel arose from that very affair in which you, when dressed in female apparel, played so singular a part. But I will give you a few particulars, Joseph. No match could have been more eligible for Mr. Walter than the one which was settled to take place with Miss Jenkinson. His family wanted money—her's wanted a patrician alliance; and I am enabled to state that when Mr. Walter spoke to her father, with the young lady's consent, he very frankly explained his position in a pecuniary point of view, and the encumbrances that are upon the estates to which he is the heir. Mr. Jenkinson probably knew all these things before: but doubtless our young master's candour made a favourable impression upon him. It was agreed that Mr. Walter should be received as the young lady's suitor; and my lord and her ladyship arrived from the country to form the acquaintance of their future daughter-in-law and her parents. They took up their abode at the town-mansion, where Mr. Ravenshill had been residing ever since we left the Hall six months back; and all seemed to go on well and comfortable for a fortnight. But then came anonymous letters from Devonshire to old Mr. Jenkinson and the young lady, to the effect that Mr. Walter had been engaged to Miss Boustead—that he had broken off the match under very dishonourable circumstances—and that he had been served by Mr. Boustead's attorney with a notice of action for breach of promise. This intelligence troubled the Jenkinsons very much; but I believe that such explanations were given as would have satisfied them, had not other untoward circumstances, producing a complete exposure, followed close upon the heels of the first. A grand party was given by some family in Belgrave Square, at which the Jenkinsons were present, as was also Mr. Walter: but my lord and her ladyship were not—I forget exactly why. Mrs. and Miss Cuthbert were amongst the guests; and when Mr. Walter endeavoured to pay his respects to them, they turned their backs upon him. This was seen by the Jenkinsons; but even that incident he might have explained away, were it not for what followed. Late in the evening Captain Berkeley made his appearance; and while Mr. Ravenshill was engaged in conversation with Mr. Jenkinson—to whom he always took care to be particularly courteous and polite—Captain Berkeley accosted them; and said to our young master, '*You are a scoundrel—a liar—and a forger! To-morrow morning you will hear from me, if I hear not from you.*'—He then walked away to another part of the room, as coolly and collectedly as if he had merely been exchanging some complimentary expressions, instead of flinging those terrible accusations at Mr. Ravenshill. No one save Mr. Jenkinson overheard what had passed: it was therefore evidently done by Captain Berkeley for the express purpose of exposing our young master to that gentleman. You may conceive, Joseph, that Mr. Jenkinson was astounded at what had taken place: but Mr. Walter no doubt enjoined him to subdue his emotions, so as to prevent creating a scandal beneath the hospitable roof of their mutual friends. Mr. Jenkinson immediately retired with his wife and daughter; and Mr. Walter left soon afterwards. The next morning he and Captain Berkeley fought near Hampstead; and as you already know, our young master was wounded in the arm. On the following day Mr. Ravenshill left abruptly for the Continent: but before he went, he told me that he could no longer afford to keep a valet for his own special attendance, and that I must thenceforth consider that I belonged entirely to his lordship's household. Poor young gentleman! I pitied him deeply. I besought him to let me accompany him,—giving him to understand as plainly as I could, that remuneration was of no consequence until he should see better times: but he only shook his head in a gloomy manner and with a sickly smile—then abruptly quitted the room."

"This is indeed most sad," I observed, feeling acutely pained on Mr. Walter's account.

"This happened the day before yesterday," added Charles; "and early yesterday morning, the travelling carriage was got in readiness, and my lord and lady set out again for Devonshire."

"But wherefore did Captain Berkeley," I asked, "address such severe taunts as those to Mr. Walter?"

"Do you not comprehend, Joseph?" asked Linton. "It was evidently by means of a forged note, purporting to be sent by Captain Berkeley, that it was hoped to entice Miss Cuthbert to the post-chaise that night you were taken for her. The stratagem must however have been seen through, and the authors of it suspected. Thus, you perceive, the scandal of this circumstance following so close upon the one respecting Miss Boustead, naturally caused the Jenkinsons to break off the match. They had seen that Mr. Ravenshill was cut by Mrs. and Miss Cuthbert—which fully corroborated the rumour that reached their ears as to the cause of the duel."

"And do you know," I inquired, "on what terms Mr. Ravenshill parted from his father and mother?"

"No—I obtained no knowledge on that point," responded Linton. "But I am aware that Mr. Ravenshill quitted the house abruptly, and without bidding them farewell. What might have previously passed between them, I know not. Her ladyship, as you may perceive, is most dreadfully cut up: she cannot conceal all she suffers,—but she conceals a part; and therefore we may judge how acute must be the anguish thus experienced, when it cannot be entirely hidden by a woman of her strong mind. As for his lordship, he too must suffer profoundly: for he likewise betrays outwardly some portion of his care and woe."

Charles and I remained in the garden talking for some little time longer; and then we sought our respective chambers. I could not help wondering why Lord and Lady Ravenshill should have come back to the mansion in Devonshire; and on the following day, when Linton and I were again talking together, I spoke to him on the subject.

"The scandal created by the duel and other rumours that were afloat," answered Charles, "was too great for my lord and her ladyship to remain in London, or even so near London as Ravenshill House; and they had therefore really no alternative but to come back to Devonshire. Besides, his lordship must face his creditors: he must be upon the spot when the crisis comes. I suppose that he will move heaven and earth to

make some fresh arrangements, and stave off the evil day. He has gone by himself to Exeter this morning; and he was up at an early hour writing letters. I am however afraid, Joseph, that things have gone much too far to be amended—that it is too late, and the crisis is at hand."

His lordship did not return from Exeter, which was only twenty miles distant, until a late hour in the evening; and when he descended from the carriage, he looked so haggard, care-worn, and fatigued, as to seem a dozen years older than he was a fortnight back. Her ladyship had kept her chamber all day, and a physician from the town had visited her: but she came down stairs to join her husband at the dinner-table; and as it was a part of my duty to be in attendance, I had an opportunity of noticing that scarcely a word was spoken between them, and that the food which they took upon their plates, went away almost untasted. In the servants' hall there was a gloomy feeling, displayed by ominous looks and whispering in groups: while every one felt uneasy and unsettled. Indeed, it was but too evident that Charles Linton's opinion was general through the household—that a crisis was at hand!

On the following morning, between nine and ten o'clock,—just as the carriage was in readiness to convey his lordship into the town,—a gig, in which three men were crowded, was seen driving up the avenue; and it stopped in front of the mansion. One of these men was dressed in a sort of half-sporting style, with tightly fitting drab trousers—a cut-away green coat and brass buttons—a blue neckerchief, with an enormous diamond pin—and a hat having very wide brims and bulging out very much in the crown. He wore a great quantity of jewellery about his person; but had a mean, vile, and flashy look, which altogether rendered his appearance as little prepossessing as possible. His two companions were very queer characters indeed, so far as their aspect went. One was dressed in an exceedingly rusty suit of black: the coat was patched at the elbows, the trousers at the knees; and the new piecings formed a most disadvantageous contrast with the general seediness of the garments themselves. Several buttons were deficient on coat and waistcoat; and the man's linen looked as if it had been washed in coffee-dregs. The other individual was still more remarkably apparelled: for though it was the sultry month of August, yet he wore a thick great-coat of drab colour, which had evidently never been made for him, inasmuch as its skirts reached the ground. It was stained and soiled in many places, as if with beer; and of this liquor both the man himself and his companion in rusty-black were redolent. The former seemed to have just disposed of a biscuit, or a piece of bread and cheese, as the gig drove up to the Hall: for he was munching something and wiping his mouth on the sleeve of his drab coat.

I was standing on the steps at the time that the gig containing these three curious specimens of humanity, drove up: and I was instantaneously seized with a suspicion of impending evil,—which was confirmed by an ominous ejaculation which involuntarily burst from the lips of the hall-porter. The individual who was bedizened with the jewellery, flung the reins upon the horse's back—leapt out of the gig—and motioned for his companions, in the rusty black and the drab coat respectively, to remain seated in the vehicle for the present: then pulling out his card, he accosted me in a free-and-easy, half-familiar half-patronising way, exclaiming, "I say, youngster, just take my card to his lordship; and say it's Mr. Ridley as wishes to have a few words with his lordship very particular indeed. He'll see it's of the firm of Sharpfist and Ridley—and he'll know who's who in a jiffey."

I experienced a strange sort of feeling—half that of consternation, and half that of a cold shudder—the former as if smitten by some sudden calamity, the latter as if the head and protruding tongue of a reptile were thrust out at me,—when I took the dirty piece of pasteboard which Mr. Ridley presented. I did not hurry away as he seemed to expect I should: I was for the moment nailed to the spot. I took the card mechanically:—mechanically too did I bend my eyes upon it; and there was no longer the possibility of doubt as to the meaning of this visit, when I read the words, "SHARPFIST and RIDLEY, *Exeter. Officers to the Sheriff of Devonshire.*"

"Now, youngster," exclaimed Mr. Ridley, as he lounged against the door-post, "why don't you cut along and give that there card? What are you standing gaping at?"

"Yes—go, Joseph," said the hall-porter, who, from the depth of his huge leathern chair, was surveying Mr. Ridley with immitigable disgust: "go and take this person's card to his lordship."

"Pusson indeed?" ejaculated the officer, turning round and fixing an insolent stare upon the hall-porter: "who calls me a pusson, I should like to know? Come out of your ivy-bush, you great big red-faced owl, with your scarlet coat, and that powdered wig on your sconce."

Indescribable was the dignity and stateliness with which the hall-porter slowly rose from his leathern throne: and bending a sternly scornful look upon Mr. Ridley, he seemed as if about to take summary proceedings to eject that individual from the threshold. But it was evident that the old man was all in a moment smitten with the recollection that the fellow came armed with the authority of the law; for his manner changed in a moment—he appeared to feel that "his occupation was gone"—and sinking back into his huge leathern chair, he positively gave vent to a sob——I heard it—and I likewise saw a big tear roll down each cheek. At this instant—just as I was turning away to hurry up to the drawing-room and deliver the card, I myself being much affected by that display of feeling on the old porter's part—I beheld his lordship descending the great staircase.

"Is the carriage in readiness?" he demanded in his usual authoritative manner: and this manner, too, had become blended with a considerable petulance since his return from London.

"Ye-e-s, my lord," said one of the footmen standing in the hall, and who spoke with a certain degree of hesitation and a singularity of look: "the carriage is in readiness, my lord——but, I think there is some one, my lord, that wishes——"

"Here, give us the card, youngster!" ejaculated Mr. Ridley, snatching it out of my hand. "If you was my lad, I would lay this horsewhip about your back, to make you look a little sharper:"—

then advancing through the hall, he slightly touched his hat, without taking it off; and handing his lordship the card, said, "I am Mr. Ridley, my lord—of the firm of Sharpfist and Ridley."

The moment that the unfortunate nobleman's eyes encountered the flashly dressed individual,—and before the latter had either tendered the card, or spoken a syllable to announce himself,—I noticed that his lordship staggered back a pace or two, as if stricken a sudden blow: while an expression of indescribable anguish passed rapidly over his features, which turned ghastly. Instantaneously recovering himself however, he waved his hand quickly to stop the Sheriff's-officer in the middle of his sentence; and beckoning him to follow, led the way into the dining-room. Almost immediately afterwards, the bell of that apartment rang: one of the footmen hastened to answer the summons—and coming forth again in less than a minute, he said, "Where's Emily?"—alluding to one of her ladyship's maids. I saw that he spoke in a hurried and excited manner; and as Emily at that instant made her appearance from a door at the extremity of the hall, he hastened towards her. She appeared quite confounded by the announcement which he made, and which I was at no loss to guess: then she began to cry,—but quickly wiping her eyes, she sped up-stairs.

"Well," said the footman, coming across the hall and speaking to the porter, "this is a bad job—isn't it? But it was foreseen. His lordship told me to desire Emily to go up and break as gently as she can, the distressing intelligence to her ladyship; so that it may not reach her all of a sudden."

The door of the dining-room now opened; and his lordship came forth, followed by Mr. Ridley, who had his hat on: so that I really do believe he had not taken it off during their interview, and that his lordship felt somehow or another too much

in the officer's power, or else was too much depressed and humiliated, to hint at his discourtesy. The nobleman was as white as a sheet: his form appeared to be more bowed than was its wont,—as if the calamity which had overtaken his house, had fallen likewise with a physical weight upon his own shoulders,—remaining there like a burthen which must be borne and could not be cast off.

"Now, Tom Austin!" exclaimed the Sheriff's-officer, advancing to the threshold and beckoning to one of his men: "you are to stay here. There's the paper—and his lordship has said that you'll have your grub and all that sort of thing in the reg'lar way."

The summons made to the gig had been answered by the man wearing the soiled and greasy drab-coat; and it was now I observed that the skirts reached to the ground.

"Werry much obleeged to his lordship," said Tom Austin, carrying his hand to the brim of his battered hat. "I've no doubt I shall be werry comfortable here."

"Don't be afeard, my lord, that Tom will be up to any tricks," observed Mr. Ridley, addressing the nobleman and pointing to the man. "He's a uncommon quiet sort of a chap—a say-nothing-to-nobody kind of a feller—and doesn't get larking with the gals or what not. His only fault is that if too much liquor is placed in his way, he'll get as drunk as blazes. So you must tell the butler, my lord, to take the key out of the ale-tap. Good day, my lord."

With these words, Mr. Ridley carried his hand just half-way to the front of his hat; and leaping up into the gig, drove away.

"You will take this person to the servants' hall," said Lord Ravenshill, beckoning towards him the same footman who had previously spoken to Emily; "and let him have his meals there——at the side-table with the scullions," added his lordship; these last words being delivered in what dramatic authors and theatrical folks would term "*an aside.*"

Tom Austin accordingly followed the footman from the hall; and I could not help observing the contrast between the tall, well-fed, gorgeously-attired livery servant,—and the shambling, shuffling, dirty, ill-looking fellow who was at his heels. His lordship counter-ordered the carriage, and proceeded slowly up-stairs—I believe to her ladyship's chamber. Thus the crisis had come at last: the first stroke of the knell of the Ravenshill house had sounded portentously upon every ear: the first gripe of the law's hand was fastened upon the property of this doomed family.

In the course of the day I learnt from Charles Linton that the execution was put in by that Exeter wine-merchant whose threatenings I had overheard. It was only for two thousand seven hundred pounds—a small sum, one would think, for a nobleman possessed of such immense estates, producing such large revenues: but it was only too evident that his lordship could not command the amount—and even if he could, its payment would have been but as a drop of water to the ocean when all the other enormous liabilities were taken into consideration. On the following day Mr. Ridley called again—had another interview with his lordship—and placed three or four fresh papers in Tom Austin's hands: so it was soon known that additional seizures had taken place. For several successive days these visits on the Sheriff's-officer's part were renewed, every time to put in fresh executions: for when once the intelligence was spread in the neighbouring town and at Exeter that the bailiffs were in possession at Charlton Hall, the creditors appeared to vie with each other in the rapidity with which they sought to enforce their claims.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE MAN IN POSSESSION.

THROUGHOUT my long and varied experiences, which are to be fully recorded in the course of these memoirs, I do not remember that I ever encountered such a character as Mr. Thomas Austin. So far from justifying any one of the eulogiums which Mr. Ridley had passed upon him the first day of his arrival at the Hall, he was in every detail the very opposite. Instead of being a silent person, he was the most garrulous individual that ever was: indeed, he would talk from morning to night, if he could get any body to listen to him. But his whole conversation was connected with sheriffs'-officers, executions, captions, levyings, sales, warrants-of-attorney, cognovits, *fi. fa.'s, ca. sa.'s,* and in short every possible process relating to debtor and creditor. In these respects he certainly possessed a marvellous fund of anecdote; and he chuckled over all kinds of rogueries, chicaneries, and double-dealings whereby he had known debtors to outwit their creditors, or creditors to take unconscionable advantage of debtors,—with a zest and a *gusto* as if they were the most capital jokes and the finest exploits in the whole world.

He was one of the dirtiest and most disgusting men as to his own person that could be well conceived,—not thinking of taking the trouble to wash himself oftener than every other day—and then only having what he called "a rinse" at the pump instead of using the bason and ewer which were of course provided in the chamber allotted him. As for shaving, this performance he could only bring his mind to about every fourth or fifth day; and in respect to his hair, I do not think it was combed all the time he was in possession—which was about six weeks. He might have blacked his shoes if he had chosen—but he did not; and they remained encrusted with mud (picked up during the rainy weather before he came to the Hall) the whole time he was there.

As for eating and drinking, Thomas Austin was never at a loss: he was always hungry and always thirsty. Every half-hour during the day he might be seen munching bread and cheese, or eating a piece of bread and cold meat with a clasp knife,—never on these occasions seeming to recollect that there was such a thing in the world as a plate. As often as he could find an opportunity, he sneaked with a mug in his hand—(he always preferred a mug to a glass)—to the ale-barrel; and as he was seldom interfered with, notwithstanding Mr. Ridley's advice to the contrary, he was invariably in a state of intoxication by about five o'clock in the evening—sometimes so

early as mid-day. During the brief intervals between his countless repasts, he would seek some nook in the back part of the premises; and preferring an inverted tub or a pail turned topsy-turvy to a chair, would sit smoking a short pipe in a kind of half-drowsy, half-ruminating fashion. But, as above stated, when he could get anybody to listen to his stories, he would even forget his bread and cold meat—would lay down his pipe—and talk away as long as he was attended to. Here is a specimen of one of these anecdotes of Mr. Thomas Austin's:—

"I don't think I ever told you about that there business of Sir George Dashwood's. Ah! Sir George was a fine feller: he had three thousand a year, and spent thirty. Took his bottled ale and cherry-brandy for breakfast—his bottled ale and cherry-brandy again for lunch—his three bottles of wine every day for dinner—and was carried up to bed every night of his life. That's what I call doing the thing slap-up: that's the way a genelman ought to live! None of your tea and slops for breakfast—your *one* glass of sherry and biscuit for lunch—and your pint of wine for dinner—then coffee and slops again in the drawing-room—and then walking up to bed as steady and sober as if you hadn't got a flunkey to carry you. That's not what I calls life: it's only a wishy-washy kind of existence. Ah! Sir George Dashwood—or Georgy Dashwood as we used to call him—did things better than that: he would have scorned his-self if he had been caught going to bed sober, and couldn't have a-beared to look his walley-de-shamble in the face next morning if he hadn't been carried up quite blazing. Well, I needn't tell you—cos why you must all have heerd it—that Sir George had a lovely place called Dashwood Park, about fifteen mile t'other side of Exeter; and he run through all his property in a matter of five year arter he come of age: so he was only twenty-six when he was ruined. Ah! a prime feller was Georgy—always three or four prize-fighters staying at his house, dining at his table, and treated just for all the world as well as his-self. Well, von day—that's about seven year ago now—Ridley says to me, says he, 'I say, Tom, you and me must just go down to Georgy Dashwood's and take possession.'—So we gets into the gig, and down we drives to George's, getting there at two o'clock in the arternoon, just as Georgy and his friends was a sitting down to lunch. There was a dozen on 'em; and such prime company! There was Tim Bullockhead, the Champion of England; and a couple of other milling coves—regular smashers of their kind. Then there was honest Jack Robins, the horse-chaunter. Ah! he knowed a trick or two about hosses—didn't he? that's all! And then there was a couple of splendid chaps as kept fighting cocks; and there was three jockies, and Ben Snelling the trainer. A sharp feller was Ben! Howsomever, I don't recollect who the rest was: but I know they was all of the right sort; and they was setting at table, drinking the bottled ale and the cherry-brandy, and kicking up such a thundering row, when me and Ridley goes in. So the instant we enters, Georgy twigs us, and gives us each such a hearty shake of the hand, as if we was his best friends and had come to do him a sarvice. So he makes us sit down; and we gets so precious jolly, that when Ridley wanted to go away, he was too drunk to get into his gig; and Georgy and the others puts him under the pump, and pumps on him for ten minutes, till he was nigh drownded—but quite sober. So away he goes—and I was left in possession."

At this part of his story, Tom Austin was wont to pause and assume a very complaisant look, as if mentally contemplating with infinite satisfaction the pumping feat and the jocose hilarity of Sir George Dashwood and his delectable friends.

"Well," he resumed, "I never had such a time of it in all my life. I was in possession about three months, Sir George keeping off the sale by feeing Sharpfist and Ridley ten pound a week; and I never goes to bed sober the whole time. Often and often I was blind drunk at noon; and led such a game I raly began to think I was a tip-top genelman myself. Georgy gave me this coat, he did: so you see I've had it a matter of seven year: it isn't veared out yet. I keep's it for poor George's sake. At last things couldn't go on no longer: no more fees was coming for Sharpfist and Ridley. So von day down comes Ridley with the hauctioneer to take the wallyation. Georgy seemed to get happier the nearer the time came; and he used to say to me, slapping me on the shoulder—for Georgy and me was quite formiliar,—'Tom,' says he, 'I've had five year on it, and that's enow for any genelman as calls his-self a genelman. A short life and a merry von,' says he: 'that's my maxim. I think I should have been happier, Tom, if I'd gone a little faster. Howmsomever, Tom,' says he, 'I've done it up brown enough; and that's a blessing. When's the sale, Tom?'—In three days, sir,' says I.—'Werry good, Tom,' says he: 'we'll spree it out till the last. They let us drink the wine: so arter all, there's nothink to say agin your people, Tom.'—And for them three days we did keep it up too, I can tell you,—every one going blazing drunk to bed, servants and all, except Georgy his-self; and for them three days he used to sleep under the table where he tumbled down, cos why his walley-de-shambles was too tosticated to carry him up as they was wont to do. They just managed to get to their rooms: but he was too far gone to reach his'n. Well, the morning of the sale comes: every winder of the old manor-house was kivered with posting-bills; and there was a precious lot of brokers and what not, assembled in the hall, where the sale took place. All went on pleasant enough,—Georgy sitting close to the hauctioneer and cracking his jokes as harticle after harticle was knocked down. Well, at two o'clock there was lunch; and Georgy was the gayest of the gay,—singing, and laughing, and telling such capital stories, he kept us all in a roo-ar. The hauctioneer lunched with us; and Georgy tried hard to make him drunk, but couldn't. Well, when the hauctioneer gets up from lunch, and says, says he, 'Now, Sir George, with your leave, we'll go back and knock off this here little business,'—Georgy says, says he, 'Just von glass of champagne all round, cos I see by the katilog the wines is to be sold next; and when vonce they're knocked down, I sha'n't have no more right to touch a single bottle.'—So a dozen of champagne and glasses was ordered up all at vonce. The glasses was filled; and Georgy says,

says he, 'Now I'll give yer a toast,' says he.—So we all gets up too; and he says, says he, 'Here's the health of the chap whomsoever he was, that inwented the maxim *a short life and a merry von.*' —So we all cries out, 'Brayvo! hooray!' and we puts our glasses to our lips. But at that werry same moment I sees Georgy take summut out of his veskit-pocket, though I didn't know nuffin at the time what it were: but as he holds his glass in von hand he seems to put t'other over it for an instant: then quick as thought he drains his glass —and down he tumbles, stone dead. He had pisoned his-self."

The listener to this anecdote would naturally express his horror in some way or another—either by an ejaculation or a gesture: whereupon it was Tom Austin's wont to look half-indignantly at such conduct; and say in a sort of scornful manner, "Well, how would you have a genelman of that stamp end his days? You wouldn't have him go and break stones in the road and lower his-self to labour and wulgarity—would yer? Deuce a bit on't! Georgy Dashwood wasn't that kind of chap. I on'y wishes as how everybody where I'm in possession, was like him—that I does!"

This anecdote and the mode in which it was told, will enable the reader to form some idea of the pleasant and agreeable character which the servants at Charlton Hall had amongst them, in the person of Thomas Austin. But I will not dwell at any greater length upon the attributes, either physical or mental, of the man in possession: other matters of graver and more important interest demand my attention.

I have already said that fresh executions kept pouring into Charlton Hall; and these were on the part of the numerous tradesmen of the adjacent town and the city of Exeter, who had been wont to supply the household. Intelligence was soon whispered at the Hall that seizures on the part of London creditors had been effected at the town-mansion, and at Ravenshill House near Richmond. Thus was the work of ruin going rapidly on in respect to this doomed family. It was not confined to one spot—it was not limited to one part of their possessions: it spread like wildfire—and wherever there was property to seize, the hand of the law made its grasp. Her ladyship kept entirely to her own chamber: his lordship seldom crossed the threshold of Charlton Hall; and when he did, it was merely to walk for a short half-hour in the garden, where he plunged into the seclusion of shady avenues. He went not to the town nor to Exeter: he made no visible effort to check the portentous tide of ruin that was rolling in upon him. Yet I do not think he had altogether lost his energies: on the contrary, I believe that if there had been a single straw of hope to clutch at, he was the man to make the attempt, however desperate, to save himself. But doubtless he saw that it was all in vain: doubtless the fearful conviction was too deeply stamped upon his soul that ruin was inevitable, and that he could no more contend against the advancing rush of the overwhelming torrent than an enfeebled swimmer could struggle with the rapids of Niagara.

Moreover, Lord Ravenshill must of course have known that even the worst had not yet come; and that while day after day kept up the succession of destructive blows, harder and sterner ones yet remained to be dealt. Three weeks after the first seizure was put in, Mr. Boustead asserted his claim in a similar manner for about ten thousand pounds,—this being the aggregate amount of the various bills of exchange which he had contrived to get into his possession. It was understood at the Hall that his lordship felt this blow most severely: and it was natural that he should do so. In the first place, he must have contemplated with bitterest regret having so insolently, and even rudely, broken off a connexion which—however unpalatable to himself, his wife, and his son—had nevertheless been positively courted and encouraged in the origin by themselves. In the second place, he must have deeply felt that had this connexion been persevered in and consolidated, it would have proved the means of saving his family from so much degradation, and his fortunes from the catastrophe of ruin.

A week after Mr. Boustead's execution was put in, a lawyer came down from London, and obtained the assistance of the local Sheriff's officers to take possession of the estate itself on behalf of the mortgagees: for it appeared that this process was admissible on account of the papers which his lordship had so rashly and wickedly persuaded his son Mr. Ravenshill to sign. Thus, at the expiration of a month from the date of the first seizure, the whole property, personal and landed, was in the hands of the officials of the law; and instead of one man in possession, we had several.

But all this time not a word was said to the domestics relative to the chance—or rather the certainty of the household being broken up. No warning was given to us in respect to leaving; and as for wages, months had passed since we had received even an instalment of the arrears. Everything was in a state of unsettled feverishness; and considering the circumstances in which his lordship was so cruelly placed, no applications were made to him by any of the servants on the score of money-matters. I should observe that although several of the surrounding nobility and gentry continued to call as usual, just as if nothing extraordinary were taking place,—the reply given by the hall-porter was always that his lordship was not at home, and that her ladyship was too ill to quit her chamber. No dinner-parties, nor balls, nor soirées now enlivened the Hall—no roseate floods of luxury filled the spacious saloons: no silvery voices of mirth and gaiety, nor sounds of music, broke in upon the dull monotony of the scene. And yet it was not altogether monotonous: for, as above hinted, the comings and goings of the myrmidons of the law sustained a feverish excitement, and one that was truly unpleasant for every soul beneath that roof.

One forenoon, about five weeks after the first seizure, I was much astonished, while conversing with the hall-porter, to behold the gaudy equipage of Mr. Boustead approaching up the carriage-drive; and on stopping at the entrance, that gentleman himself alighted.

"Go and see what he wants, Joseph," said the hall-porter, speaking in a quick voice, and with an expression of countenance indicating that a sudden hope had sprung up in his mind.

I accordingly hurried down the steps, and Mr.

Boustead said, "His lordship has requested me to call: you will denounce me at once."

Had Miss Euphemia been present, she would perhaps, in the spirit of gentle correction, have reminded her father that he had wrongly spoken the first syllable of the word: but he came alone, neither his wife nor daughter being with him. I hastened to show him into the dining-room,—while a footman hurried up-stairs to acquaint his lordship with this arrival. In a few minutes the nobleman descended the stairs; and though pale even to ghastliness—as for weeks past he had been—it was nevertheless evident that he had armed himself with a certain degree of calm severity and resigned fortitude; as if having made up his mind to proffer overtures for a reconciliation, he purposed to do so with a becoming dignity, and to exhibit no disappointment if they should be rejected. He entered the dining-room; and for two hours did his lordship and Mr. Boustead remain in conference together. At the expiration of that time they issued forth,—the nobleman accompanying the capitalist as far as the threshold of the hall; and as the latter entered his carriage, his lordship bowed with a sort of condescending affability. It may easily be supposed that this visit gave rise to many conjectures and speculations in the servants' hall; and every one expressed the hope that it would lead to some great change in the present aspect of affairs. This hope did not appear to be without foundation,—when, on the following day his lordship gave orders that Mr. Ravenshill's chamber was to be got in readiness for his reception, he being about to return to the Hall. Accordingly, in the afternoon of that same day, a postchaise-and-four drove up to the mansion; and Mr. Walter alighted.

Heavens, how changed he was! Pale, haggard, and care-worn, he looked a dozen years older than when I had last seen him seven or eight months back: he was but the ghost of his former self! Lord Ravenshill, having doubtless perceived the approach of the vehicle, came down from the drawing-room to meet his son. I saw by the nobleman's manner that he meant to embrace him: but the greeting on Mr. Walter's part was cold and distant; and the smile which for a moment appeared upon his lip, was sickly and wan.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE BILLET.

On the following day Lady Ravenshill descended from her own chamber to the drawing-room, for the first time since the executions had been placed in the house. *She* also was frightfully altered,—looking pale as a spectre, and thin even to emaciation. She was apparelled with her accustomed elegance; and there seemed to be a hideous mockery in that gay raiment clothing one whose personal appearance was so corpse-like and so ghastly. In the afternoon the Bousteads' equipage arrived at the hall; and this time the capitalist was accompanied by his wife and daughter. Their visit did not extend beyond half-an-hour; and when they took their departure, Lord Ravenshill and his son escorted them to the carriage,—Euphemia leaning upon the arm of the latter. It was therefore evident that a reconciliation had been effected, and that the matrimonial project was revived.

On the following day the Bousteads came again; and this time their stay was prolonged to an hour. But the men in possession were not withdrawn: they received no intimation that any change in the condition of affairs was likely to take place: all seemed thus far enveloped in mystery. In the evening, however, of that second day of the Bousteads' visit, Charles Linton gave me some little intelligence.

"Mr. Ravenshill," he said, "hinted to me just now that the day after to-morrow he is to be married by special license to Miss Boustead. The ceremony will take place at the Hall, and with the strictest privacy. No guests are to be invited, beyond the actual bridal-party; and immediately after the solemnization, Mr. Ravenshill and his bride will leave for Torquay. I am not to mention this to the servants generally: perhaps Mr. Ravenshill would not even have thus far made me his confidant, only that I am to accompany him,—and moreover he is evidently mindful of my conduct towards him, when after the duel in London I besought that he would not discharge me from his service on the mere ground of his inability to remunerate me."

"Then I suppose the debts will all be paid and the men in possession will be withdrawn? Ah! I can assure you, Charles," I went on to observe, "that I shall be truly rejoiced to behold such a sudden change in his lordship's circumstances."

"There can be no doubt, Joseph, that it is altogether a matter of pecuniary expediency; and that Mr. Ravenshill has consented to sacrifice himself to save his family from ruin. Ah! it was with a ghastly look of despair that he spoke the few words which gave me the knowledge I have just imparted to you. As a matter of course, old Boustead will not part with a single shilling until he has seen the nuptial-knot tied; and therefore I suppose all the legal processes will go on just the same until the last instant,—when the capitalist will produce his money-bags. But you must not say a word of all this to any of the other servants."

I promised compliance with Linton's injunction; and therefore with the household generally everything continued to be shrouded in mystery—save and except so far as conjecture enabled the domestics to penetrate somewhat into the new arrangements that were progressing. But they were very far from surmising that the intended marriage was so close at hand. On the following morning their hopes of an amicable settlement of his lordship's affairs were considerably damped, when Mr. Ridley and an auctioneer came over from Exeter to take the necessary preliminaries for the sale of the personal property, which was fixed for the third day thence. Catalogues had been already printed; and now commenced the process of affixing tickets, with numerals upon them, to every article throughout the mansion. In this service the men in possession were all included: most of the domestics were likewise called upon to help, the steward intimating that it was by his lordship's orders, so as to prevent the myrmidons of the law from penetrating into the private

apartments. Ah! methought the celebration of a marriage under such circumstances,—a marriage to take place in a drawing-room where every article of furniture and every ornament, even to the most trifling nicknack, was ticketed for sale,—must at least be a singular if not an ominous spectacle! The Bousteads paid their usual visit on this day: and his lordship, on seeing them to their carriage, was far more courteously polite than ever I had before observed him to be towards the capitalist and his family. As for Mr. Walter,—his bearing towards Euphemia was that of a polished gentleman; but cold, reserved, and constrained——How was it possible for it to be otherwise?

It was verging towards sunset on that same day, that I walked forth alone through the grounds, —my services not being in any way required for an hour or two at the Hall. I had thus strolled to a distance of about a mile, wrapped up in my reflections,—when I observed a lady approaching from the direction of the road. As she drew nearer, I saw that she was young and beautiful. Her age could not have been more than one-and-twenty: she was tall and finely formed,—elegance and grace characterizing her whole appearance. Her hair was dark—her eyes of a deep blue: she looked pale—but not with a pallor that seemed natural. It was evidently the result of fatigue or care—perhaps both combined; and as I drew nearer, I likewise noticed that there was the glitter of suspense and uneasiness in those beauteous eyes of her's. She surveyed me very hard, as if she wished to speak: but as she did not immediately address me, I passed her by. Having proceeded perhaps for twenty paces, wondering who she could be, and whether she was going to the Hall,—marvelling likewise that she should be by herself, and on foot, at that time of the evening, as well as in so lonely a place,—I looked back. She was standing on the spot where I had passed her, gazing after me. I stopped short, hesitating whether to accost her with some question,—such as if she had lost her way and was seeking any particular destination?—when she beckoned me towards her. I hastened to obey the summons: but even when I accosted her, she still appeared uncertain what to say, or whether to speak at all. At length, with a visible effort, she put aside all farther hesitation; and observed, "You are in the service of Lord Ravenshill?"

"I am, madam," was my answer; "and if I could do anything to oblige you, I shall be truly happy."

Again she surveyed me with penetrating earnestness; and after a long pause she said in a tone of audible and perhaps involuntary musing, "Yes—I think I can trust you. Your appearance——But will you do me a favour?" she asked, thus suddenly interrupting herself: "and I will reward you liberally."

"I do not need any reward, madam," was my immediate response: "but whatsoever services I can render, you may command them."

"I see that I am not deceived in you," the young lady observed: "you are evidently above your position. Do not think ill of me that I have thus addressed you——still more, do not think ill of me for the favour I am about to solicit at your hands."

There was so much sweetness in her manner,—so much kind yet perfectly lady-like and dignified affability,—that I was much prepossessed on her behalf. She seemed uneasy, and even excited—as if hope and fear were struggling in her bosom.

"I am certain not to think ill of you, madam," I hastened to observe: "for I am confident you could enjoin me no task which I may not honourably and becomingly fulfil."

"At least promise me *this*," she hastily exclaimed,—"that if when I have named my request—which is a simple, though it may appear a strange one—you should have any scruples in granting it, you will not breathe to a soul the circumstance that you have met me here, or that such a favour has been sought at your hands."

"Most faithfully do I give that promise," was my rejoinder.

She drew forth a note from a reticule which she carried in her hand:—the hand too which held that note, trembled visibly; and I observed the blood mantle upon her cheeks—then vanish again as suddenly, leaving them by the contrast paler than they were before. Methought that some powerful inward struggle was taking place—a struggle perhaps between the prideful modesty of her sex, and some other as well as more tender feeling. She looked at the note and then at me: hesitation and reluctance marked her conduct. But again exhibiting a suddenness of decision, she said, "Will you undertake—with the least possible delay, and likewise with the strictest secrecy—to place this note in the hands of Mr. Ravenshill?"

"I will," was my prompt answer:—for I could not possibly conceive that I was doing wrong in complying with a request put by one so lady-like, so beautiful, and whose motives for her present proceeding were evidently of such importance as to struggle successfully against her innate sense of modesty. "Within an hour from the present time," I went on to observe, "Mr. Ravenshill shall have this note—and no one shall see me give it him."

"Thanks—a thousand thanks!" answered the lady: then, with a renewal of her hesitating manner, she drew her purse forth from her reticule, saying, "Shall I insult you if ——"

"Not for the world will I accept the slightest reward!" I exclaimed. "Fear not that your errand will be unfaithfully or clumsily executed:"—and with these words I darted away in the direction of the Hall.

Looking back in the course of a few minutes, I perceived a post-chaise hastening along the road which bounded the park; and I therefore concluded it was this vehicle which had brought the lady thither, and in which she was now taking her departure. On I sped towards the mansion,—feeling as if I were the messenger of good tidings, but without having the slightest comprehension of what their nature could be. As I neared the Hall, I was much gratified on beholding Mr. Ravenshill himself issuing forth,—doubtless for the purpose of roaming in solitude and giving way without restraint to his mournful reflections. In a few minutes I was by his side; and as he stopped short abruptly, he doubtless saw by my features that I had something of importance to communicate.

"What is it, Joseph?" he asked. "Any new

calamity?"—and an expression of anguished bitterness passed over his features.

"I hope not, sir—I think not," was my response: and I tendered him the billet.

"Ah!" he ejaculated, instantaneously recognising the writing, which was in a beautiful fluent female hand; and all in a moment did joy, suspense, and amazement succeed that other look which I had just observed on his countenance. "Who gave you this? how did it come?"

But without waiting for any answer, he tore open the billet. The lines it contained were evidently few—for they were quickly scanned by his eager eyes: yet great must have been their importance, for the ejaculation "Thank God!" fell in fervent accents from his lips. He seemed to be overpowered by his joy; and tears gushed forth from his eyes,—as if some tremendous weight had been lifted from his soul, and the sense of relief found its natural issue in those tears. For more than a minute he thus remained under the influence of his feelings,—apparently unconscious that I was standing near and observing him. I should have retired at once, only that I knew there were questions which he must desire to put to me.

"Who gave you this note, Joseph?" he at length asked. "Tell me quick——who gave it to you?"

"A young lady——"

"Ah! it is she herself then! And what said she?"

"The lady merely asked me," I responded, "to do her a service—which I willingly undertook——"

"And she enjoined you to secrecy—did she not?" interrupted Mr. Ravenshill.

"Yes, sir: and that injunction I shall assuredly obey."

"You are a good youth, Joseph," cried my young master,—"an excellent youth! I must reward you liberally——"

"No, sir," I answered. "The young lady herself proffered me a recompense: but I respectfully declined it."

"Well, go, Joseph—return to the Hall," resumed Mr. Ravenshill, evidently under the excitement of these new feelings of hope and joy wherewith the letter had inspired him. "But for heaven's sake, breathe not a syllable——"

"No, sir—not a syllable to a soul. Believe me, I am incapable of such folly and treachery:"—and with these words, I hastened away, my heart rejoicing at the sudden change which had been effected by the billet in the mind of Mr. Ravenshill.

I did not see my young master any more that evening; and when I descended from my bedroom at the usual hour in the morning, I found three or four of the servants, together with Thomas Austin and the other men in possession, conversing in an excited way, relative to an incident that appeared to be involved in some degree of mystery.

"It's of no use a-talking like this here," said Tom Austin, as he cut a piece of cold meat on a slice of bread, and began munching the little refection to stay his stomach ere breakfast should be served up: "it's my dooty to see as how the doors and gates is all locked afore going up to bed; and I'll be on my salvation hoath that I see the back-door and the garden-gate all as right as trivets."

"But who could have gone out, then, in the middle of the night—or else early this morning before anybody was up?" demanded one of the footmen angrily. "It must lie with some of you chaps,"—addressing himself scornfully to the men in possession: "and I for one don't mean to be got into a scrape by any such nonsense as this."

As I listened to the colloquy which was thus progressing, a vague suspicion stole into my mind; and I looked about for Charles Linton, in order to see whether he had as yet been up to call Mr. Ravenshill,—who, I should observe, was accustomed to rise early. But I could not find him; and I soon perceived that the work specially belonging to Charles, was not yet commenced. I ascended to his chamber: he was not there. I went down stairs again—waited for another half-hour—and then inquired of some of my fellow-servants if they had seen Charles? The response was in the negative: so I took a pitcher of hot water; and again ascending the stairs, proceeded this time to Mr. Ravenshill's apartment. It was unoccupied; and on the table lay a letter addressed to his lordship. I then knew that my suspicion was correct:—Mr. Walter had evidently fled!

I took the letter—went down stairs—and communicated the circumstance. The domestics were all astonished; and they instantaneously began speculating and conjecturing what this sudden disappearance could mean: for it was clear enough that Mr. Ravenshill was gone, and that Charles Linton had accompanied him. The general and most natural supposition was, that our young master had departed in order to avoid being dragged into an alliance with Miss Boustead: though none of the servants were aware that this marriage had been so positively and definitely fixed for that very day. I could perhaps have thrown a little more light on the subject—for it was evident enough to me that Mr. Walter had found a far more suitable bride in the fair writer of the billet, than in the ugly and affected Euphemia: but I held my peace, and hastened to take the letter which my young master had left, to his lordship.

The nobleman had only just descended to the breakfast-parlour as I entered; and the moment I made my appearance, he said, "What, have the letters come so early?"

"No, my lord," I answered—but with some degree of hesitation; for I foresaw that a fearful shock was about to be occasioned by the letter I carried—"I found this, my lord, on—on the table in Mr. Ravenshill's——"

"What! where is Mr. Ravenshill? where is my son?" ejaculated his lordship, seized with misgivings that were painfully evident: and he snatched up the letter from the silver salver—then tearing it open, gave vent to a low but agonized ejaculation, as his eyes glanced at the first few lines.

I withdrew from the breakfast-room, and purposely avoided returning immediately to the servants' hall—as I did not wish to be questioned. I went and walked in the garden until I thought breakfast was ready: and on re-entering the house, I found the utmost excitement prevailing amongst the domestics. His lordship had been found in a

fit in the breakfast-room: her ladyship was instantaneously made acquainted with the circumstance;—and she, on reading the letter which was discovered lying open on the carpet as it had dropped from her husband's hand, had likewise fainted away. They had however both been recovered without the necessity of sending for medical assistance; and from the broken sentences to which they had given utterance on coming back to consciousness, enough was gleaned to make those who attended upon them, acquainted with what had happened. Mr. Walter had indeed stealthily taken his departure, in order to avoid a match that was hateful to him, and to form another alliance where his heart was already engaged.

In the course of an hour his lordship was sufficiently recovered to write a letter, which was immediately sent off to its destination. This was to Mr. Boustead; and it was by no means difficult to conjecture that it was for the purpose of announcing the definitive breaking off of the match between Mr. Ravenshill and his daughter. A couple of hours later, a postchaise-and-four arrived from the town: for Lord Ravenshill and his wife were now about to leave their stately mansion—perhaps for ever.

Although it was difficult to experience much sympathy for this thoroughly selfish and worldly-minded couple, it was nevertheless painful to reflect that after having all their lives been accustomed to ride in splendid equipages of their own, they were now reduced to the necessity of travelling in a hired one—and this too on the occasion of bidding farewell to the home where they had been wont to entertain such brilliant assemblages, and where they had revelled in the enjoyment of every luxury. By his lordship's express command, the domestics all remained in the servants' hall, at the moment of departure,—with the exception of one valet and one lady's-maid, who were to accompany them. Their pride was dominant until the very last: they could not endure the thought of passing out of that mansion, ruined and undone, in the presence of those who had been the witnesses of their splendour. Not even the old hall-porter was suffered to remain at his post, as Lord and Lady Ravenshill thus issued forth. But doubtless conjecture was busy in the servants' hall, at the time, as to the spectacle which the nobleman and his wife presented to the two domestics whom they had chosen to follow them in this phase of their broken fortunes. Terrible must have been their feelings, as they descended the superb staircase—as they passed through the spacious hall—as they crossed the marble threshold—and as they entered a vehicle the appearance of which was sordid and wretched to a degree, in comparison with their own travelling-barouche with its emblazoned panels and its luxurious cushions. Doubtless that old lord exerted all his energy to conquer his emotions: and doubtless the severe pride of her ladyship made her keep back her tears as she clung to her husband's arm. At length the post-chaise was rolling along the shady avenue towards the park-gate: but every feature of the scenery—every tree which was thus passed—every glimpe of a browsing deer or frisking fawn, must have conjured up bitter, bitter associations of the past in the minds of that ruined nobleman and his unhappy lady.

Shortly after the post-chaise had departed, the steward summoned the domestics one by one into his own room, and informed us that by agreement between his lordship and the mortgagees who had seized upon the estate, we were all to be paid in full—for which purpose the funds would be forthcoming on the following day. A computation was made of the arrears due to each; and it was understood that, as we were all to leave on the morrow, a month's wages would be given us in addition.

On the following day the sale of the furniture and personal property commenced. From an early hour, vehicles of all kinds began arriving in rapid succession: and persons on foot, likewise, made their appearance in considerable numbers from the adjacent town. Noblemen, gentlemen, and ladies, dwelling in the neighbourhood, came in their carriages for the purpose of selecting such articles as they might fancy to purchase,—some remaining to bid for them in person, others empowering agents to conduct the business on their behalf. Furniture-brokers, dealers in objects of *vertu* and curiosity, goldsmiths and jewellers, and a tolerable sprinkling of the Jewish fraternity,—some from the town, some from Exeter, others from remoter places, and others even from London—congregated at Charlton Hall. The place was like a fair: gaiety, business, and bustle pervaded the scene:—of sympathy for the ruined and self-exiled family, there was none!

Several solicitors and Sheriff's-officers were likewise in attendance: the men in possession appeared full of importance, and gave themselves extraordinary airs,—with the exception of Tom Austin, who was excessively drunk as early as eight o'clock on this memorable morning; and who, having been missed for some three or four hours, was at length discovered sitting in the beer-cellar with his back propped up against the ale-barrel,—a slice of bread, a piece of cold meat, and his clasp-knife lying beside him,—he being actually too far gone even to cut his food or convey it to his lips. But it was about ten o'clock when the sale commenced,—the auctioneer removing from room to room as he successively disposed of their contents in detail. The spectacle for one who *could* sympathize with the ruined family, was of an exceeding mournful interest. Articles which had evidently cost large sums when originally purchased, were now knocked down at comparatively trifling amounts: furniture, plate, china, time-pieces, mantle ornaments, lustres, candelabra, pictures, curiosities, and valuables of all sorts, were thus rapidly disposed of;—and though the auctioneer did his business quickly, yet was it evident that the sale must last for three or four days. Thus was it that all the accumulations which had been made to gratify refined taste, to constitute the means of luxury, and become accessories to the splendour and magnificence of the Ravenshill family,—were being scattered hither and thither—falling into fresh hands—finding new owners. It was a scene from which the most touching as well as the sternest morals might be deduced,—this breaking up of an almost princely establishment—this severing and dispersing of the countless evidences of lordly luxury and patrician splendour!

A little before noon, the carriage of the Bousteads arrived at the mansion; and I must confess

that I was infinitely surprised on beholding the two ladies, as well as the capitalist himself, alight. Mrs. Boustead talked very loud in her bassoon-like voice,—evidently for the behoof of all who were near enough to listen: but the principal string upon which she harped, was the fall which the pride of the Ravenshills had experienced. Euphemia affected to laugh and giggle as if it were all most delightful sport for her; and it was easy to perceive that she experienced a bitterly spiteful satisfaction at the contemplation of a scene in the midst of which she had the bad taste to show herself. The Bousteads became large purchasers,—the capitalist himself buying plate and pictures,—the ladies lavishing their money upon all kinds of ornamental articles and nick-nacks.

But I will not dwell longer on this scene. Suffice it to say that in the course of the afternoon, the steward received from the mortgagees' solicitor the requisite funds to fulfil his engagements to the servants generally; and to each of the males did he give a written character—while the housekeeper did the same towards the female portion of the household. I received my money and my certificate as well as the rest; and the omnibus-van was got in readiness to convey to the town those who thought fit to avail themselves of this convenience. I knew not what course to pursue: I longed to ask my fellow-servants for some advice—but they were all so busy on their own account that I feared to trouble them. I felt as if I were again to be thrown friendless upon the wide world. I had however plenty of ready money in my possession, and an excellent testimonial of character: but these circumstances were not a sufficient consolation to dispel that sense of utter loneliness which I experienced. All the other servants had either relatives or friends ready to receive them, or plans ready formed for prompt adoption: whereas I had not a single human

being to whom I could fly, and no settled purpose in view. It was however necessary to leave the Hall: but before I quitted my chamber, I sat down and wept,—for to me it was a home to which I was about to bid farewell!

Having put off my livery and resumed my plain clothes, I entered the omnibus which was filled with my fellow-servants. They were all so busy in conversing amongst themselves that but little attention was paid to me:—not that this arose from any actual callousness or heartless indifference on their part: it was simply thoughtlessness—and I felt too unhappy to obtrude myself upon their attention. When we reached the town, there was a general leave-taking amongst us all: my fellow-servants hurried off in different directions—and I was left alone at the tavern where the vehicle had stopped. It drove away on its return to Charlton Hall; and as I watched its departure, methought its disappearance was the severance of the last link which had thus for one year bound me to the Ravenshill family.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE TIVERTONS OF MYRTLE LODGE.

As I have already said, it was a small tavern where I had thus been set down; and the landlord began overwhelming me with questions,—as to all that was going on at the Hall, how the sale was progressing, whether there were many purchasers, and so forth. Having given him such answers as, in common civility, I thought fit,—I requested him to tell me if he could possibly assist me in procuring another situation. He was a good-natured and well-meaning man; and frankly replied that he thought I should stand a much better chance of procuring what I sought at Exeter, or at any other large place, than in that small town. Accordingly, on the following day, I repaired by the coach to the cathedral-city: and was set down at a small inn to which the landlord had recommended me. I lost no time in making the usual inquiries amongst certain tradesmen in Exeter: and speedily heard of three or four places that were vacant. But the one which seemed, from the specified requirements, most suitable for my age and abilities, was a situation in the service of a family named Tiverton, who resided at a place called Myrtle Lodge, about three miles from the city. I was informed that Mr. Tiverton was a retired stockbroker from London, who by the sudden death of a distant relative some ten or a dozen years back, had inherited the Myrtle estate, consisting of five hundred acres, in addition to a considerable sum of money in the Funds. These acquisitions, added to his own property, had enabled him to retire on about three thousand a-year; and he had married one of the numerous daughters of an impoverished Peer, who was only too glad to sink his aristocratic pride and bestow the portionless Lady Georgiana upon the fortunate stockbroker.

Possessed with this information, I set off for Myrtle Lodge,—proceeding thither on foot, as the distance was not very great, and the day was fine, with a refreshing breeze,—for it was now the month of October. I had no difficulty in finding my way, as the Lodge was situated near the main road; and as I walked along, I thought of the varied and manifold incidents which had occurred during the fifteen months that had now elapsed since I left the Nelsons' school at Leicester. The reader may be assured that the image of Annabel was uppermost in my reflections; and it was with a swelling heart that I reviewed all the circumstances which had transpired relative to that beauteous creature. I wondered what had become of her mother—wondered also whether Mr. Lanover ever thought of me—and whether he had instituted any proceedings for the purpose of discovering my whereabouts? Again, too, for the thousandth time, were my thoughts reflected back to that memorable night on which I had fled from his dwelling. I could not doubt—I never had doubted, that my life was threatened on that night: Annabel herself had told me so—she had assured me it was menaced by her own father—— But for what reason? wherefore should he have sought to make me the victim of so diabolical a crime? And then, too, his mysterious connexion with that man Taddy—I could not understand it! It was a mystery which ever became all the more and more bewildering, the oftener and the longer I thought of it.

It was in the midst of such reflections as these,—none of them being of a pleasant or agreeable nature,—that I arrived within sight of a gloomy-looking red-brick house, standing on a slight eminence about a quarter of a mile from the main road, and approached by a carriage-drive traversing two or three fields and a paddock. From a peasant who was passing along, I learnt that this was Myrtle Lodge; and I must candidly confess that I was considerably disappointed by its appearance. The cheerful name which it bore had led me to picture to myself an equally cheerful mansion, situated in the midst of smiling pleasure-grounds: whereas the scene that I beheld was quite the reverse. The house was large, with an infinite number of very small windows; and viewed from that distance, it looked more like the remnant of an old barrack than a gentleman's country-seat. There were many immense trees grouped around: but these were so situated that they added to the gloomy aspect of the mansion, instead of rendering it cheerful with their rich autumn-tinted foliage.

Passing through an ordinary five-barred gate, at which there was no porter's lodge,—only a little miserable-looking cottage close by, with a few dirty and half-naked children playing about in front,—I was proceeding along the carriage-drive, when I observed a lady walking slowly in the same direction. She was some fifty yards in front of me, and was followed at a short interval by a tall footman carrying an enormous French poodle under each arm. This footman was dressed in a dark livery, very shabby, and the gold lace of which was considerably tarnished. He wore an ill-powdered wig, much too small for his head; and there was something mournful, as well as rigid and severe, in this man's appearance. The lady,—who was likewise very tall, and excessively thin,—was dressed in an old lavender-coloured silk gown. A shawl, once of a showy pattern, but very much faded—a French bonnet that had

once been pink, but had lost all its colour and had a rusty look—a parasol which seemed to have grown old and worn out as a shield alike against sun and rain—soiled kid gloves—and a black silk reticule, in which keys and half-pence jingled together, completed this lady's toilet. As for her personal appearance, I may as well add that she had a pale face, with sharp angular features—light blue eyes, altogether lacking in lustre—and thin lips, which she retained very much compressed. Her age might be about forty: her look was severe and proud, at the same time prim and old maidish. Blended therewith, too, was a certain expression indicative of meanness, ill-nature, and narrow-mindedness. She was decidedly ugly and unprepossessing, without a single redeeming feature,—and likewise without a ray of any better feeling shining through that disagreeable and sinister aspect.

The lady was walking so very slow,—the footman with the poodles being, as a matter of course, compelled to follow at the same snail's pace,—that I could not possibly have lingered behind without having the appearance of impertinently watching them: besides I more than suspected that this must be Lady Georgiana Tiverton herself. So I soon overtook them both; and on passing her by, touched my hat.

"What do you want, lad?" she said, speaking in a languid and yet a severe voice,—as if it were unpleasantly fatiguing for her nerves as well as painful to her pride to have to address an inferior at all. "I dare say you have come about the situation?"—and then she fixed her dull blue eyes upon me very suspiciously, as well as very disdainfully: as if she thought it was quite possible I might be lurking about the grounds for no good purpose—or else that I was scarcely worthy of attracting her notice.

I intimated that I had come to apply for the situation of page, which I understood to be vacant at Myrtle Lodge.

"Then you can follow, lad, at a respectful distance," said the lady: "and another time you will perhaps learn better manners than to think of overtaking your superiors with a view to passing them by."

I again touched my hat and fell into the rear,—observing, as I did so, that the tall footman looked very glum and very miserable indeed, though still rigidly severe as he lugged the great poodles under his arms. It was now a sort of little procession that was formed towards the Lodge,—the lady leading the way as prim as possible, scarcely ever looking to the right or to the left, and holding her old parasol straight before her nose: though for what reason she had it at all, I could not think; as there was very little sun, and the October breeze blew fresh. The footman followed with the dogs; and I brought up the rear. Presently I noticed that the footman let down one of the poodles, very gently indeed—then the other—and led them both by faded blue ribbons which were tied round their necks. He now seemed to walk more freely, and with a little more elasticity of his hitherto rigid limbs; while it likewise struck me that he glanced over his shoulder towards me with an expression of grim satisfaction, as if he felt that he was outwitting his mistress. He was a hard-featured man, with a sallow complexion, and certainly did not seem as if he were fed on roast beef and drank strong beer: indeed he had a certain hungry look, and also as if he were labouring under a sad depression of spirits. One would have thought him an unhappy man, of lugubrious disposition—discontented and dissatisfied with all things in general, and his own place in particular.

Nevertheless, it seemed, as I have said, to afford him some little relief that he had contrived to set down the poodles without being detected by his mistress; and he increased the interval between himself and her, so that she might not hear the pattering of the dogs' feet. But, alas for the vanity of sublunary hopes!—the lady dropped her reticule, causing the keys and the half-pence to rattle together upon the road: and as I darted forward to pick up the rusty old silk bag, she stopped short. Turning slowly round, she beheld the high crime and misdemeanour of which the footman had been so stealthily and insidiously guilty; and drawing herself up into the most dignified primness, and with a look of awful sternness, she said, "John Robert!"

"Yes, my lady," answered the glum-looking footman, with a touch of his hat: and he stood like a veritable culprit before her.

"You have disobeyed my orders, John Robert," resumed her ladyship, "and you have done this in a manner which I will not designate so lightly as an ordinary act of carelessness or neglect: but you have done it under circumstances of cunning and duplicity which——"

"Really, my lady, I'm very sorry," mumbled the footman, getting more and more discomfited as the aspect of his mistress waxed more and more severe: "but them dogs, my lady, is so heavy——"

"Now don't answer me, John Robert," she interrupted with deprecating sternness. "You know I can put up with anything except being answered. I never *will* allow anybody in my service to answer me:"—and as she thus spoke, she bent her severe gaze upon me, as much as to say she thought I was an impudent-looking young scamp, who was very likely to commit myself in the manner she was denouncing, and that she therefore let me know beforehand what I might expect if I took the place and ventured to be so unpardonably audacious.

The footman, heaving a profound sigh, picked up the poodles again; and her ladyship resumed her walk towards the Lodge with the same stately slowness as before. I again fell into the rear—and began thinking to myself that I had already seen quite enough of Myrtle Lodge from a distance, and of its mistress in the space of ten minutes, to put me out of all conceit of the situation I had come to inquire about. But then I recollected that the tradesman who gave me the recommendation, had told me the Tivertons were rather peculiar people, though he thought I should be happy and comfortable when once I had fallen into their ways. Besides, I could not for decency's sake turn abruptly round and hurry off; so I followed the lady and footman towards the Lodge. The nearer I approached, the more gloomy was its aspect. I have already said the windows were numerous and very small: the dark heavy hangings seen through the panes, strengthened the impression that the interior must be of

the most sombre appearance. There was a tall narrow portico, formed of two lanky pillars, supporting a peaked piece of masonry; and the ascent into the entrance-hall consisted only of two steps —so that there was nothing imposing in the first impression thus made by Myrtle Lodge upon the mind of a stranger. The hall itself was spacious, but dark and mournful: it had a huge oaken staircase, with massive balustrades; and what might be termed the rail of these was at least eight inches in width. The doors opening from this hall, were low and deep-set; and a profound silence appeared to reign throughout the building.

"John Robert," said her ladyship, stopping in the middle of this great hall, and turning slowly round to confront the solemn-looking footman; "I hope that if I on *this* occasion pardon your grievous delinquency, you will not provoke my wrath again. Don't answer me, John Robert: but go and see that those dear pets are properly fed. They must be tired to death after your cruelty in making them walk. Now, boy," she added, with a stately gesture of the right arm, and an accompanying wave of the old faded parasol, "follow me!"

Lady Georgiana Tiverton led the way into a parlour; while the unfortunate footman heaved another profound sigh, and looked as rueful as if he were going to be hanged, while he toiled along with the fat dogs under his arms. The room in which I now found myself, was, as I had expected, of the most sombre aspect,—the draperies dark and heavy, without richness of material or elegance of arrangement—the furniture old, cumbrous, and massive—the carpet faded everywhere, and darned in many places—the pictures with huge dingy dusty frames—nothing light nor cheerful to relieve the cold and gloomy appearance of the spacious apartment. At a work-table sat a short, thin, very plain-looking female, in a rusty black silk dress—a not over clean cap, with faded blue ribbons—and an old dingy-hued scarf, thrown over her shoulders. She wore mittens—and was knitting. She was about five years younger than Lady Georgiana; but had a similarly old-maidish look. This, however, instead of being blended with aristocratic pride, was full of the most abject humility—as if she could not rightly say whether her soul was her own or not, were she questioned on the subject. The moment Lady Georgiana entered the room, this lady threw down her knitting—darted up from her seat—and deferentially expressing a hope that her ladyship had enjoyed her walk, helped to take off her bonnet and shawl.

"No, Miss Dakin, I have *not* enjoyed my walk," was the sternly severe response, delivered as if Lady Georgiana was both surprised and indignant at the bare idea that she *could* have taken any pleasure in a ramble which was so cruelly spoilt by the conduct of the footman, and likewise as if she thought that Miss Dakin ought to have known, by some magical intuition on her part, that the walk had been thus spoilt. "That deceitful man John Robert——"

"Well my dear Lady Georgiana," exclaimed Miss Dakin, "I always knew he was deceitful."

"And yet it was only this morning at breakfast," responded the lady, "you were praising him."

"Ah! because your ladyship was pleased with him *then*," was Miss Dakin's immediate rejoinder. "But what has the good-for-nothing fellow been doing?"—and she looked quite concerned, as if fully prepared for some awful narrative of John Robert's atrocity.

"You know, Miss Dakin, that this man who has such good wages and is treated so kindly, has positive orders to carry dear Flora under one arm and dear Rosa under the other?"

"I know how good your ladyship is to that man," ejaculated Miss Dakin,—"as you are to all the servants who are happy enough to enter your household."

I was rather encouraged by this remark; and I even began to think that John Robert's conduct in respect to the dogs must have been very ungrateful towards so excellent a mistress. Her ladyship, having by this time given her bonnet and shawl—not forgetting the old parasol—to Miss Dakin, was reminded of my presence; and instead of continuing her doleful narrative of complaint in respect to John Robert, she sat herself down in a very formal and solemn manner to catechise me. Miss Dakin rang the bell: the summons was answered by a thin, prim-looking lady's-maid, of "a certain age;"—so that I began to fancy all the persons at Myrtle Lodge must be of Pharoah's lean kind. To this dependant the bonnet, shawl, and parasol were consigned, with strict and emphatic injunctions on Miss Dakin's part, to put them away carefully; and then she resumed her seat and her knitting at the work-table.

"Now, boy, I will make time to say a few words to you," began Lady Georgiana. "What is your name? and how old are you?"

"Joseph Wilmot, please your ladyship—and I am a few months past sixteen."

"The name is not bad," said Lady Georgiana, addressing the observation to Miss Dakin.

"Not at all, your ladyship," responded the latter: and as she thought the mistress of the mansion was pleased and satisfied, she ventured to smile.

"And yet it might be better: for Joseph, you know, can be abbreviated into Joe; and nothing can be so vulgar as Old Joe or Young Joe. Both are execrable!"

"Execrable indeed!" answered Miss Dakin, now suddenly looking serious, and even ominous—as if she thought the name must be a drawback to my eligibility: for it was by this time tolerably apparent that it was a part of Miss Dakin's duty to echo all her ladyship's opinions, and to take her cue in everything from this supreme authority.

"Well, we will not make the name an objection," continued her ladyship: "the age suits."

"The age is most admirably adapted," said Miss Dakin.

"And yet his height might be a little less," remarked Lady Georgiana thoughtfully.

"True! it might," observed Miss Dakin, slowly shaking her head, as if the objection struck her forcibly.

"But we will pass over the height. Now about the character. To whom do you refer me, Joseph Wilmot?" demanded the mistress of Myrtle Lodge.

"Please your ladyship, I have a written character with me——"

"A written character!" she said, drawing herself up with awful dignity. "Miss Dakin, did he say a written character?"

"I am very much afraid so," was the ominous answer, very gravely given: "but I hope that my ears deceived me."

"Don't hope, Miss Dakin. Hope implies uncertainty."

"To be sure! Did I say *hope?* I am sure I was very wrong to hope in any case."

"No—there are cases in which we may hope."

"Ah, true! I sit corrected. There *are* cases:"—and then Miss Dakin sighed as if she did indeed know full well that she was speaking the truth, and that one of the cases in which the entertainment of hope was legitimate enough, was that of obtaining a husband, and which was by no means a strange one to her experience, though as yet ungratified.

"You sighed, Miss Dakin?" said her ladyship, with a look of the severest rebuke.

"Did I?" exclaimed the toady or companion—for such indeed she was. "I am sure I was very wrong!"—and so she was, because she felt she had not the faintest shadow of a right either to be miserable or to be cheerful without the tacit consent of her patroness.

"But about this written character," resumed Lady Georgiana, turning to me. "It is totally impossible I can think of taking you upon such testimony."

I was not particularly grieved at this refusal: for by this time I thoroughly comprehended the value to be set upon the eulogy pronounced a few minutes back by Miss Dakin on her ladyship's treatment of her servants. I however determined to retreat with honour to myself, and show that I had not sought the situation in the first instance without deeming myself justified. I therefore said, "I beg your ladyship's pardon for the trouble I have given; but the written testimonial I hold, is signed by the steward of Lord Ravenshill, and on his lordship's behalf."

"Ah! that alters the case very materially," exclaimed Lady Georgiana, her prim rigid features now actually brightening up: and she smiled.

"Oh, very materially indeed!" echoed Miss Dakin, smiling also.

"Because, you see," continued her ladyship, addressing the companion, "that although poor dear Lord Ravenshill—whom I knew very well in London some years ago, before I *condescended*"—and she emphasized the word—"to throw myself away on Mr. Tiverton——"

"Ah! it was a sacrifice on your ladyship's part!" interjected Miss Dakin, shaking her head mournfully.

"Well, as I was observing," continued her ladyship, "though poor Lord Ravenshill has made so dreadful a smash of it,—yet of course a lad who has been in his service, *may* have a written character. Personages moving in my sphere, Miss Dakin, can stamp with authority a document which would be valueless when coming from your vulgar middle-class folks. Joseph Wilmot, let me see this written character of your's."

I was sorry at the favourable turn which Lady Georgiana's opinion had thus suddenly taken on my behalf,—as I really did not wish to accept the situation: but still I had not the moral courage at the moment to say that I would not; and I accordingly produced the certificate. Her ladyship read it with great attention, and handed it to Miss Dakin,—who imitated, though at a humble distance, the air and manner with which her patroness scanned its contents.

"It will do," said her ladyship.

"Yes—it will do," responded Miss Dakin.

"Joseph Wilmot," continued Lady Georgiana, "I have no objection to take you into my service."

"Please your ladyship," I began, being about to decline: "I——"

"Don't answer!" she interrupted me: "I can't bear a servant who is in the habit of answering. This, I dare say, will prove your only fault: but I see that it *is* a fault—and you must correct yourself. What wages had you at Lord Ravenshill's?"

"Twelve guineas a-year, please your ladyship."

"That's a great deal of money," she observed, aside to Miss Dakin.

"A very great deal," was the response of the latter.

"But yet, considering the character——"

"Yes—considering the character——"

"It is not too much," said Lady Georgiana.

"Not at all too much," immediately coincided the toady.

"Well then, Joseph Wilmot, we will say twelve guineas a-year—and two suits of livery. The liveries, be it well understood, are to be your master's—or rather mine—for I and your master are the same thing——"

"Just the same," observed Miss Dakin, impressively directing the remark to me.

"The liveries, I say, to be mine when you leave. And now I must tell you that I have everything very regular and very orderly. You get up at five in the summer, and six in winter——Early rising is good for the health——"

"And enables the servants," interjected Miss Dakin suggestively, "to get on with their work."

"And you go to bed every night at ten o'clock—except when we have company. You will have to assist the footman in all things——"

"Particularly the poodles," observed Miss Dakin, again impressing the words upon me.

"But you will soon fall into the proper routine," continued her ladyship. "You will find me very particular—but I hope a good mistress."

"Too good!" mildly observed Miss Dakin, in an under-tone.

"Well, I trust that I have a proper regard for the welfare of my servants," proceeded her ladyship. "When you are ill, the family doctor prescribes for you for nothing; and you get your own medicines made up at the chemist's. Besides, you need not be dull here: for though we are very quiet people indeed, yet I do not wish to curb the natural spirit of youth and cheerfulness:"—which latter remark was very considerate on her part, inasmuch as she possessed neither. "And now, if you like to go to the servants' room, to get a glass of small beer and a little bit of bread and cheese after your walk, you are welcome."

"How good you are, dear Lady Georgiana!" said Miss Dakin, admiringly. "You are so thoughtful and so considerate on behalf of those poor creatures who are compelled to go out to service."

I could not help thinking that any servant's situation—even the most menial—was preferable to that of this miserable grovelling toady, whose entire employment was to think, look, move, and talk in undeviating accordance with the will and humour of her patroness. But I of course said nothing; and I have no doubt that Miss Dakin fancied I entertained a very different opinion of the dignity of her position.

"Now, Joseph Wilmot," added her ladyship, "you can retire; and to-night you must be here with your boxes by nine o'clock—and not an instant later."

I thought to myself that, after all, I had better accept this situation. It afforded me a home at once: I might go farther and fare worse: if I threw away this chance, I might be a long time ere finding another: if I remained out of service, my money would be slipping away;—and I naturally shuddered at the idea of falling into such poverty as that which had thrown me in the way of Mr. Taddy. So I bowed acquiescence to the mandate last issued; but not standing in need of the bounteous bequest of a glass of small beer and a mouthful of bread and cheese, I at once took my departure from Myrtle Lodge.

As I was proceeding along the carriage-drive, I encountered a short, thin man,—very shabbily dressed—about fifty years of age—and with a sharp suspicious look. He had a mean appearance, and none of the prideful assumption which blended therewith—or rather glossed it over—on the part of her ladyship. At the very first glance I experienced a dislike for this individual; and I hoped that he would not prove to be Mr. Tiverton. I was however disappointed.

"Well, youngster," he said, beckoning me to stop. "Who are you?"—and he eyed me just as if he thought I was some lurking thief carrying off a silver spoon or some other booty on which I had laid my hands. "Been after the place—eh? Well, I thought so," he immediately added, as I replied in the affirmative. "When are you coming?"

"To-night, sir—at nine o'clock."

"Very well, then," he instantaneously responded, in a peremptory tone: "you will be here at half-past eight. So now understand me. I am the master here—and my word is law."

With these words he looked very fierce, as if thinking it possible that I might venture to contradict him by stating my impression to be somewhat different, and that Lady Georgiana's word was the only law to be followed. But I merely expressed my obedience to the command he had just uttered, and smiling with a sort of grim satisfaction, he passed rapidly on his way to the Lodge. I had thus acquired the certainty that it was my new master whom I had thus spoken to: but I was left in a strange condition of bewilderment and doubt as to whether he or his wife would prove the supreme authority.

CHAPTER XX.

WHAT DOES IT ALL MEAN?

On arriving at the tavern where I had taken up my temporary quarters in Exeter, I inquired of the landlord for any means of conveyance by which my trunk might be borne to Myrtle Lodge. He answered that a carrier's van would pass that way at about five o'clock: and that there was no public vehicle proceeding along the same road at a later hour. I had been ordered to make my appearance at the Lodge at half-past eight; and I did not like to anticipate the time. Besides, I was desirous to ramble through Exeter, and see whatsoever might be worth beholding. I therefore resolved upon forwarding my trunk by the carrier's van, with directions that it should be left at that cottage which was at the entrance of the grounds, and which (as I subsequently discovered) was dignified by the name of the porter's lodge. Having made this arrangement, and paid the carrier his charge, I took some refreshment; and then walked out into the city.

It was now about four o'clock in the afternoon; and I felt that I must not over-fatigue myself, as I had already performed a journey on foot of six miles, and had three more to do in the evening in order to reach my new home. I therefore sauntered leisurely along; and inquiring my way to the cathedral, amused myself with the contemplation of this superb edifice until the dusk began to close in between five and six o'clock. I was retracing my way to the tavern, in order to take some tea and have an hour's rest previous to setting off for Myrtle Lodge,—when at the corner of a street I suddenly beheld an object which made me shrink with mingled horror and dismay into the nearest shop. This object was none other than Mr. Lanover!

I felt such a sickening at the heart—such a glacial terror, too, seizing upon me—that I literally staggered into that shop; and sank like one exhausted, or about to faint, upon a chair. A young person who stood behind the counter, thinking I was unwell, offered me a glass of water; and somewhat recalled to myself by being thus addressed in a kind and sympathizing voice, I glanced rapidly around. It happened to be a pastry-cook's shop where I had thus taken refuge from the presence of that loathed and dreaded being; and I asked for a bottle of soda-water. This was promptly supplied; and the beverage refreshed me. But now I knew not how to act. I thought that I dared not venture forth with a chance of encountering the man whom I was compelled to regard as my mortal enemy;—and yet what excuse could I make for lingering in that shop? Summoning all my courage to my aid,—and reflecting that whatsoever evil intentions Mr. Lanover might have towards me, he could not dare perpetrate a crime in the open street, and in the midst of a populous neighbourhood,—I determined upon sallying forth. The instant I crossed the threshold, I glanced in the direction of the spot where I had seen Mr. Lanover standing: but what was my suprise, and how strong were the undefinable feelings which sprang up within me, when on that very same spot—instead of the hideous humpback—my eyes at once settled on the lovely countenance of Annabel?

I was not a dozen yards from her; and there she stood, alone—but with her eyes fixed upon the interior of another shop; and I at once concluded that she was waiting for her father, who was no doubt inside. It was not yet completely dusk

and moreover, just at the very instant that I thus caught sight of her features, a light springing up in the shop-window, suddenly flung its glare upon that countenance of such angelic beauty. And she was dressed in that same modest and becoming manner which she adopted when I first knew her: she was even plainly dressed:—nothing meretricious—nothing showy nor gaudy in her garb,—nothing bold nor forward in her demeanour. On the contrary, there was a certain visible timidity in her look, as if annoyed and alarmed at even being left for a few minutes standing alone on the pavement. In short, with a single glance did I perceive that she was the same innocent-looking, modest, and bashful Annabel that I had first known and whom I had learnt to love so fondly—aye, with all the affection of my boyish heart! Oh, had she left that profligate Sir Malcolm Wavenham? had she returned, so far as a once fallen girl *can* return, into the path of rectitude? was she thus plainly and modestly apparelled in atonement, as it were, for the too gauzy garb she had worn at the theatre, and for the rich raiment in which she was clad when I beheld her dashing past on a proudly careering steed, near the village of Charlton? Alas, the thought struck me at the instant, that she must be a consummate mistress of dissimulation and hypocrisy—mère girl though she were—if she could thus so easily resume that outward appearance of virginal innocence and modest ingenuousness which used to characterize her, and which now again she wore. But, Oh! to speak to her for a moment——if only for a moment—at any risk—at all hazards——Yes, even the very dread and horror in which I stood of her father, were over-ruled by this earnest longing at that instant.

All these thoughts swept through my mind in the space of a few swiftly fleeting seconds; and issuing forth from the shade of the confectioner's doorway, I accosted her—at the same moment making her a quick sign not to give vent to any ejaculation which might reach the ears of her father. She beheld me: she comprehended that sign. Indeed, without it she would have been upon her guard: for she flung a rapid, penetrating glance into the shop, near the threshold of which she was standing.

"Annabel!" I murmured, as I clasped the hand which she at once extended towards me; and I knew not at the moment whether my sensations of joy or of pain chiefly predominated.

"O Joseph, I am so glad to meet you!"—and she stopped short, evidently overpowered by her emotions: for the tears were gushing down her cheeks.

"Dearest Annabel," I quickly answered,—"for dear you must ever be to me, no matter in what circumstances you may be placed——Oh! you know not how I have wept and sorrowed on your behalf!"

"And I also for you, Joseph!" she responded in the soft melting tones of her silvery voice: and heavens! how beautiful did she appear at that moment: for a rich carnation mantled upon her cheeks—and her lovely azure eyes swam with a bashful tenderness. "But tell me—are you happy, Joseph?"—and then those eyes, so soft and melting, surveyed me quickly from head to foot, as if to judge of my circumstances by my appearance. "You are struggling successfully with the world—are you not, Joseph?" she immediately added, evidently satisfied by the survey: for I was well dressed in a suit of plain clothes, which I had purchased only a few weeks previously, and in painful anticipation at the time of the breaking-up of the establishment at Charlton Hall.

"Yes—I am earning my bread," I answered,—"but in that same capacity in which you last saw me—I mean as a domestic servant——But you, Annabel—do tell me—have you altogether——Oh, I dare not complete the question! You know what I mean?"

Strange was the look with which for an instant she regarded me—a look which I could scarcely comprehend! But all in an instant it changed——yes, it changed into one of terror and dismay,—as glancing towards the shop, she said with feverish excitement, "Fly, Joseph—for heaven's sake, fly!"

I pressed her hand—and in a moment was speeding along the street. A diverging one was near: I plunged into it, without daring to look behind: for I comprehended but too well what she meant:—her father, Mr. Lanover, was issuing forth from the shop at the instant she thus in terrified anxiety urged me to flight! I ran on, until within a dozen yards of the tavern: then I relaxed my pace, and looked back to see if I were pursued. But neither in the gathering gloom in the middle of the street—nor in the flood of light which the shop-fronts now threw upon the pavement on either side—could I discern the horrible form of the humpback.

I entered the tavern, and ordered some tea. While I sat drinking it, all my thoughts were centred in Annabel. Was there not some strange mystery surrounding this young creature? was she not a singular and incomprehensible being? All within the space of some fourteen months, I had seen her under a variety of phases,—first the modest, innocent, artless girl, ministering with all the sanctity of filial affection to an invalid mother—then suddenly bursting, as it were, upon my presence in the meretricious garb and dazzling lustre of a stage—then galloping past me in a splendid riding-habit, with waving plumes in her hat, and in the company of a notorious profligate—now once more the modest and ingenuous girl, with innocence written upon her brow, whatsoever consciousness of guilt there might be in the secret depths of her soul. Oh! and could this be the same Annabel who quitted me so abruptly at the theatre, and who sent out a message to the effect that she knew me not?—was *that* the same Annabel with *this* one who but a few minutes back had greeted me with such unmistakable joy, amidst such overpowering emotions, and with a modest blush rising to her cheeks as she gave me the assurance that she had often and often thought of me and wept in so thinking? Was *this* the same Annabel? Yes, yes—it was! But how could I account for all those varied phases in which I had beheld her—unless it were by the belief that she must indeed be a thorough adept in the wiles of dissimulation, and that the artlessness of her looks was only equalled by the artfulness of her soul? Cruel, cruel thought—a thought which wrung tears from my eyes—a thought which I could not repel, and which nevertheless was too

dreadful to be associated with a young girl whose age was only a few months past sixteen!

Such were the reflections which swept through my mind after this singular, brief, and most unexpected meeting with Annabel. And though feeling myself compelled by the overwhelming weight of circumstances to think thus disparagingly of her, nevertheless my soul yearned towards her—my heart was her's——Yes, were the name of Annabel synonymous with pollution itself, it were impossible to help loving her! There may be poison in the cup of honey—but it will still have its sweetness: there may be venom in the goblet of sparkling wine—but it will still possess its fascinations: there may be death in the perfume of some beauteous flower—but it will not the less retain the brilliancy of its charms. Oh! are not the apples on the shore of the Dead Sea delightful to the eye, though they contain ashes at their core?—is not the shade of the upas grateful to the way-worn traveller: but is there not death in its umbrageous canopy?

From such reflections as these my mind was gradually turned into another channel of meditation,—yet scarcely another, but merely a current of the same stream. I thought of Mr. Lanover's presence in Exeter. What could it be for? Was he in search of me? No—I scarcely feared this: for if he had obtained a clue to my whereabouts, he could not have failed to trace me from Charlton Hall to the tavern where I was now seated. Had he not rather come into Devonshire for the purpose of reclaiming his daughter from the companionship of an unprincipled profligate?—and if this were the case, how could he be, after all, so bad a man as to have entertained a murderous design upon my life? But did he intend to remain in this neighbourhood? If so, I should not be safe—I must not dream of entering upon the situation which I had accepted in the morning: I must fly, and place an interval of hundreds of miles between myself and the dreadful humpback! But my box was already at its destination; and I could not afford to lose all the little personal property I possessed in the world. Besides, I must take courage—I must exercise caution—I must keep a good look-out, and notice, when at Myrtle Lodge, whether my movements should be watched and my footsteps dogged. The more calmly I reasoned, the fainter grew my fear that Lanover intended to settle at Exeter, or to remain in the neighbourhood. If he had really come for the purpose of recovering and reclaiming his daughter—as I firmly believed—it was by no means likely he would tarry with her in the same district where dwelt the individual from whom he must have thus obtained her. Exeter was but about twenty-three miles from Sir Malcolm Wavenham's seat; and it would be sheer madness for Mr. Lanover to keep his daughter within so limited a range from that point.

The result of my deliberations was that I would proceed to Myrtle Lodge according to my original intention;—and having paid my bill at the tavern, I set out on the walk of three miles that lay before me. It was only half-past seven when I thus took my departure: I had an hour at my command—and this was ample for the performance of such a journey. It was a beautiful evening: the fresh breeze of the day was lulled into a perfect calm: the sky was cloudless, with the exception of a few thin fleecy vapours, like an assemblage of snow-flakes, floating at a great height. Emerging from the city, I soon entered upon the road: but as it gradually grew more and more lonely, I could not prevent certain vague fears from stealing into my mind. Ah! and then I recollected those painful and wearying night-journeys which I had performed when escaping from Mr. Jukes at Leicester; and though my position was now, thank heaven! considerably ameliorated in one respect, yet in another it was frightfully altered. For *then* I had only the fear of being captured and dragged to a workhouse; whereas *now* I entertained the dread of being overtaken by a horrible monster who sought my life. Striving hard, however, to conquer my apprehensions, I pursued my way briskly; and again did all my thoughts centre themselves on the image of Annabel. Oh, that the interview had been longer!—Oh, that it should have been confined to the insignificant space of a couple of minutes! Had I not so much to say to her—so much to learn from her lips—so many questions to ask her? Had her father discovered that it was through her generous self-sacrificing kindness I had escaped from his murderous aim?—was it his cruelty that had driven her forth to seek a livelihood upon the stage, and thus be led into those temptations to which she had succumbed, and from the trammels of which he appeared to have at last rescued her? And what had become of her mother? These, and countless other questions, should I have put to Annabel, if I had been permitted the leisure.

While thus giving way to my reflections, I reached a lonely little inn—or more correctly speaking, an alehouse—which stood by the roadside about two miles from Exeter, and consequently about a mile from Myrtle Lodge. A carriage, drawn by a splendid pair of horses, had stopped in front of this little hostelry. The coachman sat upon the box, ready to drive on: a footman stood by the open door of the vehicle, evidently expecting some one to come forth from the alehouse and resume his seat within. The brilliant lamps of the carriage threw their lustre upon the two noble animals, and on the ground where they stood. I felt tired with the briskness of my walk: I knew that I had plenty of time to spare—and I sat down to rest for a few minutes on a bench in front of the alehouse. Scarcely had I placed myself there, when a gentleman issued forth,—exclaiming, methought in a half-tipsy tone, "Yes, Master Boniface, your ale is capital! My throat was as parched as the devil with thirst when I halted to partake of it; and now it is quenched. Good night."

"Good night, Sir Malcolm," answered the landlord: and the gentleman hastened towards the carriage.

Ah, this was Sir Malcolm Wavenham! The first tones of his voice had smitten familiarly upon my ear, while his back was still turned towards me; and even before the landlord addressed him by name, I was startled with the conviction that it was he. All of a sudden a terrible suspicion flashed to my mind. The carriage was evidently on its way *from* Exeter: was it possible that it was bearing off Annabel from her father, back to the

abode of the profligate Baronet? I know not why this fancy should have so abruptly seized upon me: but certain is it that it did;—and almost frenzied by the idea, I sprang towards the vehicle. Past Sir Malcolm Wavenham did I bound as if I were mad; and dashing up to the door which the footman held open, I looked in. Yes—there was light sufficient for me to behold a countenance which made me ejaculate, "Heavens! is it possible you could have done this?"

At the same instant I was seized on the collar by the powerful arm of the footman, and whirled round with such force that I was dashed up against a horse-trough in front of the inn. The loud roystering laugh of Sir Malcolm Wavenham rang in my ears; and by the time I recovered myself, the equipage was rushing away,—its lights glancing like twin comets along the road, until a bend thereof suddenly veiled them from the view.

"You got that nicely, young feller, for your imperence!" shouted the landlord, with a loud guffaw, from the threshold of his house. "Why, what the dooce could you mean by it? I never seed sich a mad freak in all my life. What the dooce did you want going to stare in at the lady?"

I hurried on, partly in the wild hope of overtaking the carriage—partly to escape from the coarse and brutal jesting of the landlord. I was soon out of breath: but I had run at least a couple of hundred yards ere I recollected the futile absurdity of thinking to catch up the vehicle. Then I sat down by the way-side, and burst into tears.

"O lost, lost Annabel!" I exclaimed: "what is now to become of thee? Art thou so wedded to that vile profligate——Wedded! I wish thou wast," I cried, in bitter repetition of that word which I had at first used in another sense: and then again I wept abundantly.

For several minutes I was so overcome with grief, that I forgot my own present circumstances—forgot that I was on my way to enter upon a new situation: but at length I grew comparatively calm, and continued my route. During the rest of the walk, the image of Annabel absorbed all my reflections; and it was in a kind of mechanical manner that I stopped at the gate leading into the grounds attached to Myrtle Lodge. I knocked at the door of that miserable-looking hut which stood near the gate; and it was opened by a thin emaciated female, who seemed half-starved. A boorish-looking man, in the smock-frock and leather gaiters of a farm-labourer, was smoking his pipe by the side of the fire—if an ounce of fuel, with scarcely enough heat to boil as much water as an egg-saucepan would contain, deserved to be so denominated. I asked if the carrier had left my trunk?—the woman replied in the affirmative; and the man said he had just come back from taking it up to the Lodge,—adding a hint that he thought the task was worth something to drink. I accordingly gave him sixpence, which his wife immediately pounced upon,—vowing in a querulous voice that it should not go to the ale-house, but should be put into the money-box. Neither of them asked me in to sit down; and as I continued my way towards the Lodge, I could not help thinking that everybody I had as yet seen in connexion with my new place was thin and scraggy, and either had a hungry or a half-starved look. I was however too unhappy on Annabel's account to ponder many moments upon these things: but continued my way, thinking of that fair being until I reached the house.

Passing round to the back of the premises, I rang the bell at the servants' entrance; and it was answered by the glum-looking man-servant whom I had seen carrying the poodles, and whose Christian names were John Robert. He gave a sort of grunt on beholding me; and as I took this to be his peculiar mode of bestowing a greeting, I addressed him very civilly in return. He however said not another word—but led the way into the servants' room, which was separated by a narrow passage from the kitchen. There I found those whom I had now to consider my fellow-domestics. These consisted of the cook, the lady's-maid, and a housemaid,—so that, including John Robert and myself, the domestic establishment was limited to five persons—little enough, I thought, for so large a mansion! But I was completely taken by surprise,—and the reader himself may smile when I inform him,—that the cook and the housemaid were as lean and scraggy as John Robert and the lady's-maid, both of whom I had previously seen. I never saw such a meagre skeleton of a cook in my life; and though all the victuals might pass through her hands, it appeared to me as if she could certainly have very little discretionary power as to the disposal of them. The servants were seated at supper when I entered; and the greeting I received, consisted of a few cold brief words from each. On the table there was a piece of cheese, or rather the crust of one—a very small modicum of bread—some brown mugs—and a tin can of beer, which turned out to be particularly small indeed. This was in reality a frugal repast, and one to which the strictest anchorite might have sat down without the slightest apprehension of being seduced into intemperance either in eating or drinking.

The cook desired me to take a chair and have my supper. Fortunately the incident which occurred during my walk, in respect to the Baronet's travelling-carriage, had taken away my appetite: otherwise the walk itself would perhaps have sharpened it beyond a relish for the sorry fare which stood before me, and which contrasted unpleasantly enough with the suppers of cold joints and meat-pies to which I was wont to sit down at Charlton Hall. I was however thirsty; but having taken a mouthful of the beer, I found it so exceedingly sour that I requested permission to drink water.

Little conversation took place amongst the servants: and if they did not exhibit any cheerfulness or gaiety, they were equally deficient in curiosity,—the questions they put to me, being very few in number. There seemed to be a generally pervasive mournfulness amongst them, as if they were all under the influence of a dull vague terror: they spoke in subdued voices—they appeared like persons who, being cowed and spirit-broken, entertained a common sense of degradation and oppression beneath the iron rule of a stern discipline. I myself was in wretched bad spirits on account of the incident during my walk thither; and the cold gloom of the scene in the midst of which I now found myself was but little calculated to raise me up from despondency. But it seemed so natural to my fellow-servants in my new place that I should be thus dull and melancholy, that not one of them thought of inquiring the reason.

Precisely at half-past nine the parlour-bell rang—the servants all stood up—and a procession was formed, the lady's-maid leading the way, the cook following, the footman coming next, then the housemaid—and I was bidden to close the rear. I could not possibly make out what this was for: no explanation was volunteered: perfect silence reigned amongst the servants: and the procession moved slowly along, just as if we were mourners at a funeral. We ascended the stairs—we entered the parlour with the regularity and order of a disciplined squad of soldiers; and in the same formal array we took seats at the extremity of the room where the door was situated.

I had noticed down stairs in the servants' apartment, that there was no fire although the October evening was cold—and that there was but a single miserable tallow candle that did not burn much better than a rushlight. I now observed that things were but little more cheerful in the parlour. There was no fire in the grate; and though two mould candles stood on the table, only one was lighted. Could all this be through the mean stinginess of the master and mistress of the house? was the question I asked myself; and I certainly could not account for it in any other way. The spacious parlour was wrapped in a sombre gloom; and in the midst of the semi-obscurity I observed Mr. Tiverton sitting on one side of the table—Lady Georgiana, starch, stiff, and prim, on the other—and Miss Dakin at the upper end, with a couple of books before her. I now therefore comprehended wherefore the domestics had been thus solemnly marshalled: it was for family prayers.

Miss Dakin deferentially inquired in a low voice if she should begin: whereupon Mr. Tiverton and Lady Georgiana both slightly inclined their heads in solemn assent; and the toady accordingly commenced reading the prayers in a voice which she endeavoured to render as intensely miserable as she possibly could. I glanced along the array of my fellow-servants, and noticed that they all wore a similarly lugubrious aspect,—John Robert especially looking awfully unhappy, and the cook pursing up her mouth as if she had a deep sense of self-mortification for no end of sins and wickednesses which she had committed. At the termination of the first prayer, I was literally startled by the cavern-like gloom and sepulchral depth of tone with which John Robert groaned forth "Amen!"—for I found that it was a portion of his duties to enact the clerk. The service lasted for precisely twenty minutes; at the expiration of which every one—master, mistress, the toady, and the servants—all buried their faces in their hands for three minutes more—an example which I of course imitated. The signal to desist from this dumb show was a low half-stifled sound, between a groan and a grunt, on the part of John Robert: then we all rose, and solemnly marched forth from the parlour,—descending with the due regularity of a procession into the servants' room again. Two or three minutes afterwards the clock in the kitchen struck ten; and then, as if everything were managed with the precision of that same clock-work which was in motion at the time, each of the domestics took a candle—lighted it—and with a solemn "Good night" to each other, began moving up-stairs. The housemaid showed me to my chamber, where I found my trunk; and ere she closed the door, she said in a low voice, "You are only allowed five minutes to get to bed; and whether in bed or not, the light must be put out. That piece which you have got," she added, pointing to the little end of candle which was burning in the socket of the stick, "will have to last you a whole week."

She then closed the door; and I found myself alone in a small attic just under the tiles,—sordidly furnished, and not particularly clean. I by no means liked the aspect of my new place: but I was still too low-spirited to devote much thought to the little circumstances which had already created this dislike. Being much fatigued, I was in bed before the prescribed five minutes had elapsed—and the light was out. But scarcely had I extinguished it, when I heard footsteps passing slowly along the corridor whence the servants' attics opened: then suddenly there was a loud and authoritative knock at one of those doors—and Mr. Tiverton's voice exclaimed, "John Robert, your light is not out—and the five minutes have passed by at least three-quarters of a minute by my watch."

The steps advanced again, stopping for a moment at every door, until they halted at mine,—whence however Mr. Tiverton departed, no doubt satisfied, by the simple process of peeping through the key-hole, that I was in strict accordance with the rules of the house. I soon fell asleep, notwithstanding my sorrowful reflections—for I was exhausted alike in mind and body; and I have no doubt I should have slept on until a late hour in the morning, had I not been suddenly startled by hearing a large bell clanging as if it were just over my head. I subsequently ascertained that it was on the house-top—but literally over my head; for it was perched upon the tilings just above my attic.

"Ten minutes to wash and dress!" spoke the deep lugubrious voice of John Robert, as he knocked at my door.

I sprang out of bed; and not having as yet had my livery given out, resumed my own plain clothes. But I found it somewhat difficult to perform my ablutions and toilet within so limited a space of time,—having been accustomed at Charlton Hall, as well as at Mr. Delmar's, to take as long an interval as I required. On descending to the servants' room down stairs, I was told by John Robert that I was just three minutes over my time—that as I was under him, he was answerable to his master and mistress for my proceedings—and that I must be more regular in future. At eight o'clock punctually, we all marshalled ourselves again—ascended to the parlour,—and heard prayers read by Miss Dakin: these lasted twenty minutes as on the previous evening, and John Robert again officiated as clerk. On descending to our own region again, breakfast was served up,—this consisting of very weak tea and bread-and-butter cut enormously thick. There was no sugar,—the cook informing me that only a certain quantity was allowed by Lady Georgiana—that it was given out every Monday morning—that it could not possibly be made to last beyond Thursday evening—and that consequently there were always three days every week during which the servants had to dispense with the article entirely. There was not so much as a bone of cold meat allowed even to the footman; and again I could not help contrasting all this direful meanness and studied sordidness with the well-spread breakfast-table in the servants' apartment at Charlton Hall. I felt sure that if it ever happened that Mr. Thomas Austin were in possession at Myrtle Lodge, he would be starved out—his clasp-knife would be rusted—and he would pine away with coerced temperance.

At about noon I was sent for up into the parlour, where I found the tailor with his measure in his hand, and who had evidently come about the livery. Two suits which had been worn by the page who preceded me, were lying on a chair; and Mr. Tiverton told me to take one suit up to my chamber and put it on. While turning over the garments, I found that both suits were so well worn that I really could not tell which was the every-day one and which was intended for Sunday: whereupon Mr. Tiverton himself, putting on a pair of spectacles, assisted me to discriminate between the two—and a very nice sense of discrimination he must have had to be enabled to do it. He gave me the every-day suit: and hastening up-stairs, I proceeded to put it on—or, I should rather say, to work myself into it; for it was very evident that my predecessor must have been at least half a foot shorter than myself, and of marvellous leanness, though I was at the time of sufficiently slender shape. In short—and it *was* "short"—the suit did not fit me at all; and I was really ashamed to descend in those garments,—the cuffs of the jacket not reaching near down to the wrists, the trousers only so far as the middle of

the calf of the leg. But I fancied that Mr. Tiverton was not exactly the gentleman to have his instructions in any way deviated from: so I accordingly went down stairs, feeling however that the figure I cut was most ludicrous. In the hall I met John Robert; and as he surveyed me with a sort of sombre glumness, he suffered a low grunting groaning sound to escape him,—but whether it were in admiration or in deprecation of my appearance, I could not exactly determine.

On entering the parlour, I found Lady Georgiana and Miss Dakin both seated there, in company with Mr. Tiverton,—all three solemnly and gloomily silent, and apparently bent upon holding a council as to what was to be done with the liveries. The tailor—a short, dapper-looking, little man, with a very dirty face and very bowed legs—was standing at a respectful distance, fidgetting with his measure and looking ill at ease, as a person does when not asked to sit down, nor spoken to, and not knowing exactly what to do with himself or how to seem unconcerned. The moment I made my appearance, I saw that the countenances of Mr. Tiverton and Lady Georgiana became considerably elongated; while Miss Dakin,—who was quite prepared, as usual, to assume any look which might be a reflection of that of her patroness,—made her own face of a correspondingly hatchet-like longitude. As for the tailor, *his* looks brightened up considerably with a sort of grimy lustre: for he no doubt flattered himself that it would prove inevitably necessary to have a couple of new suits.

"Well, for my part," said Lady Georgiana, after a long and ominous silence, "I don't at all see that these clothes cannot be altered to fit Joseph Wilmot. What do you think, Miss Dakin?"

"Oh, decidedly!" was the toady's quick response. "They are only a *leetle* too small for him—a mere trifle."

"Yes, Mr. Pumpkin," resumed Lady Georgiana, thus addressing the tailor: "I think that you must take these suits and make them fit the lad. I observed to you yesterday," she added, turning to Miss Dakin, "that Joseph Wilmot was a trifle too tall, and that it was a pity: for I had these liveries in my eye at the time."

"To be sure!" rejoined the toady: "your ladyship is so very far-seeing."

While this colloquy was progressing, Mr. Pumpkin began to look very rueful and very much disappointed: but Mr. Tiverton's countenance gradually assumed a sternly resolute aspect; and then I saw him glance at his wife with an unmistakable malignity, as much as to imply that though she fancied she had settled the affair all in her own way, he would very soon teach her differently. Accordingly, rising up from his seat, he said, "No, Mr. Pumpkin—I won't go to the expense of having these old things done up."

"Old?" ejaculated Lady Georgiana, in horrified amazement.

"Old?" echoed Miss Dakin, in amazed horror.

"Well, worn out and shabby, then," exclaimed Mr. Tiverton. "Pumpkin, take the lad's measure at once; and let him have a couple of new suits as quick as you can. Send him up new hats likewise, with new bands."

"This extravagance, Mr. Tiverton, is intolerable!" said the lady, in a tone of the sternest rebuke. "What do *you* think, Miss Dakin?"

"Miss Dakin will please to hold her tongue on the subject," at once observed Mr. Tiverton.

"Oh, to be sure!" said the toady, with a sort of hysterical giggle, as she likewise tossed her head indignantly.

However, Mr. Tiverton was resolute. Mr. Pumpkin, infinitely rejoiced, took the measure; and I hastened up-stairs again to resume my plain clothes until the livery should come home.

CHAPTER XXI.

A VISITRESS.

THIS little incident gave me a considerable insight into the character of my new master, and showed me on what pleasant and agreeable terms he lived with his patrician wife. It was evidently a struggle between them who should be the supreme authority within those walls: but the husband failed not to seize upon any favourable opportunity of asserting his own dominant power. Though mean and stingy to a degree, he nevertheless suffered his pride to get the better of his sordidness in this matter of the liveries; and to the circumstance of his being anxious to carry out his own will in direct opposition to that of his spouse, was I indebted for my new garments and rescued from the necessity of wearing the old shabby ones. When the liveries came home, and I put on a new suit for the first time since I had entered my place, John Robert surveyed me with visible envy; and as he cast a most rueful look over his own threadbare and tarnished raiment, he gave vent to his afflicted feelings by means of his habitual half-groan, half-grunt.

Before I properly resume the thread of my narrative, I must place on record a few more particulars relative to this family. That the meanness of my master and mistress were excessive, has already been shown; and I speedily found that it extended to the minutest details. The number of servants being so limited, the amount of work allotted to each was most onerous; and yet we never could give satisfaction: there was always something to complain about. Lady Georgiana paid a visit to the larder every morning, and appeared to measure with her eyes every article of food, so as to eke it out with the nicest exactitude. She had a partiality for thin and ugly female-servants; because, as I understood, she considered that they made a household so much more respectable, inasmuch as there was all the less chance of their laughing and giggling with individuals of the other sex. The whole routine of the establishment was regulated as it were by clock-work precision; and thus it was by no means difficult to comprehend how my unfortunate fellow-servants had been reduced to mere automatons—that they laboured under a continued depression of spirits—that they were afraid of talking too loud—while anything bordering on gaiety was totally out of the question. The only reason they retained their places and did not seek to "better themselves," was because Lady Georgiana made it a rule never to give a character with a servant who left her

voluntarily;—and what were these unfortunate beings to do if they cut themselves adrift upon the world without such an indispensable means of procuring other situations? Besides, times were bad—numbers of household servants were out of place—and it was therefore considered better to have a bad situation than none at all.

The Tivertons received very little company, and seldom gave parties. These were doubtless too expensive: for nothing could exceed their meanness and parsimony. The very candle-ends were counted: the tea and sugar were doled out in the smallest quantities: so much beer—and that of the vilest and sourest description—was allowed for a fortnight's consumption in the servants' room; and if it were drunk up beforehand, the remainder of the period beheld water supplying its place. I have already hinted that Lady Georgiana and her husband did not live on the best possible terms together. She, in her aristocratic pride, looked down upon him as a vulgar member of the middle class; while he, on his side, no doubt calculated that he should have done much better to marry the wealthy daughter of a London citizen than the portionless scion of a patrician family. They had no children; and therefore to what end they strove and struggled to save and amass money, was rather a puzzling question. In this aim, however, there was a wondrous agreement of opinion between them,—with the occasional and far-distant exceptions of such instances as that to which I was indebted for my new liveries. As for Miss Dakin, she was one of the most contemptible of women,—fawning and cringing to Lady Georgiana—always taking her part in her disputes with her husband—and yet somehow or another contriving to keep on tolerably good terms with Mr. Tiverton himself. She was one of those beings who sell their independence of spirit—sell all their faculties of hearing, seeing, and thinking—for the miserable stipend which a patroness is willing to give. It was even surprising that Lady Georgiana allowed herself such a luxury as a "companion:" but perhaps the mystery may be explained by the fact that she needed some one to flatter her—some one to bear the brunt of her ill-humours—some one to listen patiently to her tirades about the long ancestry from which she was descended—some one to assist in taking her part against her husband, and to corroborate her complaints that she was a very shamefully-used woman. Again, as Lady Georgiana had no children—and as even the most ill-conditioned of her sex generally feel the necessity of loving something—she kept poodles on which to bestow her attachment; and these animals were the only living beings at Myrtle Lodge that were not stinted in their food and were cared for with some sort of tenderness.

I had been about a month in my new place, when one day—having occasion to enter the parlour for some purpose—I found Miss Dakin seated there alone, knitting a pair of mittens for her patroness. I could not help noticing that she looked at me in a very peculiar way, and methought with a certain degree of confusion, which only rendered her uglier than she naturally was.

"Joseph," she said, "I hope you are satisfied with your new place? You may depend upon it, you have a very good friend in me; and I do my best to save you from scoldings."

"I am sure I am very much obliged to you, Miss," was my response: and I certainly marvelled that I should have thus won for myself the favour of this lady, as I had never taken any trouble to secure it.

"Oh! you needn't thank me, Joseph," she at once replied, blushing and simpering. "Everybody that possesses a heart must like *you*. But, dear me! how awkwardly you have tied your neck-cloth! I am sure that if Lady Georgiana saw it, she would scold you for being slovenly. Do let me arrange it properly for you."

"I think, Miss, it will do very well as it is——"

"Oh, no! indeed it will not!"—and flinging down her work, Miss Dakin flew towards me; so that I was compelled to submit to this proof of her kindness. Her hands trembled very much, and kept coming in contact with my face. She blushed and simpered more and more; and when she had done tying the cravat, she patted my cheek, saying, "You are a very handsome lad, Joseph; and I——"

My countenance became crimson; and flinging an indignant look upon Miss Dakin, I turned abruptly round and quitted the room. But that glance showed me that she had become all in a moment as white as a sheet: she was literally quivering too with rage. From that time forth Miss Dakin was a mortal enemy of mine.

Weeks passed on; and as Christmas approached, it was whispered in the servants' room that Lady Georgiana's youngest sister—or rather half-sister, for her father the Earl of Mandeville had married twice—was coming on a visit to Myrtle Lodge. Though a shrewd, money-loving, parsimonious man,—worshipping Mammon for Mammon's sake—Mr. Tiverton had a particular weakness: and this was that he felt proud of being allied to an aristocratic family, and therefore vain of parading any of his wife's relatives before his acquaintances. This will account for his having perhaps readily enough assented to the proposal of his spouse, that her sister Lady Calanthe Dundas should become an inmate of Myrtle Lodge for a few weeks. The meanest and most sordid, too, in a certain sphere of life, are apt to launch out somewhat at times, and on great occasions; and therefore the reader must not be surprised when I state that it was proposed to spend the Christmas season with some little gaiety at the Lodge. Preparations were made for the reception of Lady Calanthe: a new carpet and new draperies were actually and positively purchased for the chamber which she was to occupy; and invitations were issued for a dinner-party one day and a soirée for another, in the Christmas week. I was enlivened and cheered by these preliminary proceedings, which promised some relief to the monotony of the existence we all led at Myrtle Lodge. My fellow-servants seemed to imbibe the same feeling; and even John Robert was so animated with fresh life as to smile when a new suit of livery was ordered for him,—Mr. Pumpkin being engaged to supply it.

At length the day arrived on which Lady Calanthe Dundas was expected. The cook must have felt herself quite another being when she had a really good and copious repast to prepare for the dining-room, and was enabled, without any inter-

ference on the part of her mistress, to serve up a better dinner than usual in the domestics' apartment. Lady Calanthe had never before visited the Lodge; and therefore it was unknown what sort of a person she was—whether handsome or ugly—amiable or the reverse,—whether she resembled her sister, or afforded a pleasing contrast. Her very age was likewise a matter of doubt, although it was certain that she must be many years younger than Lady Georgiana. Not that my fellow-servants displayed any particular anxiety upon these points: for the conjectures to which I heard them give utterance, were very few and expressed feebly and timidly. I myself however did experience some curiosity; because I felt assured that on the character and disposition of the expected visitress, would in a great measure depend the spirit and the duration of those gaieties which, heaven knows! were so much needed to dispel the soul-deadening gloom in which I had now for nearly three months lived at Myrtle Lodge.

It was between four and five o'clock in the afternoon, that a travelling carriage with post-horses dashed up to the front door of the house. John Robert and myself were promptly in attendance: Mr. Tiverton, Lady Georgiana, and Miss Dakin, likewise came forth to receive the visitress. Then from the carriage descended a handsome, well-dressed, smart-looking maid, whose age might be about five-and-twenty; and next a lady, muffled in furs, placed a hand on the abigail's shoulder and lightly tripped forth from the vehicle. The first glimpse that I obtained of her countenance by the light of the hall-lamp, showed me that it was exceedingly beautiful; while the figure, even though encumbered with its piles of winter clothing, was characterized by elegance and grace. With a gushing enthusiasm which at once gave me an insight into her heart, she flew towards her sister, whom she embraced affectionately: then in the most affable manner she gave her hand to Mr. Tiverton—and when introduced to Miss Dakin, shook hands with her also. Presently, when the dinner was served up and I was in attendance, I had a full opportunity to make further observations in respect to Lady Calanthe Dundas. Her age did not exceed eighteen; and, as before said, she was exceedingly beautiful. A cloud of the darkest, glossiest hair threw into bright and brilliant contrast the fair countenance which it enframed. She had a purely classic profile,—the straight nose joining the forehead with only the slightest indentation. The upper lip was short and curved; and whatsoever haughtiness of expression this feature would have otherwise imparted, was almost entirely mitigated by the sweetness of the smile which sat upon that coral mouth and which irradiated the entire face. Her eyes were large and dark: she had naturally but little colour on the cheeks—this however was now heightened by the cold frosty air through which she had travelled, and by the gay excitement produced by change of scene. In figure she was tall and slender—but admirably formed: while the statuesque carriage of the head and bust—the beauty of this bust—and the fine slope of the shoulders, would have constituted an exquisite model for a sculptor or a painter. There appeared to be no affectation, no aristocratic nonsense about this young lady: affable in manners, frank in speech, ingenuous in looks—with a certain becoming modesty spread over all—she was a being as yet unspoilt by the dissipations of London life,—in the same way too that her beauty was as yet undimmed and the bloom of her charms unfaded by the heated atmosphere of gilded saloons.

The lady's-maid, whose Christian name was Charlotte, has already been glanced at as a handsome smart-looking young woman. I may now add that she was of gay disposition—fond of laughing and talking—but without harm or mischief in her manner or disposition. She was exceedingly good-natured; and when she found what sort of persons she had to associate with at Myrtle Lodge, she seemed to set herself to work in good earnest to infuse a little more cheerfulness into them. I at once became a favourite with her, because I ventured to converse somewhat more openly and frankly than did my fellow-servants. She jested with John Robert on his rueful looks, though these were now cheerfulness itself in comparison with what they were wont to be; and he condescended to smile at her remarks, instead of being angry: for indeed, it was scarcely possible for even the most churlish soul to feel offended with the good-natured chattering and bantering of Charlotte the lady's-maid.

"Well," she exclaimed, before she had been an hour in the place, "you people seem excessively dull,—buried, as you are, in this out-of-the-way rural nook: but there is no reason why you should not make the best of circumstances. What? only one candle! Fie! I cannot possibly sit in the dark. Come, cook—let us have another. Oh! your mistress does not allow two candles—eh? Well, we shall see about that. You can throw all the blame upon me; and Lady Calanthe will save me from a scolding. Now, let me have a nice cup of tea—very strong. Oh, that will not do at all! What? two spoonfuls of tea for half-a-dozen people! Here, let me put it in. One spoonful for each individual, and one for the pot—that makes seven. Now, my dear creature," she continued, speaking to the housemaid, "don't think of cutting bread-and-butter like that: it would strain one's jaws to open them to such a width. Here, let me cut it——thin, with plenty of butter."

As she thus went rattling on in her good-humoured way,—and without the slightest affectation, or what may be termed giving herself "airs,"—she suited her actions to her words. She lighted another candle: she almost emptied the tea-caddy into the pot, thus consuming at least three days' supply for one meal: and she then began cutting the bread-and-butter according to her own liking. I looked on with unconcealed delight at these daring innovations: my fellow-servants with a sort of blank consternation. It soon became evident that Miss Charlotte understood what sort of persons the Tivertons were, and how the domestics had become modelled, body and soul, to the influences of a rigid discipline and a stern parsimony. Nor less was it apparent that she resolved, to the utmost of her power, to put things upon a better footing.

"Now, don't look so sadly frightened," she went on to say, sweeping her laughing and roguish blue eyes around: "I tell you to throw all the blame upon me. Depend upon it, Lady Georgiana

will not have the face to proclaim her own meanness by quarrelling with me, because I choose to make myself comfortable. Ah! I comprehend—I have nearly used all the tea? Well, we can easily buy another pound: I will treat you to it to-morrow—as I mean to go to Exeter and see all that is worth seeing. Really this room has a cold and miserable appearance: there is not an ounce of fuel in the grate. Come, my boy," she added, turning to me, "you look a little different from the rest, and seem as if you had a spirit in you. Just empty that scuttle upon the fire. But stay! —throw a good large faggot on first."

Unhesitatingly did I fulfil these instructions; and in a few minutes there was such a roaring blaze in the grate as Myrtle Lodge seldom beheld; so that the very walls themselves must have felt comfortable at having the damp dispelled by the genial and indeed unusual warmth now thrown forth. My fellow-servants appeared to have made up their minds, with a sort of reckless desperation, to let Charlotte have her own way, and to profit by the bold innovations which she was evidently determined to introduce. When once they had abandoned themselves to this mood, they all became considerably more cheerful than they had doubtless ever yet been since they first crossed the threshold of Myrtle Lodge. I began to wonder whether, when the prayer-bell rang, Miss Charlotte would join in the procession: but my speculations on this point were presently put an end to by the following circumstance.

I had occasion to go up to the drawing-room for something; and on leaving it again, was followed out by Miss Dakin. Ever since the little incident of the cravat-tying, she had been wont to seize every opportunity of darting malignant looks at me, and of pointing out to Lady Georgiana any little oversight on my part for the purpose of getting me scolded. I therefore entertained no very friendly feeling towards her,—though I may say without vanity that I was naturally too good-hearted to bear her any direct and positive rancour. I also despised her too much for the entertainment of so serious a feeling. When, however, she thus followed me out upon the landing, I hurried my pace towards the stairs,—whereupon she cried out sharply and petulantly, "Come here, sir! What are you running away like that for? You might have seen that I wished to speak to you."

I turned—but said not a word. She looked excessively spiteful and malignant, as if she could have flown at me and scratched my face with her nails.

"The next time, sir, that you see me following you from a room," she went on to observe, "with the evident intention of addressing you, you had better take care and wait in respectful attention—or you will speedily get your impudence put down, I can tell you."

Still I said nothing: but I felt that my lips were curling with contempt—whereat she actually trembled with rage, her own lips becoming white as ashes, and twitching with a spasmodic nervousness.

"It is Lady Georgiana's command," she said, the words literally hissing up from her throat with the concentrated fury of her ire,—"that the servants do not come up to prayers while Lady Calanthe is at the Lodge: but the service is to be read by John Robert in the domestics' room at the usual hour. Now, sir, will you go and give these orders? or shall I inform your master and her ladyship that you refuse?"—and she eyed me with a wicked malignity, as if nothing would have pleased her better than that I should have returned some insolent answer and laid myself open to be evilly reported in the manner she had threatened.

"I was merely awaiting, Miss," was my calm and collected response, "the orders which her ladyship has sent through you; and I do not think that you have any reason to infer that I should for a moment refuse to deliver them."

"You are insolent enough for anything!" was her quick and spiteful retort: then, as if all the energy of her passions were suddenly concentrated in the feeling she was about to express, she said in low but bitterly emphatic accents, "I hate you!"

I could not help giving a sort of scornful laugh at this avowal of aversion which was thrown out: for my spirit was to a certain degree excited—and I did not choose this wretched toady to domineer over me. As I was turning away—and indeed had already reached the stairs—she flew after me: she caught me by the arm—her fingers clasped my flesh as if with an iron vice; and still in that same low but deeply accentuated tone, she said, "Yes, I hate you—I abhor you! I could have liked you—I could have loved you madly—I would have done anything for you——But——but—— I hate you—and I will wreak all the vengeance of a woman's bitterness upon you!"

I was certainly not frightened—but I was really astonished at this address. She immediately turned away; and, no doubt composing her looks with all the power of a consummate dissimulation, re-entered the drawing-room. I had a very great mind to mention the circumstance to my fellow-servants when I descended to rejoin them; but I thought it better not. I did not like to render myself the hero of a scene; and I felt by no means flattered on account of having at any time won the love of such a creature as Miss Dakin. As for her hatred, I certainly did not fear it: for I did my duty to the utmost of my power towards my master and mistress, and resolved to be even still more circumspect than hitherto in my conduct, so as to avoid furnishing the toady with an opportunity of venting her spite upon me. Besides, I reflected that if, after all, I should lose my present situation, I had the written testimonial of Lord Ravenshill's steward as a means of procuring another. For all these considerations I kept silent in respect to Miss Dakin,—confining myself to the mere delivery of the message with which I was charged.

"And pray," inquired Charlotte, who had listened to it with an arch smile, "how long do these prayers occupy?"

"About twenty minutes," responded John Robert.

"Then, if you please," quickly exclaimed Charlotte, in a positive manner, "we will dispense with them. I am not going to sit here, Mr. John, and listen to you droning away for twenty minutes, in that voice of your's which sounds as if it came up from a grave. I always say my prayers in my own chamber; and can then pray as my heart dictates."

John Robert commenced some remonstrance: but Charlotte cut him short by a good-humoured jest. He was compelled to yield: and so we all sat talking round the blazing fire until bed-time.

On the following morning Charlotte informed us that she had obtained Lady Calanthe's permission to go to Exeter for a few hours; and moreover, that as she was a total stranger there, and did not like to proceed alone, she had Lady Georgiana's authority (obtained through her sister) to be accompanied by any one of the domestics who could be best spared.

"Of course you can't go, cook—or else there would be no dinner. As for you," addressing herself to Lady Georgiana's maid, "you are sure to be wanted when your mistress puts on that precious old faded silk gown of her's presently. You," she continued, turning to the housemaid, "have got all the rooms to do, and only one pair of hands to do them with: so I am sure you have a full week's work all to be compressed into one short day. As for you, John Robert, the ruefulness of your countenance is enough to give one the blue-devils. So I shall make you, Joseph," she concluded, in her gay manner, "the companion of my trip. I am sure I could not have a nicer little *beau;* and I shall treat you to a good lunch at the pastry-cook's. Come—be quick—put on your best livery—and let us be off."

I was by no means sorry to avail myself of this opportunity for a holiday, and gladly assented to the proposal. I lost no time in apparelling myself in my best clothes; and when I again descended to the servants' room, I found Charlotte already waiting for me. She was handsomely but neatly dressed,—with no flaunting display, and everything in good taste.

"I sha'n't forget to bring the promised pound of tea," she said, laughing, to the other servants as we took our departure. "And now, Master Joseph," she continued, as we emerged from the premises, "how are we to get to Exeter?—for I understand it is three miles, and I do not profess to be a good walker. The day is however fine and frosty; and perhaps I might make the attempt."

"You will have to do so," was my answer: "for I know not of any conveyance passing along the road at this hour. There is one—the carrier's van—which leaves Exeter at about four o'clock: and by that we can return."

"Well, this is a consolation, at all events," she cried, good-humouredly: "and therefore I will resign myself to the walk into the city. By the bye, what do you think of my young mistress? is she not a beautiful creature? But I will tell you more—she is as good and amiable as she is beautiful."

"She appears so," I observed.

"Oh, yes!" added Charlotte enthusiastically, "you can read it upon her countenance. Heavens! what a difference between her and her sister—that prim, starch, insufferably proud Lady Georgiana! I never saw her before, you know: I was not in Lord Mandeville's service when Lady Georgiana married Mr. Tiverton. That, I believe, was seven or eight years ago, when Lady Calanthe was a mere child."

"And how long have you been in attendance upon your young mistress?"

"About three years. You know Lord Mandeville married a second wife, by whom he has three daughters, of whom Lady Calanthe is the eldest. He has half-a-dozen other daughters and two sons by his first wife: so you perceive there is a perfect swarm of them; and as his Lordship, between you and me, is not very well off, the girls are all portionless."

"And are they all beautiful like Lady Calanthe?" I inquired.

"The three by the second marriage," responded Charlotte: "but the six by the first are absolute frights—though Lady Georgiana is decidedly the ugliest of the bunch. By the bye, that Miss Dakin is a very fitting companion——But why did you start so, Joseph?"

"Did I start? I am sure I was not aware of it—I did not mean it——"

"Well, I suppose it was nothing, then. Now, I am not very quick in taking aversions; but I certainly like that Miss Dakin as little as can be. Would you believe it?—as I was descending the stairs just now, after dressing myself to come out with you, I met Miss Dakin; and you should have seen how superciliously she tossed her head as she looked at me, and appeared inclined to give herself such airs, as if she felt herself a lady and that I was only a lady's-maid. Or I suppose it was because, with those shabby old things of her's, she was quite jealous to see a simple lady's-maid having good clothes on her back. I was passing her, when she said, 'By the bye, young woman, Lady Georgiana told you that you might take one of *our* servants with you:'—and she laid such stress on the *our*, just for all the world as if she were the mistress, or it was all a partnership concern: and she went on to demand, 'Pray who is to accompany you?'—'Joseph Wilmot, Miss,' I answered; and you should have then seen again how she tossed her head. I did not wait to let her give herself any more of her airs; but hurried down, thinking to find you in readiness. And you were not: but you kept me waiting full five minutes—which was very shameful of you."

Here Charlotte laughed in her good-humoured way, revealing a set of the finest teeth, which very advantageously counterbalanced a somewhat large mouth.

"What a dreadful place all you people appear to have of it!" she quickly resumed: for she was a terrible chatterbox. "I certainly expected to find something more cheerful. Lord Mandeville's seat, though out in the country, as one may call it—being at no great distance from Enfield——"

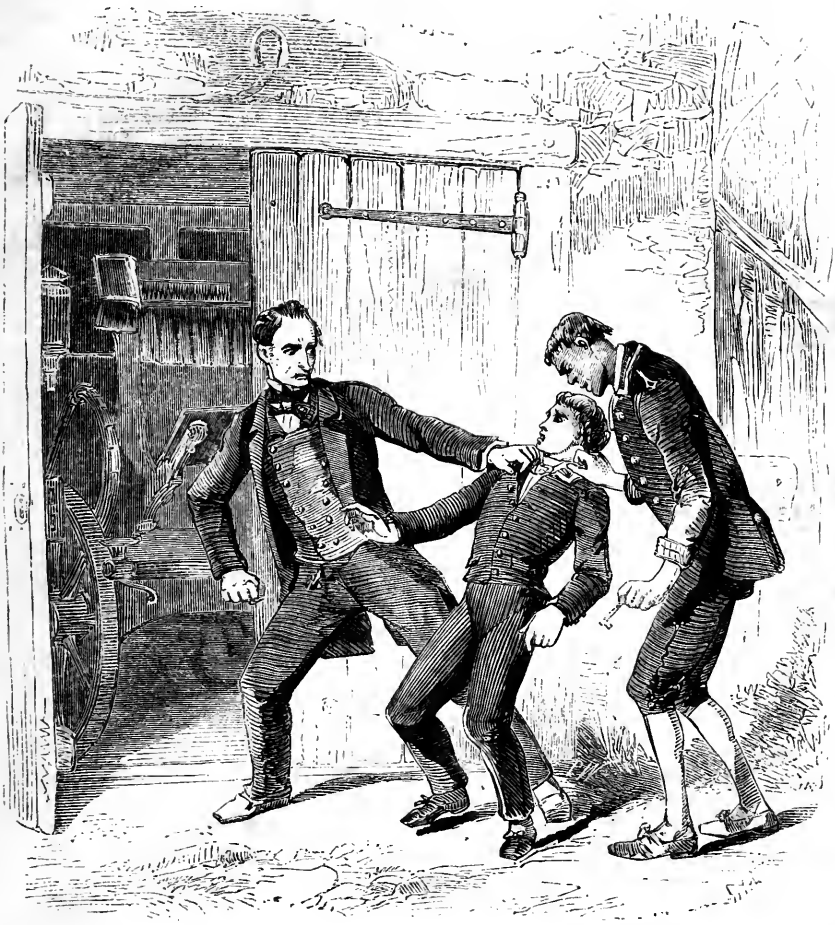
"Enfield!" I ejaculated.

"Yes, to be sure—a few miles from London. Every one who knows London, knows Enfield. Ah! by the bye, what a shocking occurrence took place in that neighbourhood about eighteen months ago——the murder, under most mysterious circumstances, of a gentleman named Delmar."

"I heard of it," was the observation I now made, but in a tremulous voice.

"Oh! every one who reads newspapers," continued Charlotte, "must have heard of it. It created an immense sensation."

"And has there never been the slightest clue to the discovery of the assassins?" I inquired: and I was half inclined to tell Charlotte how painfully intimate I was with all the circumstances of the



tragedy, save and except in regard to the very point on which I had just put the question. But on second thoughts, I kept my own counsel: for I saw that my companion was somewhat giddy and unguarded in her speech, though without meaning any harm; and I feared lest on her return to Lord Mandeville's seat, she might mention in that neighbourhood of how she had fallen in with me, and the intelligence might by some means or another reach the ears of my mortal enemy—the man who called himself my uncle—Mr. Lanover.

"No," she replied; "not the slightest clue has ever been discovered to the murderer or murderers. It has remained wrapped in a seemingly impenetrable mystery: but the deed was of course perpetrated by burglars, as some things were stolen."

"And who lives at the place now?" I asked, with difficulty concealing the emotions which this topic, whereupon the discourse had turned, was but too well calculated to excite.

"At Delmar Manor? Oh! the Hon. Mr. and Mrs. Mulgrave, to be sure. But I believe that Miss Delmar——Edith, I think her name is——at present resides there also."

"To whom does the Manor belong? But I suppose equally between those Mulgraves and Miss Delmar?"

"I really cannot say," replied Charlotte. "But you seem to know something about the matter. Were you in London at the time?"

"Yes—I was in London at the time. By the bye," I immediately added, for the purpose of avoiding farther questioning, "how long do you think you are going to remain here?"

"At the Lodge?" exclaimed Charlotte. "I must confess I hope not long; but I fear for at least six weeks or a couple of months. It may seem a bad compliment to you that I should

thus regret having to be cooped up in that dreary-looking place for such a time—particularly in this winter season: but you must candidly admit, Joseph, that your fellow-servants are not the most agreeable of companions."

"How can they be otherwise?" I asked. "I dare say that when they first set foot at the Lodge, they had their cheerful and gay moments as well as other people: but the strict discipline and the hard work are quite sufficient to crush the spirit out of anybody."

"So I should think indeed!" ejaculated Charlotte. "You are the only one who appears to have any spirit left. But you are young—I should suppose you are not seventeen yet?"

"Sixteen and a half," I observed.

"Well, getting on that way. However, at your age people put up with things better than when they are older. Youth is not so easily depressed. But if you remain another year or two in that place, you will become as ruefully owlish in your looks as that woful personage Mr. John Robert."

While thus conversing we had accomplished two-thirds of the distance to Exeter: and Charlotte now began expatiating on the appearance of the city as we drew near it. I gave her to understand that I myself was almost a perfect stranger there, my experience of the place having been limited to a few hours.

"Never mind," she said: "we shall be enabled to find our way about—and if not, we must inquire it."

We entered the city; and our first visit was paid to the cathedral, where we spent upwards of an hour. We then proceeded to a pastrycook's, where we took some refreshments,—for which I insisted upon paying; and on this point had the utmost difficulty in overruling the generous scruples of my good-humoured companion. On issuing thence, we repaired to a grocer's, where Charlotte purchased a vast quantity of tea and loaf-sugar—directing the parcel to be sent to the office whence, as I informed her, the carrier's van started, which was to convey us home.

"And now, Joseph," she said, "I have a few little purchases to make at a linendraper's; and I shall not trouble you to come inside with me—but you must have the goodness to wait at the door, or lounge up and down the street; as it will not do for us to miss each other. I know that young men have no great affection for shopping."

We soon found an establishment the external appearance of which satisfied Charlotte, after a cursory survey of the goods displayed in the window;—and while she entered, I remained outside. I had not been many minutes there, when whom should I see approaching along the street but Charles Linton? He immediately recognised me; and hastening forward, shook me warmly by the hand.

"My dear young friend," he said, "I am so glad to meet you!—so glad likewise to find you looking well! I have often thought of you; and would have written a few lines if I had known where to address a letter."

I told him where I was living, and that I had been at Myrtle Lodge ever since the breaking up of Lord Ravenshill's establishment.

"Well, and now you will be anxious," he said, "to receive such intelligence as I have to give you. I was really sorry to leave Charlton Hall in that stealthy, abrupt manner, without bidding good-bye to yourself or any of the other servants: but I really could not help it. Mr. Ravenshill insisted that I should keep his intention a profound secret. Besides, it was not until after you were all in bed, that he came quietly to my room and told me that I was to get up very early and go away with him. So, even if I had not been enjoined to silence, I should have had no opportunity for leave-taking. Do you know—or can you guess who that young lady was? But doubtless you have heard that Mr. Ravenshill is married?"

"I guessed as much—but I had obtained no knowledge on the subject. Buried as I have been in the seclusion of Myrtle Lodge——"

"Ah! then I have some news for you," interrupted Charles. "That young lady who gave you the note, was Miss Jenkinson."

"Miss Jenkinson?" I exclaimed. "Well, many and many a time have I thought to myself that it might have been she: but still, when I recollected all you had told me of how the marriage was broken off in London, on account of the duel and other matters——"

"Yes—but that was done by the old people: and so now you have a proof of what true love can accomplish. Miss Jenkinson was devotedly attached to Mr. Walter; and though a sensible, intelligent, and prudent young lady, yet she was disposed to look over his faults in respect to the attempt at carrying off Miss Cuthbert and the jilting of Miss Boustead—if indeed the latter could be regarded as a fault at all. Besides, the circumstance of Mr. Ravenshill being wounded in a duel, was sufficient to make a still deeper impression on the heart of a young lady who loved him; and it appears that when he went off suddenly to the Continent, he wrote her a letter in a manly but affectionate strain,—frankly confessing that he had at first courted her for the wealth which her father might be enabled to give her, but that he had soon learnt to love her for herself alone. He added that it was with his heart full of this feeling he now ventured to address her for the last time,—merely for the purpose of bidding her an eternal farewell, and, as an honourable man, of returning two or three letters which he had received from her. This epistle made a still deeper impression upon the young lady; and when, after the lapse of some few weeks, she read in the newspapers of the total ruin of the Ravenshill family, and how sales were about to take place of all the property, she resolved upon a particular course of action. I must tell you, Joseph, that under the will of an aunt, she was entitled to the sum of twenty thousand pounds, from which her parents could not debar her. Quitting her home in the most stealthy manner, she travelled into Devonshire. She wrote a note, addressed to Mr. Ravenshill, begging him to think not lightly of her for the course which she was adopting,—but confessing that she still reciprocated the attachment which he himself in his farewell letter had vowed to be eternal. She pleaded the peculiarity of the circumstances as an excuse for whatsoever unmaidenly or unseemly there might be in her conduct: she explained her precise position in a pecuniary sense,—adding that she knew her available fortune was only small, but

that such as it was she placed it at his disposal; and she hinted at the hope that her parents might ultimately be led to accord their forgiveness. It was this note, Joseph, which you bore for her to the hands of Mr. Ravenshill. I should add that it gave the address of an hotel at Exeter, where she awaited his response. You now can imagine the rest. He fled at an early hour in the morning,—not merely to avoid the hated marriage to which, in sheer desperation, he had a second time been induced, by urgent letters received on the Continent from his father, to give his assent,—but likewise to accompany a fairer and more amiable bride to the altar. He left a note for his lordship to this effect; and on the very same day that we proceeded to Exeter, Mr. Ravenshill and Miss Jenkinson were married by special license."

"And her parents?" I asked: "have they pardoned her?"

"Yes—at length," responded Charles. "The honeymoon was passed in Cornwall; and there have we been residing until within the last few days. We are now on our way to London, that Mr. and Mrs. Jenkinson may receive their daughter with open arms, and likewise welcome her husband. We have halted here for a few hours, as Mrs. Ravenshill is somewhat fatigued with travelling. I came out for a stroll—and am rejoiced to have fallen in with you."

"And his lordship—her ladyship also?" I said, inquiringly.

"They are upon the Continent," answered Charles. "They went straight off thither, it appears, on leaving Charlton Hall. One letter—and one letter only—has Mr. Ravenshill received from them; and that, I should observe, was penned by his mother. Her ladyship said that he had broken his father's heart; and as she felt persuaded there was no chance of Mr. and Mrs. Jenkinson forgiving their daughter, it was the most shocking match he could possibly have made. Her ladyship added that even if it should prove otherwise and the old people should relent, it was too late to rescue the property from the hands of others, or save the honour of the Ravenshill family. Thus, you may see that altogether her ladyship wrote in a very desponding way—while his lordship wrote not at all."

"But was there not," I asked, "some little bitterness as well as despondency in that letter? It would seem so, from all that you have told me."

"Yes—you are right, Joseph: for her ladyship, you know, is not endowed with the very best of tempers. Perhaps you may be surprised that I am enabled to give you so many minute details with regard to all these particulars: but you will understand how it is, when I inform you that Mr. Walter——I suppose we shall always call him Mr. Walter——now treats me quite as a confidential person."

"I am rejoiced to receive such good tidings of Mr. Walter's circumstances; and I congratulate you, Charles, upon having continued in a place which at last has proved so good a one."

At this moment Charlotte issued from the linen-draper's shop; and I introduced Charles Linton. The latter had only half-an-hour to spare before he was compelled to return to the hotel where his master and mistress had stopped: but this half-hour he spent in walking with us,—giving Charlotte his arm and treating her with much attention. At length he took leave of us; and when he was gone, Charlotte declared to me that he was the nicest young man she had ever met in her life. We proceeded to the tavern whence the carrier's van started; and taking our places in the vehicle, got back to Myrtle Lodge at about five o'clock.

CHAPTER XXII.

MYSTERY AND TROUBLE.

On the following day there was to be a dinner-party at the Lodge; and the bell rang to call the servants half-an-hour earlier than usual. I was down first of all that morning: but the reader may however rest assured that Miss Charlotte Murray, Lady Calanthe's maid, did not so speedily obey that summons; for she considered herself to be perfectly independent of the rules and regulations of the house. She did not descend till breakfast-time; and when she thus made her appearance, I was surprised to notice the marked coldness with which she treated me. As if she studiously endeavoured to make this bearing on her part all the more pointed, she bade the other servants "Good morning" in the kindest and blithest manner;—while towards me she was glacial, reserved, and distant. My fellow-domestics did not perceive it—or if they did, suffered it to pass without a comment; while I conceived that it must be mere fancy on my side. In order to arrive at a certainty on the subject, I addressed Charlotte in a marked manner: but my suspicion was confirmed—she only responded with a monosyllable—and by her tone and look gave me to understand that she would rather not discourse with me any longer. My pride was wounded: for as I knew that I had done nothing to provoke this ill-feeling, I was impatient at the thought of being rendered the victim of Charlotte Murray's caprices. On the previous day, at Exeter, we were the best of friends; she had shaken hands with me kindly, jocularly calling me "her elegant little *beau*," when we had separated for the night: and now she had come down stairs the very next morning in this humour of frigid reserve towards me.

I rose from the breakfast-table and went about my work. Numerous guests were expected to dinner; and the parsimonious habits of Mr. Tiverton and Lady Georgiana appeared to have been to a certain degree laid aside for the nonce. Nevertheless, the store-room was so badly provided with the commonest necessaries for such a household, that the cook found she required all kinds of things for her culinary preparations—even to spices, isinglass, vermicelli, and so forth. It was indispensable that some one should go to Exeter for them; and as there were so few domestics to do so much work, Charlotte volunteered the service. As she ascended the kitchen stairs, I was coming down; and we thus met face to face.

"I did not think that you were such a wicked, deceitful, depraved youth," she immediately said, in a low whisper, but with a severe look.

I was perfectly astounded—and was so com-

pletely taken by surprise, that I could not give utterance to a single syllable: so that it is very probable my appearance and manner seemed to imply a consciousness of guilt.

"Yes—you do well not to deny it," she went on to say. "I do not wish to make mischief—and therefore I shall say nothing upon the subject. You know very well to what I allude; and I must beg that so long as I may be unfortunate enough to remain in this horrid place, you will not address yourself to me again. Do not think that because I laugh and joke and am good-tempered, there is any levity or want of principle about *me*. If you do, you are very much mistaken."

With these words, she brushed past me and hurried up-stairs. I remained rooted to the spot for nearly a minute: I could not possibly understand what it all meant. The accusations—or rather the epithets thrown out against me—"wicked, deceitful, depraved"—were strong indeed; and I knew full well that I merited them not. Slander had evidently been at work. But how? or where? What could Charlotte have possibly heard between the hour of retiring to rest and that of coming down in the morning? Ah! I began to suspect that Miss Dakin must have been saying things to my prejudice in the presence of Lady Calanthe, who had repeated them to her maid. Conceiving this to be the only possible means of accounting for Charlotte's conduct, I resolved to seek an immediate explanation with her; and for this purpose I loitered about on the stairs till she should descend again.

In a few minutes she came tripping down, dressed to go out; and she looked both astonished and angry when thus waylaid by me.

"Charlotte," I said, "you have accused me wrongfully. This must be explained."

"Explained indeed!" she repeated, drawing herself up disdainfully. "Are you so consummate a hypocrite——"

"Hypocrite?—no, Charlotte!" I interrupted her, the blood crimsoning my countenance.

"But you are!" she retorted; "and your present conduct most lamentably confirms it. But I am wrong thus to converse farther with you. Understand me well, Joseph—there *can* be no explanations after what I myself saw with my own eyes. But as I do not wish to ruin a youth like you, I renew my promise not to mention it. You alone therefore shall know that I did see it. And now not another word!"

She hurried past me; and again was I so confounded as to continue rivetted to the spot. What on earth could she mean? what was it that she had seen? I was cruelly chagrined and bewildered. To me it was evident enough that she was labouring under some extraordinary error,—though whatever it were, she was as firmly convinced that I *had* done something which merited the strong epithets she had thrown out against me. It was likewise clear that no scandal had been at work; and I had wrongfully suspected Miss Dakin. The thing, whatsoever it were, that was uppermost in the mind of Charlotte Murray, was not entertained upon hearsay, but had been beholden with her own eyes. What could it mean? I knew not; and in a state of bewilderment I descended to the pantry, to assist John Robert in cleaning the plate.

The incident which I have been describing, took place at about ten o'clock in the forenoon. Charlotte had set off for Exeter: she had to walk thither; but it had been arranged that she was to come back in the cart belonging to the grocer who supplied the Lodge, and who would have to bring over the purchases she was to make. I thus calculated that at least a couple of hours must elapse before Charlotte would return; and then I resolved to insist upon the fullest explanations. I felt annoyed: but, still armed with conscious innocence, I was perfectly well assured that the mystery would be cleared up to my complete satisfaction.

On entering the pantry, I found John Robert labouring under a degree of excitement which was so unusual on his part, that I was at once convinced something extraordinary must have occurred. His countenance, which was wont to be so solemnly rueful, was animated with an expression of bewilderment and uneasiness; and he was hunting about in every nook and corner of the pantry with the air of a man who had lost something.

"What is it, John?" I asked.

"What is it?" he said, with a grunt: "why, half-a-dozen of the large spoons and half-a-dozen dessert spoons missing, besides a couple of silver sauce-ladles. I can't make it out."

"Missing?" I ejaculated. "Perhaps master forgot to give them out?"—for I should observe that the plate-basket was duly consigned by John Robert every night to Mr. Tiverton, who took it up into his own room and brought it down again in the morning.

"Yes—he gave them all out," replied the footman. "Last night, when I took up the plate-basket, master told me to keep charge of it, as I should want to be cleaning the things early in the morning; and he at the same time gave me the rest of the forks and spoons that would be wanted for to-day. He counted it all out before me last night; and here's the list," added John Robert, pointing to a piece of paper that lay upon the dresser in the pantry.

"And where was the plate all night?" I inquired.

"Why, that's the worst of it," answered the footman. "Like a fool as I was, I left it all down here. I thought it quite safe: and here's a precious mess I shall get myself into!"

"But could any thieves have introduced themselves in the night?" was my next question.

"Thieves?—no! Every door was fastened when I come down——"

"To be sure!" I ejaculated, recollecting that it was so: "for I was first down this morning, two or three minutes before you."

"Well, and you found all safe, didn't you? Besides, if thieves had broke in, they wouldn't have been so nice as to take a part—they would have walked off with the whole."

The cook and housemaid, hearing somewhat of all that was going on, now came into the pantry;—and to them the circumstance of the missing plate was duly mentioned. Scarcely had they expressed their astonishment and alarm, when down stairs rushed Lady Georgiana's maid, her countenance expressing her fright and dismay. It must have been a long time since she had sped at such

a pace, or since her usually rigid features had exhibited so much emotion.

"Here's a pretty to-do!" she cried. "Her ladyship's most valuable ring—the diamond, you know, set round with pearls——"

"Well, what about it?" we all asked, anticipating the announcement of some fresh calamity.

"What about it?" she repeated. "Why, her ladyship left it on the drawing-room table last night——she had been trying on some new gloves before going up to bed, and so took off the ring——"

"And what has happened? what has happened?" we asked, eagerly and anxiously.

"It is gone," rejoined the maid.

"Gone! And the plate too!" we ejaculated.

At this moment the parlour-bell rang violently; and I hastened up to answer it. I found Mr. Tiverton, Lady Georgiana, and Miss Dakin, all three in a most excited state; while Lady Calanthe Dundas was saying, "Pray, my dear sister, tranquillize yourself. The ring cannot be lost—rest assured that it can only be mislaid."

These were the words to which that amiable young lady was giving utterance at the moment I entered the room: but Lady Georgiana was not to be appeased by such representations.

"Joseph Wilmot," she exclaimed, "have you learnt that a ring has been lost?"

"Yes, my lady," I responded." And—and——" I was going on to say, with some degree of hesitation; but as it instantaneously struck me that I might be seriously compromising poor John Robert, I stopped short.

"What were you going to say, Joseph Wilmot?" cried her ladyship.

"Don't bewilder the boy," interposed Mr. Tiverton. "You see how confused he looks."

"Bewilder the boy!" ejaculated Lady Georgiana. "Did you ever hear such a thing, Miss Dakin?"

"Never, in all my life," answered the toady, who for a wonder did not on the present occasion dart at me her wonted malignant glances.

"Now, Joseph—speak out," said Mr. Tiverton. "What were you going on to observe when you checked yourself? If you can throw any light upon this unpleasant matter, don't hesitate——"

"Hesitate?" echoed Lady Georgiana. "Who ever heard of a servant daring to hesitate? Did you, Miss Dakin?"

"Never," was the toady's reply.

"Now, my dear sister," interrupted Lady Calanthe, with the most amiable spirit imaginable, "do let this youth be questioned quietly and deliberately. It is evident that he knows or suspects something; and you had better let him tell his tale in his own manner. He seems a nice lad—a very nice lad," Lady Calanthe added, in an aside whisper to her sister; but my ear caught the words, though they were evidently not intended to be thus overheard by me.

"I know nothing about the diamond ring," I proceeded to remark, in as collected a manner as possible: "but I was about to inform your ladyship——"

"Address yourself to me, Joseph," said Mr. Tiverton, thus with a stern air asserting his rights. "*I* am the master of the house; and in serious matters of this description, I choose to act as the chief investigator."

"The master of the house!" said Lady Georgiana, disdainfully repeating her husband's words. "Did you ever hear of such a thing, Miss Dakin?"

"Never——only excepting when Mr. Tiverton chooses to say so:" and thus by a sort of compromise in the method of her phraseology, the artful toady avoided giving offence to either.

"Go on, Joseph," said Mr. Tiverton, in a peremptory tone. "What were you about to inform me?"

"That I am sorry to say, sir, some of the plate is likewise missing——"

"The plate missing!" exclaimed Mr. Tiverton. "Then there is positively a thief in the house!"—and rushing to the bell, he rang it violently.

"Plate missing!" echoed Lady Georgiana: and Miss Dakin, thinking it her duty to take up the same strain, though in a lower key, shrieked in a half-stifled hysterical voice, "Plate missing!"

Mr. Tiverton went on tearing at the bell-pull until John Robert made his appearance.

"Have up all the others!" exclaimed Mr. Tiverton: "let the whole of the servants come hither at once!"

John Robert, overwhelmed by this bursting forth of the storm which he had foreseen, and the anticipation of which had filled him with such dire alarm, was unable to hurry away to bear his master's mandate: I accordingly sped down stairs, and quickly summoned the lady's-maid, the housemaid, and the cook, up into the parlour. A few hurried words were alone necessary to make them comprehend what the excitement was about; and in less than a minute we were all grouped together in the presence of our master and mistress, Lady Calanthe Dundas, and Miss Dakin. The queries that were put to us were hurried and impetuous, and constantly interrupted by cross-firing and sparring between Mr. Tiverton and Lady Georgiana in their struggle with each other to assert the supremacy. Ultimately, however, it was elicited from John Robert that he had left the plate in the pantry the whole night—that I was the first down in the morning, and that I found all the doors and windows were fastened as usual—that it was not until after breakfast he had commenced cleaning the plate—and that he had been thus engaged for at least a couple of hours ere he discovered that six large spoons, six small ones, and two sauce-ladles were deficient.

Lady Georgiana talked of sending for constables; Miss Dakin considered it to be highly necessary; Mr. Tiverton appeared for once to be inclined to agree with his wife and the toady: but Lady Calanthe hastened to suggest the course which she considered proper and fitting to be pursued.

"Mr. Tiverton," she proceeded to say,—"and you too, my dear sister—I beg that you will not act precipitately. The two occurrences of the ring and the plate are most mysterious: to send for constables would be tantamount to casting suspicion upon the domestics of your household; and this, I am sure, you would be most unwilling to do without the best possible grounds. Let the investigation be conducted with all becoming privacy; and the servants, for their own sake, will no doubt volunteer to suffer their boxes to be examined. Not, be it understood," she added, glancing im-

pressively towards us, "that I apprehend for a moment such a course will result in any discovery prejudicial to yourselves: but under circumstances, it is the best to be pursued;—and on the part of my own attendant Charlotte, who has gone to Exeter, I readily consent to such examination."

"The very thing that I should like," said John Robert: "'cos why, I want to acquit myself. As for purlining the plate, I'd scorn such a hactión!" he added, his indignant feelings for a moment rendering him excited: and then he composed himself with a grunt.

We all expressed a similar readiness to have our boxes examined; and Mr. Tiverton, begging the ladies to remain in the parlour, was about to issue forth, when Lady Georgiana insisted on accompanying him,—asserting that she was the head of the domestic department of the household; and in corroboration thereof, she appealed to Miss Dakin. The toady had not however time to give a reply, ere Mr. Tiverton said in a peremptory manner, "This is an affair too serious to be trifled with: it is my command that you remain here!"

Lady Georgiana ejaculated, "Did you ever?"—to which Miss Dakin responded, "No, I never;"—and Lady Calanthe addressed herself to the task of pacifying them both. Mr. Tiverton thus gained the victory in this last little domestic squabble; and issuing from the room, was followed by us servants.

Not a word was spoken as we all ascended to the highest storey; and the cook's attic being first, was first to be examined. But as Mr. Tiverton was about to enter, it evidently struck him that there was something indelicate in his prosecuting this search in the females' chambers: so he bade the lady's-maid hasten down stairs and tell Miss Dakin to come up immediately. The errand was speedily accomplished; and the toady made her appearance. While Mr. Tiverton and the servants all remained in the passage, Miss Dakin searched the boxes and the drawers in the cook's room: she even examined the bedding and between the mattresses. The result was completely satisfactory. The lady's-maid's and the housemaid's chambers were next scrutinized in a similar manner, and with a similar result: then came John Robert's room, which was searched by Mr. Tiverton—and equally without the discovery of either lost ring or missing plate. The chamber occupied by Charlotte Murray was then entered by Miss Dakin: the box was found to be open, and the result of the search proved to be as satisfactory as the former ones. My chamber, which was at the end of the passage, was the last to be examined; and it was again Mr. Tiverton's turn to institute the search. As a matter of course, I felt perfectly easy as to what the issue would be, and I was wondering to myself how the lost objects could have so mysteriously disappeared,—when an ejaculation bursting from Mr. Tiverton's lips, made us all rush into the room from the passage, where we had remained grouped together. From between the mattresses he produced the plate, wrapped up in paper, and tied round with a string!

I felt like one annihilated. A dizziness seized upon my brain: the blood turned cold at my very heart's core; and I staggered back as if about to faint. I remember that such ejaculations as, "O Joseph!" "Wicked boy!" "Who could have thought it?" fell confusedly upon my ears: but I could not distinguish from whose lips respectively each successive reproach and upbraiding fell. For nearly a minute I was as one dying; it seemed as if all sense of life were ebbing away. But suddenly a horrible clearness seized upon my mind: I was startled up to a keen and vivid comprehension of the dreadful circumstances in which I was placed: and the flush of outraged innocence glowing upon my face, which, as I afterwards learnt, had at first turned so ashy pale, I exclaimed, "No, sir! I am incapable of such a thing! It is some hideous conspiracy to effect my ruin!"

While thus speaking, I swept my eyes around upon all those present; and as my looks settled again on Mr. Tiverton, I saw that he was stern and decided—that my vehement repudiation was not believed—and that he was determined to go to extremities. As for my fellow-domestics, their countenances manifested surprise and dismay; while Miss Dakin also looked profoundly astonished; and even amidst the whirl of my tortured feelings, I could not help observing at the moment that her features expressed no malignant satisfaction nor spiteful triumph at the sudden ignominy into which I was plunged.

"The ring! where is the ring, Joseph?" demanded Mr. Tiverton. "Come, confess!—you will do yourself no good——"

"Sir," I interrupted him, with passionate vehemence, "I have nothing to confess. As there is a God above me, I am innocent! I would sooner starve than commit such a deed! Circumstances may be against me——to me they are utterly incomprehensible——"

"Enough, sir!" ejaculated Mr. Tiverton: "this is the most wretched of sophistry."

Thus speaking, he quickly turned towards the bed again, and resumed his search between the mattresses. Another ejaculation escaped his lips as he drew forth a tiny paper-packet; and opening it, displayed the lost ring.

"Oh, Joseph!" said John Robert, shaking his head most ruefully. "Into what a sad scrape might you have got us all!"—and he gave his wonted half-grunt, half-groan.

"Down to the parlour with him!" vociferated Mr. Tiverton: and as he seized me by one arm, John Robert clutched me by the other.

"I am innocent! God knows that I am innocent!" I exclaimed, now bursting into tears: for it was horrible to be thus deemed and treated as a felon, while having within my own heart the full consciousness of freedom from guilt.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE COACH-HOUSE.

I was hurried down to the parlour; and the moment the door was thrown open, Lady Georgiana and her sister Calanthe both uttered ejaculations of astonishment to see me thus thrust forward in a manner which naturally smote them with the conviction that I was the culprit. I saw that Lady Calanthe was perfectly astounded—incredulous even of what she herself beheld: while it was

evident that Lady Georgiana had little expected the deed to be brought home to *me*. Mr. Tiverton displayed the ring and the plate, and in a few hurried words explained how they were discovered beneath the mattress of my bed.

"And now, John Robert," he said, "go to Exeter and fetch a constable."

"For heaven's sake, mind what you are doing, sir!" I exclaimed, full of anguished horror at the thought of being dragged away to a felon's gaol. "I am innocent—I invoke heaven to attest my averment of innocence! Oh, sir, I am friendless in the wide world—I am an orphan—I have no relations to whom I can appeal—circumstances will overwhelm me—but sooner or later my innocence must be made apparent; and *then* what will be your feelings as you look back upon the ruin of a fellow-creature—a ruin wrought by your hands!"

"All this is useless, vile boy," responded Mr. Tiverton. "Circumstances are indeed against you. Was he not down first in the morning?"

"He was, sir," answered John Robert. "And yet, you know, *that* might be an accident: for, when I recollect, he is very often down first."

"To be sure!" interjected Lady Georgiana: "to watch his opportunity to steal the plate—and now at last he has found it!"

"Besides," added Mr. Tiverton, "the confusion of your manner, Joseph, when you first came into the parlour, and when we had so much difficulty in making you speak out——and your looks upstairs too, a few minutes back, when I drew forth the parcel from your bed——yes, there can be no doubt of it! At all events I have a duty to perform—a duty towards society—and it must be fulfilled. John Robert, be off to Exeter as quick as ever you can, and return with a constable."

"But what on earth are we to do," exclaimed Lady Georgiana, "about this dinner? No—John Robert cannot be spared: he has got his own work and all this vile boy's into the bargain. We must secure him in some place—a coal-cellar, for instance—till to-morrow."

"Really," interposed Lady Calanthe, who all this time had been surveying me with the most earnest attention—this fixed scrutiny being not unmingled with a certain amount of compassionating sympathy,—"really, if I were you, Mr. Tiverton, I would not be too precipitate——"

"Precipitate!" he exclaimed. "Do you think, Calanthe, that there is any doubt?"

"I should certainly be sorry to say," she answered, mildly yet firmly, "that I entertain the positive conviction of this youth's guilt: but on the other hand, I am equally at a loss to reconcile existing circumstances with an idea of his innocence."

"Innocent!—he can't be innocent! It's impossible!" exclaimed Mr. Tiverton. "Never mind the dinner-party: we must manage as best we can. John Robert, once more——"

I had thrown a look of fervid gratitude upon Lady Calanthe for her humane generosity in boldly proclaiming that doubt as to my guilt; and I now exclaimed, "No, send me not to gaol! May the Almighty strike me dead at your feet if I committed this deed!"

The domestics looked appalled at the tremendous solemnity of this invocation: Mr. Tiverton knitted his brows with ire: Lady Calanthe seemed forcibly struck by my words and manner: while Lady Georgiana, making herself shudder visibly, clasped her hands and said, "Oh, the horrid blasphemy! Did you ever, Miss Dakin? did you ever?"

But for a wonder the toady did not answer: she was standing at a distance from the rest; and as my eyes settled upon her, methought that I read something like compassion in her looks, as I had already beheld it—but far more unmistakably—in those of Lady Calanthe.

"Now, my dear Mr. Tiverton," said this excellent young lady, approaching her brother-in-law and gazing wistfully up into his countenance, "do, pray, be guided by me. The banquet of this evening is to be given as a welcome for my presence here; and I beseech that it may not be marred. You cannot possibly dispense with your footman for two or three hours: besides, if this lad be given into custody, you will have to go before some magistrate and make your deposition. I do not understand these things very well: but such appears to me to be the necessity of the case, if you at once proceed to extremes. Keep him in safe custody until to-morrow morning; and then——"

"Well, be it so," said Mr. Tiverton curtly: and it was evidently with a bad grace that he yielded to the intercession of his sister-in-law: for he doubtless felt that it was a point which his wife in reality gained, she having been the first to hint at the inconvenience which would be felt by sending John Robert away from his duties on such an occasion.

Again did I fling a quick glance of most respectful gratitude upon the amiable Lady Calanthe: for I full well comprehended that she cared nothing about the marring of the dinner-party—but that she took this step from motives of the kindest consideration towards myself; and probably with the idea that if the matter stood over until the morrow, it would end in my simple dismissal, and not in any harsher extreme.

"But where shall we put him for safe custody?" exclaimed Mr. Tiverton. "Ah, I have it! Come, John Robert—we will lock him up in the coach-house."

I was now conducted from the parlour,—again grasped by Mr. Tiverton on one side and the footman on the other: and thus was I hurried to the back premises, where, the yard being traversed, I was thrust into the coach-house. The door was locked, and the key taken away.

Through parsimonious reasons, Mr. Tiverton had about three years back given up keeping horses: but there was an old lumbering chariot in the coach-house; and when its services were needed, post-horses were procured from Exeter. The coach-house was almost completely dark: there was no place to sit down upon; so I opened the door of the vehicle—and entering it, threw myself upon the cushions, where I burst into a fresh agony of weeping. These tears afforded me relief. I grew somewhat calmer, and began to reflect upon my position. Even if Mr. Tiverton should not proceed to extremes, I felt that I was utterly ruined all the same——unless, indeed, my innocence should be made apparent. But how was this to be brought about? I settled myself to the most deliberate meditation; and thoughts

began to arise in my mind which in the hurry and whirl of my previous ideas, had not leisure nor opportunity to suggest themselves before. That the plate and ring had been placed in my room for the malignant motive of accomplishing my ruin, now appeared to me unquestionably evident. No one having the intention of really stealing those articles, would have thus disposed of them: for even if they had not been discovered in the manner they were, they must have been found later in the day when the housemaid went to make the bed. Therefore an intending thief, by secreting his plunder there, would have baffled his own aims: and it was simply ludicrous to conceive any one capable of such arrant madness. Malignity, then, was the origin of the transaction. But who was my enemy? I could not fix upon any one of the servants: I had never done them an injury: I had always been willing and obliging; and until this fatal occasion had found myself rather a favourite amongst them than otherwise. Neither for a single moment could I imagine that Charlotte Murray was the authoress of the foul deed. But Miss Dakin—had not she avowed herself to be my foe? had not she menaced me with the direst vengeance that woman's hatred could wreak? Yes: but might not those expressions have been wrung from her by the intensity of her feelings at a particular moment, and without the actual purpose of being carried into effect? Besides, her entire bearing throughout the scene in my chamber and that in the parlour, had been totally devoid of malignant triumph or gloating satisfaction at a successful perfidy. So far from that being the case, there was a moment—as I have already stated—when methought she had contemplated me with a look of sorrow.

Upwards of an hour and a half elapsed while I was thus giving way to my reflections: and wretched, as well as bewildering enough, they were. Oh! what was to become of me? I asked myself a thousand times: how was my innocence to be brought to light? And if it were not, should I be turned adrift on the wide world, branded with a felon's infamy, and every avenue to future employment closed against me? Already did I behold myself standing anew on the brink of that awful poverty which had flung me into the power of the man Taddy. And Annabel too,—might not *she* hear of the depth of degradation into which I was plunged? For I said to myself that though lost she herself was, I still valued her good opinion—and Oh, it was all horrible to think of!

I had been, I said, about an hour and a half in the coach-house, when I heard the sounds of horses' hoofs and the roll of wheels rattling up to the yard-gate: and then the bell at that gate was rung. I thought to myself that this was the grocer's cart, and that it had brought back Charlotte Murray, who would now hear of my ignominious position. Ah! this reflection called vividly up to my mind the incidents which had taken place between myself and her in the morning; and somehow or another it seemed to associate itself with the circumstances which had since transpired relative to the plate and the ring: but how the two cases could thus possibly connect themselves, I was at a loss to understand. That it was however so, I had now the deeply-settled conviction in my mind. What did she mean by calling me wicked, deceitful, and depraved? Was she already aware that the articles were secreted beneath my mattress? No—that was an hypothesis not to be dreamt of for a moment: because she would not have undertaken to hush up the presumed knowledge of a theft. While I was thus pursuing my bewildering train of thought, I heard the yard-gate open; and the grocer's boy, whose voice I well knew, exclaimed, "Here, cook, are the things the young woman came and ordered."

"But where is the young woman herself?" asked the cook.

"Ah! that I don't know," replied the boy. "She said that she was coming over with me in the cart—that she had a purchase or two to make for herself just up the street—and that she should not be five minutes. I waited near half-an-hour; and as she did not come back, and it was getting on for twelve, I thought you would want these things—and so I came off without her."

"Well, I suppose she was delayed somehow or another," said the cook: and there the colloquy ended,—the yard-gate closing, and the grocer's cart rattling away again.

I should observe that the coach-house was so close to the gate that I was enabled to catch every syllable of this little dialogue; and I was rather surprised that Charlotte Murray had not returned in the way she originally intended,—particularly as I knew she did not like much walking. I was not however in a humour to suffer my attention to remain long fixed on so comparatively trivial an incident, when the gravity of my own circumstances demanded all my consideration. Over and over again did I revolve these circumstances, as well as all the varied ideas, suspicions, and misgivings which they suggested: but I could neither settle my mind to any fixed belief as to who was the author or authoress of the foul wrong which had stricken me—nor could I flatter myself with the hope of making my innocence apparent.

Between one and two o'clock John Robert unlocked the door of the coach-house, and thrust me in a plate containing bread-and-cheese and a mug of water,—curtly informing me that this was all the dinner I might expect. Descending from the interior of the vehicle, I took the food from his hands,—saying, "John, is it possible that you believe me really guilty?"

He made no verbal response—but only gave that half-grunt, half-groan, which was used by him to express so many different feelings and conditions of mind: then abruptly banging the door, he locked it and re-entered the house. I could scarcely touch a mouthful of food: I was too profoundly wretched to experience any appetite: but I drank the water with avidity—for my throat was parched as if I had been swallowing arid sand. Slowly, slowly did the hours move by; and as the afternoon advanced, in silence and darkness for me, I thought to myself that Charlotte Murray would return by the carrier's van which passed along the road between four and five o'clock,—supposing that she had not already come back. And that she had not, I had every reason to suppose, inasmuch as each time the gate-bell had rung, I gathered who it was; and of all the voices thus heard, had caught not her's. Still, too, as the afternoon merged into the evening—both being alike equally

dark at that mid-winter period of the year—I heard nothing to indicate that Charlotte had returned. Presently the roll of carriages, coming from the front part of the building, reached my ears; and I knew that the guests were beginning to arrive for the dinner-party. It was therefore half-past six o'clock. John Robert now found time to pay me another hurried visit: some more bread and cheese, and a fresh supply of water, were thrust into the coach-house. I did not again venture to address him: I saw that it was useless. Indeed, how could I wonder that he should believe in my guilt?—for was not the weight of circumstantial evidence overwhelmingly crushing? He banged the door—and quickly locking it, hurried off.

It struck me that he had not taken out the key. I passed my hand over the lock; and could feel the end of the key slightly protruding. I know not why I should have done this: it was an involuntary proceeding on my part, without any particular aim. I entertained not the slightest thought of escape; and even if I had, the circumstance of the key being left in the lock *from the outside*, would not have forwarded such a view. No—I harboured not the idea: had the door been open, I should have tarried where I was, in order to face my cruel dilemma with the boldness of conscious integrity. To escape——no, no! *that* would have been to confirm the dread accusations pending against me!

From the pitchy black interior of the place in which I was imprisoned, I continued to catch the sounds of arriving equipages for at least half-an-hour. The guests had come—the drawing-room was a scene of gaiety—the dining-room would soon be one of festivity: and there was I, immured in the darkness of that coach-house! But I was not afraid. I had long since triumphed over those superstitious beliefs and apprehensions which I had

at one time imbibed, when at Charlton Hall, through the reading of certain books: although the incident at the village church on Midsummer's Eve, had often and often recurred to my mind, and I had some difficulty in convincing myself that the apparition of Annabel's countenance at the window was only the result of a fevered fancy.

The hours passed on; and feeling exhausted, I partook of the sorry fare which John Robert had twice brought me. The coach-house was bitter cold: the currents of air penetrated through the crevices in the small door and the folding-ones, with the keenness of ice-shafts;—and I remained inside the vehicle, not merely because it was the only resting-place, but likewise for the sake of warmth. As nearly as I can guess, it must have been about ten o'clock when I fell asleep; and all the circumstances of the morning were re-enacted in my dreams, but distorted with the exaggerations as well as with the heightened horrors usually characteristic of such visions.

I knew not how long I had slept, when I was slowly awakened by the noise as of a door opening; and for a few moments I remained perfectly still, scarcely even giving myself the trouble to listen with a sharper exercise of the faculty,—for I fancied I was still sleeping and still dreaming. But this state of mingled uncertainty and quiescence did not last many moments: for I soon became convinced that I was really and truly awake, and that it was likewise a veritable sound which I heard. Yes—the coach-house door was opening: I caught the whispering of voices in the low rustling tones of male tongues; and then I *did* listen with the keenest suspense. What could this mean? who could these be that were entering thus stealthily? The door closed; and then one of the individuals, speaking in a somewhat louder voice than before, said, "Now, Bill, show the darkey."

Good heavens, that voice!—it was unmistakable! The tones—the accents—the quick sharp manner in which the ruffian spoke, were beyond the possibility of doubt: it was the voice of Taddy!

The next instant there was a sudden flashing forth of a light from the close vicinage of the coach-house door; and from the interior of the vehicle my terrified looks were flung upon the countenances of Taddy and his companion: for there were only these two persons who had thus stealthily made their way into the place. I had drawn up the windows of the old carriage to keep myself as warm as possible: it was through the dingy glass that I thus caught a glimpse of those men's faces:—one was Taddy's, as I had felt assured—the other was totally unknown to me, but of so ruffianly an aspect as to make my blood stagnate into a still more glacial chill in my veins. Fortunate was it for me that I was not perceived by them; and in a few moments the lantern which had flung forth the light, was darkened again.

"There, Tom," Taddy's companion immediately said, "I told you as how we should find the old rattletrap in the coachus: and so we'll just creep in and hide ourselves, that when John Robert comes to lock up as usual, if he should happen to look in, he won't twig us: for it ain't by no manner of means likely that he'll poke his nose into the carriage."

Such were the words which were spoke by Taddy's companion: but before he had completed his sentence, I was extricating myself from the horrible danger in which that speech made me aware I was placed.

I had been suddenly galvanized back into the fullest and completest vitality: all the feelings of existence were excited to the keenest and most poignant sensibility. To lower the glass, thrust forth my arm, seize the handle, and open the door on the opposite side from that where they were standing, was the work of but a few moments. And noiselessly too was it done,—as if a spirit were working with mere phantom-objects. I crept forth: the old carriage was too heavy to sway much with my light weight; and whatsoever little creaking sound it might have sent forth, was lost to the two men in the noise of their own footsteps as they approached the door on their side. At the same instant that they opened that door, I closed the one by which I had emerged from the vehicle; and I slipped underneath it,—sinking on the cold stones, as much exhausted with the sudden return of terror as if I had just been achieving some tremendous physical labour.

The two fellows entered the carriage, closing the door by which they had thus admitted themselves into it. They did not think of putting up the window which I had let down: perhaps they did not even feel to ascertain whether it were raised or not. A couple of men, seated together inside the carriage, were by no means so likely to experience the nipping chill of the December night, as I was when alone and sleeping too. To the circumstance of that window being left down, was I indebted for my ability to overhear the conversation which now took place between Thomas Taddy and his companion: for, as they spoke in somewhat hushed voices, had the glass been raised I should scarcely have caught what they said.

"And so, Bill," said Taddy, "you are certain that we shall do a good thing here?"

"I hav'n't no manner of doubt on it," was the fellow's response. "As sure as my name's Bill Blackbeard, we'll get a pretty good lot of swag to-night."

"How long was it since you were groom here at the Lodge?" asked Taddy.

"Oh! that was a matter of three years ago," answered Bill Blackbeard. "The Tivertons used to keep a couple of horses then; and precious rum uns they was, too. Half a sack of corn a week was allowed for their keep; and what with such short commons and the hay too being stinted, they was reglar skillintons. I have seed many a better pair since then, in the London hackney-coaches."

"And how was it that you left the Lodge, Bill?" inquired Taddy. "For being too industrious, too civil, and too sober?"

"No—I was a decent feller enough in them times," answered Blackbeard: "but you see, the Tivertons got meaner and stingier every day; and so they put down their horses at last, having made a kalkilation that they could save eighteen-pence a-year by having job-horses whenever they wanted 'em. So you see, I was turned adrift; and then I fell into what's called bad company——though I think it precious good company, mind you!—and so I never went into sarvice no more, but took to knocking about the world and living by my vits."

"And a precious starvation such a living would

prove, old fellow," rejoined Taddy, "if it wasn't that every now and then you tumbled in with such a clever chap as I am. Why, you don't seem to have two ideas of your own how to do a thing——"

"The fact is," interrupted Bill Blackbeard, "I always work best with a mate; and so although I'd been thinking for a month past to do this little bit of a job for myself, up here at the Lodge, I couldn't exactly make up my mind——"

"Till you fell in with me a few days ago," added Taddy, in his sharp quick manner. "Well, I hope it will turn up a trump. You are sure that when there's a party at the Lodge, the plate is always left lying about in the pantry till next morning?"

"Yes, to be sure—I know that fast enough!" exclaimed Blackbeard. "Do you think I've forgot John Robert's ways? Not me indeed! He's sure to leave the plate out in the pantry; and we shall have a deuced fine grab at it—cos why, these Tivertons has that old-fashioned heavy plate that turns to such good account in the melting-pot. Besides, the pantry is quite handy, as I've described it to you: just a shutter to break open, a couple of iron bars to take out, a vinder to lift up, and there you be!"

"I have not forgotten what you've already told me," observed Taddy. "But I say, during these three years since you left the Tivertons, have you never once called up here again?"

"Never afore I came peeping about two or three days back, just to see whether John Robert was still in the place——"

"Because, if so, you could make sure," added Thomas Taddy, "that according to his old habit, he would leave the plate in the pantry? Well, I hope we may get a good haul; and then sha'n't we have done a capital day's work! Twenty guineas a-piece in the morning for trapping and carrying off that young woman—and now all this plate——"

"Ah! wasn't that a rum lark?" exclaimed Bill Blackbeard. "On'y fancy a genelman as never seed the young woman afore in all his life, making up his mind in a minute to have her spirited away! But it's just like Sir Malcolm. When I was at the Lodge, he wisited the Tivertons: he was a mere lad then, and hadn't come into his property: but he was a wild harum-scarum sort of a feller—always running arter the gals, and not caring what sort of scrapes he got his-self into as long as he suited his own pleasures. Now, that's the kind of chap I like to have to do with! And isn't it a deuced handsome young woman he's got hold of now? I wonder whether she's come round quite amiable or not by this time."

"Oh, of course she has!" observed Taddy. "She looked like a tradesmen daughter, or a superior kind of lady's-maid, or something of that sort; and when Sir Malcolm Wavenham comes his palaver over her, she'll consent fast enough to accept a handsome income at his hands. But what was that we heard somebody saying at the public-house this evening, when the name of Sir Malcolm was mentioned? Ah! those chaps who began to talk of the Baronet, little thought that you and me had been employed by him for such a pretty business this forenoon. But what was it they said?"

"Why, that he'd got a sweet young creatur' living with him at Wavenham Park, just beyond Charlton—a matter of twenty odd mile off. Well, now he's got another mistress——"

"Yes: but I don't think, from what he said," observed Taddy, "that he meant to take her to the Park. But I say, while we are gossipping and chattering here, time is slipping away——"

"Well, it was just twelve o'clock when we sneaked into the yard," said Bill Blackbeard; "and I don't suppose more than half-an-hour has passed since we have been seated in this old rattle-trap. Besides, you know, we should hear the carriages driving off: for they was all a-coming to fetch away the guests as we stole through the paddock. And then too, John Robert or somebody will come very like to lock up the coachus door——"

"Hark!" ejaculated Taddy. "I can hear the carriages rolling away now—the party is breaking up. I dare say it won't be very long before we shall have to set about doing the business. And while we are at it, you don't think it would be worth while to penetrate farther into the house than the pantry, and see what else we can pick up?"

"No—I had rayther not," replied Blackbeard. "It would be dangerous: for I know that Mr. Tiverton has pistols in his room. Besides, we shall get enough swag as it is, I promise you!"

"Well, let it be as you say," remarked Mr. Taddy; "and we'll confine our operations to the pantry. But come, Bill—take another sup at the brandy-flask: for it's getting rather cold here."

"Ah! it won't be amiss," observed the other ruffian: "brandy is a good thing to keep the cold *out* and von's courage *in*. But I say, Tom, I was going to ask you two or three times—but I forgot it—what the deuce it was that brought you down to Exeter?"

"Why, there is a friend of mine in London—a certain Mr. Lanover," answered Taddy; "and he's got a little business of a somewhat delicate nature to transact with Mr. Dobbins, the haberdasher, in Exeter; and so, as he couldn't make it convenient to come down himself just at this particular time, he sent me. But it's getting so uncommon cold, I really can't stand it. Ah, no wonder! this window's down: we will put it up, and then it will keep out the chill."

The glass was raised accordingly; and though the conversation was continued inside the vehicle, I could catch no more of it,—merely a confused jumble of sounds now reaching my ears. But I had heard enough to give me a full insight into the object which these wretches had in view; and I resolved, at any risk, to do my best to frustrate it. My position was however not merely a most alarming one in respect to those men, but likewise most wretched in another sense. There I lay, stretched upon the pavement of the coach-house,—the chill night air penetrating like ice-shafts through the chinks and crevices in the doors, and sweeping in with a strong current underneath them. The flag-stones themselves were sufficiently cold to benumb every limb and paralyse me completely: but I was compelled to endure all this—the slightest movement on my part would no doubt lead to my destruction! If I were discovered, those wretches would scarcely hesitate to take my life for the purpose of ensuring their own safety. Perhaps the excitement of terror

which this conviction sustained within me, kept up a certain heat of the blood, and thus beneficially served as a counteractive to the glacial effects of the pavement and the nipping draughts. Otherwise it would have been next to impossible for me to remain all that time stretched motionless upon the cold stones, not daring even to shift my position, and with the currents of icy air blowing in upon me with the keenness of a hyperborean clime.

I heard the carriages roll away one after the other; and at length all was silent about the mansion. I now waited with intense anxiety in the expectation that John Robert would come to lock up the coach-house—or rather to take away the key which he would no doubt recollect that he had left in the door. My purpose was to spring forth from beneath the carriage the instant I should hear footsteps approaching across the yard—and raise an alarm. But now it suddenly occurred to me that inasmuch as the door was unlocked, and merely kept closed by the tightness with which it fitted into its setting, I might make a dash at it at once and escape from the coach-house before the ruffians in the carriage could have time to leap out and seize upon me. I wondered that this idea had not occurred to me before: but for the first half-hour that they were in the place, my attention was absorbed in listening to their discourse—while for the second half-hour which had by this time passed since they put up the window, I had been benumbed as it were with terror as well as with cold, and my mind was proportionately sluggish in its action. Now, however, that this thought had smitten me, I was on the very point of carrying it into execution,—when the door of the old barouche opened; and as some one stepped out, the voice of Taddy said, "Now, Bill, as all's quiet, we'll commence operations."

Again did a mortal terror seize upon me with petrifying influence: I felt that the slightest movement on my part would render my life not worth an instant's purchase.

"Let's open the door gently," continued Taddy, "and see if all the lights are out in the lower part of the premises."

"Well, mark my words, Tom," replied Blackbeard urgently, "you are too fast. I tell you they are sure to come round and lock up all the doors. We had better get back into the carriage and wait and see whether they do come or not. If they do, it will on'y be the work of a moment to take off the lock with the pretty little crowbar I've got in my pocket: and we can let ourselves out again in a jiffey."

"Why, it must be past one o'clock—more than half-an-hour," continued Taddy, "since the carriages rolled away; and as they hav'n't come to lock up, they won't come at all. People always go to bed soon after a party. At all events, I'll look."

He opened the door; and almost immediately afterwards closing it again, said, "Now, Bill let's get to work: there isn't a glimmering of a light at any one of the windows down stairs or up. Depend upon it they have bolted the yard-gate and all the other doors, but forgot about the coach-house."

"Well then, come along," replied Bill Blackbeard: "let's do the job, since you're so impatient over it."

The two villains issued forth from the coach-house; and for a moment infinite was my alarm lest they should turn the key upon me: but they did not. With an indescribable feeling of relief I dragged myself out from under the carriage: but my limbs were so stiff I could scarcely move them: and now it was that the play of the muscles suddenly caused excruciating aches and pains to shoot all through me. It was with the extremest difficulty I could raise myself to my legs; and I had to cling to the parts of the carriage for the purpose. There I stood too, for some moments, feeling as if the slightest attempt to move away would be followed by immediately falling down. Oh! what was to be done? The question itself appeared so keenly and acutely to sum up in a few brief words all the details of my position,—my own danger in case the wretches, being alarmed, should return abruptly—the necessity of frustrating their scheme of robbery—and that of having them secured, if possible,—that I felt a glow of excitement rush through my entire frame, dispelling aches and pains, relaxing the rigidity of my limbs, and filling me with energy.

The next moment I gently pushed open the coach-house door: it moved so noiselessly that no sound reached the ears of the two men—while the pitchy darkness of the night prevented them from observing it. Stealing forth, I glided round the angle of the coach-house: I sped into the garden just behind; and clambering up the leafless branches of a fruit-tree, scaled the wall. As if wings were fastened to my feet, I darted along—gained the front of the mansion—and then stopped suddenly short again to deliberate how to act. If I knocked and rang at the front-door, the burglars would hear the alarm, and would retreat. But there appeared no other way of conveying a warning to those inside—unless indeed by throwing something up at the window of the chamber where my master and mistress slept. I glanced up——Ah! there was a light still burning in that chamber: the plan which had just suggested itself should be adopted! For I was most anxious, if possible, that the burglars should be captured: I was anxious for the sake of justice—I was anxious, too, because Taddy had leagued with Lanover to take my life, and it was of importance to myself to get at least one of those enemies removed away from a land where fresh mischief might be meditated against me: but perhaps chiefly of all at the moment, was I anxious to furnish Mr. Tiverton with ocular proof that this was no concocted scheme on my part to turn opinions and circumstances into a new channel and thus by a trick secure leniency for myself in respect to the accusation under which I laboured.

Though these reflection have taken some little time to record, they swept through my mind in the brief space of a few moments; and my resolve being settled, I gathered up some little gravel-stones from the walk, and tossed them against one of the windows of the chamber where my master and mistress slept. I threw at least half-a-dozen before I succeeded in attracting attention. Nevertheless, not a minute had altogether elapsed ere one of the windows was opened, and Mr. Tiverton's head was thrust forth. This I could just see by straining my eyes as I gazed upward through the darkness of the night.

"There are thieves, sir, breaking in at the back!" I immediately said, before Mr. Tiverton had time to utter a word. "Hush! make no noise, sir—but hasten with John, and you will secure them."

"But who are you?" quickly asked Mr. Tiverton. "Joseph?"

"Yes, sir. For heaven's sake delay not! I will tell you all presently—I shall not run away."

The window was closed again that moment. Scarcely a couple of minutes then elapsed ere the front-door was opened; and Mr. Tiverton in his dressing-gown appeared with a light in one hand and a pistol in the other. John Robert, who had only just huddled on his breeches and thrust his naked feet into his shoes, was likewise there, carrying another pistol; and both master and man looked very much excited and alarmed.

"The pantry, sir!" I instantaneously said: "the burglars are breaking in! If you go round by the back and scale the garden-wall by any means——"

"No, nonsense!" ejaculated Mr. Tiverton, but in the same whispering tone that I myself was adopting. "Come—this way!"

I entered the house: the front-door was noiselessly closed; and Mr. Tiverton, leading the way across the hall, reached the stairs conducting down to the kitchen-premises. John Robert followed—I brought up the rear; and I should add that my master still carried the light. With the utmost caution—indeed, quite noiselessly—did we descend; and on gaining the passage which separated the kitchen on the one side from the domestics' room and the pantry on the other, we paused to listen. Then we distinctly heard a noise as if of the wrenching away of one of the iron-bars from the pantry-window. Mr. Tiverton flung a hasty but significant look upon John Robert, as much as to imply that the information I had given was indeed correct;—and making a sign for us to follow, he continued to lead the way, his pistol levelled ready to be fired. We reached the pantry-door, which was shut; and Mr. Tiverton was about to open it, when I clutched him by the arm and pointed to the back-door at the end of the passage which led into the yard. He instantaneously comprehended my meaning, and adopted the suggestion thus conveyed. With the same caution which had hitherto characterized all our movements, I drew back the bolts of this door. Mr. Tiverton had the keys with him: it was quickly opened—and then we all three rushed forth into the yard.

At that very moment one of the burglars was about to introduce himself through the pantry-window; and this was Bill Blackbeard: for it was from the lips of Taddy—who was standing by, preparing no doubt to follow,—that the first ejaculation of alarm thrilled forth.

"Villains!" exclaimed Mr. Tiverton, firing his pistol: but quick as the eye can wink, the two rascals rushed away, and plunged into the utter darkness which prevailed between the coach-house and the exterior wall. John Robert also fired his pistol after them—but without effect: for when we sped in pursuit, we caught the sounds of the two burglars alighting heavily, one after the other, upon the ground on the opposite side of the garden-wall.

"It is useless to attempt to pursue them," said Mr. Tiverton, as he stopped short. "Get the light out of the passage, and let us examine the pantry-window."

I hastened to fetch the candle, which had been left in the passage; and we now found that the shutter had been forced open and two of the bars wrenched away. The work must have been accomplished with a marvellous expedition; for not more than five minutes had certainly elapsed between the issuing forth of the two burglars from the coach-house to commence operations, and their precipitate flight on our bursting out upon them. It however transpired that even if they had made their entry undisturbed, they would not have found the expected booty: for Mr. Tiverton had taken up all the plate to his own room when he retired thither—a precaution which it was only natural he should adopt after the incident of the morning.

CHAPTER XXIV.

CHARLOTTE MURRAY.

My master bade me enter the house with him, instead of consigning me to the coach-house again; and we ascended to the parlour. The alarm had in the meantime spread throughout the dwelling,—Lady Georgiana having rushed to the various chambers to summon her sister, Miss Dakin, and the female servants, with the startling intelligence that thieves were breaking in. Accordingly, as Mr. Tiverton, John Robert, and myself, ascended to the parlour, all the other inmates were hurrying down with such clothes as in their terror and confusion they had managed to huddle on. My eyes swept over the group: but Charlotte Murray was not amongst them.

So soon as the excitement had somewhat abated, I was called upon for explanations. I accordingly stated how the key had been left in the coach-house door—how I was awakened up at midnight by hearing two persons enter—how I crept out of the carriage, while they ensconced themselves within—how from their conversation I gleaned their intentions—and how I likewise ascertained that one was called William Blackbeard, while the other answered to the appellation of Thomas Taddy. But I did not think it necessary to mention that I ever had any previous acquaintance with the latter. I went on to observe that I was restrained by terror from taking any step till opportunity presented itself, as already explained to the reader; and that then I adopted the course with which the listeners were acquainted.

"And now," I said, continuing to speak all in the same breath, "tell me whether Charlotte Murray has returned?"

"No," quickly responded Lady Calanthe; "and I am dreadfully alarmed on her account. Tell me, Joseph—tell me, why you put the question?"

"Because, my lady, as sure as I am here, those two villains have helped to place her in the power of another villain of a different class: for in addition to all the conversation which passed between them in the chariot, and which I have already related, I overheard them chuckling at an achievement of that kind."

"But who is the other villain of a different class to whom you have alluded?" inquired Lady Calanthe, with nervous haste.

"Sir Malcolm Wavenham," was my response.

"Sir Malcolm Wavenham!" ejaculated Mr. Tiverton. "Why he was to have been here this evening at the party; and at the last hour he sent an excuse, saying that sudden and urgent business kept him away. That was the cause, no doubt of it!——the scoundrel!"

"But what is to be done?" inquired Lady Calanthe.

Scarcely were these words uttered, when there was a loud knock and ring at the front door. We all, as if moved by a common instinct, hastened out of the parlour into the hall: the housemaid, who was first, opened the front-door,—and in staggered Charlotte Murray, evidently sinking with fatigue.

"Oh, my dear lady!" she murmured, as Calanthe Dundas, with a cry of joy, sprang forward to welcome her: and the poor young woman fainted in the arms of her mistress.

Here was a fresh cause for confusion, wonder, and excitement: so that even the startling incident of the burglarious attempt appeared suddenly to sink into the shade. Charlotte was borne in a state of perfect unconsciousness up to a bed-chamber,—the ladies and the female servants all accompanying her: and I remained standing in the hall, with Mr. Tiverton and John Robert.

"I know not what to say to you at present, Joseph," observed my master. "Your conduct of this night has gone far to atone for the fault of which your were guilty——"

"I was innocent, sir," was my firm but respectful interjection.

"I will make no further comment upon the matter now," responded Mr. Tiverton, evidently puzzled what to think. "Go up to your own room and get to bed. You need not rise earlier than you like: for you may feel in the morning the effects of having lain so long on the stones in the coach-house. By the bye, come into the parlour and take a glass of wine."

"No, sir, I thank you. With your permission I would much sooner get to bed at once."

"Then do so. And—and," he added, with some degree of hesitation, "you may make your mind comfortable so far as that I shall not proceed to extremes in respect to the occurrences of this morning. What other course I may adopt, shall be communicated to you."

I accordingly ascended to my bed-chamber; and with the least possible delay put off my apparel, for I was dreadfully exhausted. Sleep soon visited my eyes; and I slumbered on until awakened by the sound of a female voice speaking kindly near me.

I started up—it was broad daylight—and I beheld Charlotte Murray carrying a tray containing some breakfast.

"Now, Joseph, partake of these refreshments," she said: "for I am sure you must stand in need of them, after all I have heard. It is eleven o'clock——"

"Eleven in the forenoon?" I exclaimed.

"Yes," she answered: "it is no wonder that you have slept thus soundly. Though I myself am terribly exhausted, yet I was resolved to get up to bring you your breakfast."

"But you, Charlotte?" I said, moved almost to tears by the kindness of her manner: "what perils and adventures have you likewise passed through?"

"Never mind me for the present," she hastened to observe: "you shall know everything in good time. Come, eat your breakfast. Cook was going to send you up some thick bread-and-butter: but I made you this toast myself—I boiled the eggs for you—and I fried this nice rasher of bacon; because I was determined that you should have a comfortable meal, and that I would have the pleasure of bringing it up. For if I am not very much deceived, I owe you no small atonement for the wrong I did you yesterday morning."

"Ah, Charlotte!" I said, the tears chasing each other rapidly down my cheeks: "dreadful things happened after you left the Lodge yesterday morning——"

"I know it all, Joseph," interrupted Charlotte: "Lady Calanthe has told me everything. But before I say another word on that subject, let me ask you a question: and do you reply to it candidly—frankly—without fear. Is there any one beneath this roof whom you have reason to regard as a secret enemy? There, Joseph! that tell-tale expression of your countenance convinces me at once that you *have* such reason, but that in the generosity of your heart you have not hitherto mentioned it."

"It is so, Charlotte," I hastened to reply. "There *is* a certain person who menaced me with the bitterest vengeance——"

"And that person is Miss Dakin," she said, looking me very hard in the face.

"Yes—Miss Dakin," I rejoined.

"Ah!" ejaculated Charlotte, "the odious wretch! the abominable traitress! But do get your breakfast, Joseph."

"No—I cannot eat a mouthful until you tell me wherefore you have been questioning me."

"Well then, if you must talk," she hastened to reply, "tell me everything that has at any time passed between you and Miss Dakin, that could possibly have excited her enmity so bitterly."

I thereupon related how Miss Dakin had made certain overtures towards me some months back—how I had indignantly rejected them—and how, on the very night of Lady Calanthe's and Charlotte's recent arrival at the Lodge, she had taken the opportunity, when delivering the message in respect to evening-prayers, to threaten me with the vengeance of her bitterest hatred.

"The odious wretch!" again ejaculated Charlotte, with a look of the strongest abhorrence. "Ah! that accounts for the half-supercilious, half-spiteful toss of the head which she gave when I met her upon the stairs and told her that you were to accompany me to Exeter. I saw at the time that she wanted to say something more; but having conceived a thorough dislike for her, I passed her by and gave her no farther opportunity to address me. But now, Joseph, without another instant's delay let me relieve your mind on one important point," continued Charlotte, surveying me with the kindest and most compassionate interest. "You are guiltless of the terrible charge imputed to you—I know you are—your innocence can be proved—and I will prove it!"

"O Charlotte!" I exclaimed, almost overcome by

the wildly joyous feelings which this announcement raised up within me; "you know not what happiness you have infused into my soul!"—and catching her hand, I pressed it in grateful fervour to my lips.

"Well, well, Joseph," she said, herself deeply moved; "get your breakfast, there's a dear good lad—make yourself easy—but do not question me any more now. As yet I have said nothing to a soul—Lady Calanthe excepted—of what I know and what I can prove. It shall fall like the blow of a sledge-hammer upon the guilty person! Don't question me, I say," she added, perceiving that I was burning with suspense and curiosity. "You can guess who the person is that will be exposed; but you have yet to learn under what circumstances I am enabled to effect the exposure. Restrain your curiosity: suffice it for you to know that your innocence shall be proved, and *that* within the hour which is passing! Get your breakfast, then—dress yourself—and come down. I must leave you now."

She was turning away; but suddenly recollecting something, she accosted me again, observing with a kind and contrite expression of countenance, "Tell me, Joseph, that you forgive me for having treated you as I did yesterday morning? When you come to learn the circumstances——"

"Forgive you, Charlotte?" I interrupted her. "Rest assured that I did not bear you any ill-will: for I knew that you were labouring under some grievous error, which would be cleared up when an opportunity for calm and deliberate explanations should present itself."

"You are a generous youth, Joseph," responded Charlotte, proffering me her hand: and she then hurried from the room.

As the reader may suppose, I was now in a very different frame of mind from that which recent circumstances had so painfully excited: but when, having disposed of my breakfast, I rose to commence my toilet, I felt every limb so stiff that I could scarcely drag myself along. Now, Charlotte Murray seemed really to have anticipated all my wants and everything that could do me good; and with all her apparent giddiness, she thus proved herself in reality an excellent creature—thoughtful and considerate when the exercise of such qualities became needful. For John Robert knocked at the door of my chamber; and when I answered the summons, he said, "Put on this dressing-gown, Joseph, and foller me to the bath-room. Charlotte says as how a hot-bath would do you good; and she has superintended it all herself. So come along."

He brought me an old dressing-gown of his own, which I hastened to slip on; and without another word, he conducted me to the bath-room, where I enjoyed the luxury of an immersion in warm water. I issued thence with far more comfortable sensations: the improvement effected in me was truly surprising. Hastening back to my own chamber, I dressed myself without delay; and was descending the stairs to the domestics' room, when I met Lady Calanthe Dundas on the first-floor landing.

"Ah, Joseph!" she said, speaking most kindly and with a sweet smile; "I was at the very instant thinking of you. From the first I had my misgivings as to the validity of the shocking accusation charged against you; and I do not hesitate to declare that it has afforded me the utmost satisfaction to have been made aware of your innocence. You have suffered much, poor youth——far, far more than you ought to have suffered——indeed, you ought not to have suffered at all; although really under the circumstances, I do not know that my sister and Mr. Tiverton could have adopted any other course. However, you are innocent; and this innocence shall now be made known. Go and tell Charlotte to accompany you up to the drawing-room."

With tears running down my cheeks, I began to pour forth the expressions of my gratitude for Lady Calanthe's kind conduct: but she retreated quickly into the drawing-room—and I hastened down stairs to deliver her message to Charlotte.

"Come then, Joseph," said the young woman, who now treated me with a sort of sisterly kindness, as if she endeavoured to atone as much as possible for her glacial reserve and her vague but strong accusations of the preceding day: "let us go up-stairs together."

She took my hand, just in that encouraging way which an elder sister would adopt towards a brother several years younger than herself; and we ascended to the drawing-room. Mr. Tiverton and Lady Georgiana were seated in their usual starch, stiff manner: Miss Dakin occupied her wonted place near her patroness: Lady Calanthe Dundas was half-reclining upon the sofa. But the instant we made our appearance, Lady Calanthe sat completely up; and with an air of dignity beyond her years, but which admirably became the style of her beauty, she said, "I have already hinted, Mr. Tiverton, that I had desired Charlotte and Joseph to come into your presence together for a certain purpose."

"Which purpose, Calanthe," said her brother-in-law gravely, "I presume will now be explained?"

"Do not think, Mr. Tiverton—nor you either, my dear sister," continued the beautiful young lady, "that I seek to arrogate to myself an authority in this house which is unbecoming the position of a guest: but circumstances have induced me to assume this prominent part on the present occasion. There are certain little explanations to be given; and inasmuch as Joseph Wilmot was yesterday accused of a very serious act in the presence of all his fellow-servants, I beg and entreat that those same servants may now be summoned to witness the issue of the affair."

"But, my dear Calanthe," said Lady Georgiana, looking much bewildered—as did also her husband, "I am at a loss to conceive what new complexion can be possibly given to the transactions of the plate and the ring. Yes—I am indeed at a loss. Miss Dakin, are you not at a loss?"

"Perfectly at a loss," replied the toady: but yet methought there was something like the glitter of uneasiness in her eyes.

"My dear sister," said Lady Calanthe, speaking very seriously, "I can assure you that there *is* another complexion to be put upon the whole transaction; and it will be a cruel injustice towards this youth to delay the explanations a moment longer than is necessary."

"Then, in that case, let the servants be summoned," exclaimed Mr. Tiverton. "Go you, Joseph—and order them hither."

I hastened down stairs again; and as I delivered the message, my fellow-servants could not help noticing the animation of my countenance, which doubtless seemed to them to be very different from the look of a guilty person about to be ignominiously dismissed from his situation in the presence of the entire household. It was with an unusual alacrity that they therefore followed me up to the drawing-room,—John Robert giving two or three grunts as indications of the curiosity which he experienced to behold the issue of the affair. In a few minutes we were all marshalled in the drawing-room; and then Lady Calanthe, who had taken it upon herself to regulate the mode of procedure, said to me, "You will now, Joseph, recite to Mr. Tiverton and Lady Georgiana those explanations which you gave to Charlotte just now, relative to a certain person."

I glanced towards Miss Dakin, and saw that she was excessively pale. She was always pale naturally: but her countenance was now of a dead white, perfectly ghastly: and it was but too evident that she was in that dreadful frame of mind when it would have been a mercy if the earth had opened suddenly to swallow her up.

"I am sorry," I began, at once understanding to which explanations and to what person Lady Calanthe had alluded,—"I am sorry to have to perform the part of an accuser: but in self-vindication it is necessary. A certain individual present conceived an aversion towards me for reasons which had perhaps be better left to the imagination of those who now hear me; and she threatened me with her bitterest hatred. That individual is Miss Dakin."

"Joseph, you vile, wicked boy!" cried the toady, springing up to her feet: but almost instantaneously sinking back into her chair, she gave a shriek, exclaiming, "I shall go off! I shall go off!"—no doubt meaning into hysterics.

"Miss Dakin," said Mr. Tiverton, speaking sternly, as if he now perfectly well saw that some serious turn was indeed to be given to previous transactions,—"I must request that you compose yourself. Joseph Wilmot has made a charge which, unless backed by collateral evidence, must of course be rejected as a villanous attempt to throw a slur upon your character."

"Yes—it is villanous!" shrieked forth Miss Dakin. "Lady Georgiana knows me too well to believe it."

"I certainly am taken much by surprise," said my mistress. "Do you mean in plain terms, Joseph Wilmot, that Miss Dakin——"

"I mean, your ladyship," I said, perceiving the necessity of speaking out plainly and boldly, "that Miss Dakin made certain overtures to me when I had scarcely been a month in your service; and that the other night she told me that she could have loved me madly, but that she now hated me as much, and that she would wreak her vengeance upon me."

"'Tis false! 'tis false!" screamed forth the toady. "Let me get at him—I will tear his eyes out!"—and she was rushing towards me, when Charlotte, stepping forward, confronted the infuriate Miss Dakin,—exclaiming, "It is true—it is true—I am convinced of it!"

"You?—a menial!" said the toady, suddenly stopping short and tossing her head indignantly, while she quivered all the time with mingled rage, spite, and terror. "Know your place—and keep it."

"There is in this world," answered Charlotte, with admirable coolness, "no one so humble but that he or she may perform an act of justice, if accident should furnish the opportunity: and that is exactly my position now. At all events, Miss Dakin, you can but sit down and listen to me: you will have the right to reply."

"Yes—let Charlotte Murray be heard," said Mr. Tiverton: and he signalled peremptorily for Miss Dakin to resume her chair—a command which she obeyed with the air of a person who felt her condition to be almost desperate, yet nevertheless was bewildered as to what new evidence was to be brought forward against her.

"The explanations I have to give," said Charlotte, "are few. But first of all, I will ask Joseph Wilmot whether yesterday morning I did not take an opportunity to tell him privately that he was a wicked, unprincipled, and depraved young man—and that I was sorry circumstances compelled me to remain beneath the same roof with himself?"

"Those accusations were made against me," I said; "and they were quite bewildering. I comprehended them not."

"No: since circumstances have led me to reflect well what your demeanour was on the occasion," continued Charlotte, "I have felt assured that you *must* have been bewildered. You sought explanations—I would not give them; and immediately afterwards I proceeded to Exeter. Your fellow-servants could not have failed to observe how cool and distant I was to you at the breakfast-table yesterday morning."

The lady's-maid, the cook, the housemaid, and John Robert, all corroborated Charlotte's statement; and while curiosity was keenly piqued, she continued as follows:—

"The night before last, I did not sleep very well, in consequence of something which I ate at the pastrycook's at Exeter, when there with Joseph Wilmot. Soon after midnight I awoke from a feverish slumber, and could not close my eyes again. As I lay tossing uneasily about, methought I heard the creaking of the boards in the passage, as if with the footsteps of some one stealthily moving along. I listened, conceiving it to be mere imagination on my part: but in a few moments, distinctly hearing the rustling of a dress, as it swept the wall near my door, I felt somewhat alarmed. I got up, and very gently opening the door, peeped out. Though last night was dark as pitch, the one before (of which I am speaking) was clear with the starlight; and as the beams shone through the window in the passage, I distinctly perceived a female form, which I had not the slightest difficulty in recognizing. This female passed stealthily and cautiously into Joseph Wilmot's room. I was so shocked that I knew not how to act: but closing my bedroom-door, lay down to rest again. I did not hear when that stealthy night-walker retraced her way; and therefore I naturally put the very worst construction on the proceeding,—though from all that has since transpired, it is more than probable—nay, it is certain, that she did not remain there many moments—no longer than was sufficient for her to

execute her nefarious purpose. Now, you can understand, Mr. Tiverton, wherefore I charged Joseph in the morning with being wicked and depraved: for that female whom I beheld seek his chamber, was Miss Dakin!"

Almost from the commencement of Charlotte Murray's little narrative, the toady's agitation and confusion had been painfully increasing—till at length she burst forth into sobs; and when the tale was ended, and her name was declared before all present, she threw herself wildly upon her knees, exclaiming, "Yes, it is true! I confess it! Spare me—spare me!"

She then fell down flat upon her face in a state of unconsciousness.

"Take her to her room!" said Mr. Tiverton sternly, as he rose from his seat and pointed to the wretched creature; then, as the cook, the lady's-maid, and the housemaid, bore her away, he accosted me, saying, "Joseph, I am very sorry for what has occurred: but the weight of evidence appeared at the time to be so overwhelming against you——"

"Take the wretch away!" cried Lady Georgiana, as the servants who bore Miss Dakin, appeared to be lingering somewhat at the door; "and directly she comes to herself, let her pack her things and begone!"—then turning up the whites of her eyes, she added in a murmuring tone, "Well, who would have thought it? the deceitful hypocrite! I never in all my life!"

"Yes—her conduct was indeed most hypocritical," remarked Lady Calanthe: "for I could not help noticing that during the examination yesterday morning, she actually tutored herself to regard poor Joseph with a look of compassion."

"The vile hussey!" ejaculated Lady Georgiana: "and to read the family-prayers too! But I always thought there was something wrong about that young woman: I was sure it would come to

this one of these days!"—and yet scarcely a minute had elapsed since her ladyship had expressed her wonderment, and had given vent to murmured ejaculations showing how ineffably she was surprised.

"Well, Joseph, I am glad you've cleared yourself," whispered John Robert, sidling up towards me: then, doubtless under the influence of a sudden emotion of satisfaction, he seized my hand and pressed it, at the same time giving vent to the invariable half-grunt half-groan which served as an expression of every possible variety of feeling on his part.

"But I was going to say just now," resumed Lady Georgiana, "that Joseph really ought to be recompensed for all this trouble he has gone through——"

"My lady," I interrupted her, "the manifestation of my innocence is sufficient——"

"Don't answer, Joseph—don't get into that habit of answering! You must and shall be rewarded:"—and drawing forth her purse she took out eighteen-pence.

"Come, come," ejaculated Mr. Tiverton, "leave this business to me. I am really sorry, Joseph, all this should have occurred, and I can't forget how well you behaved last night in the business of the burglary. Here's five shillings for you."

"I thank you, sir," was my response, while I felt that my cheeks became crimson; "but I require no money reward. I repeat that the manifestation of my innocence is a sufficient source of joy to me:"—then approaching Calanthe Dundas, I said, "The gratitude of a life-time is your ladyship's due for the kind, the generous interest you showed in my behalf. I am but a poor humble domestic: but I have my feelings as well as——"

I could say no more: my emotions well nigh overpowered me,—especially as at the instant I perceived that Lady Calanthe was gazing upon me with a look so soft, so gentle, so melting, that I could love her as a sister. No doubt the idea which thus flashed to my mind, was very presumptuous and arrogant on my part: but I could not help it, —and, as I had just observed to her ladyship, the humblest menial has his feelings as well as any other person. I hurried out of the room, accompanied by Charlotte; and we proceeded together into the garden: for I was anxious to learn from her lips all that occurred to herself, and how she had escaped from the power of Sir Malcolm Wavenham.

CHAPTER XXV.

CHARLOTTE'S NARRATIVE.

Before she entered upon her narrative, I expressed my fervent gratitude for the interest which she likewise had displayed on my behalf: but, good-naturedly cutting me short, she assured me that she was only too glad to have been furnished with the opportunity to make as much atonement as possible for the injurious suspicions she had entertained concerning me. She then proceeded to recite her adventures:—

"You know, Joseph," she began, "that I went to Exeter yesterday morning to make some purchases for the cook. It was about ten o'clock when I set off; and I took very nearly an hour in reaching the city: for, as you are aware, I am not much of a walker. Well, I proceeded straight to the grocer's—bought all the things which the cook wanted—and told the boy that he must take me back to the Lodge in his cart. I wanted something for myself at the linendraper's; and as the grocer had the parcels to make up, I availed myself of the interval to do my own little business—intimating that I would return in about a quarter of an hour. I was proceeding along the street, when I was accosted by a young and handsomely-dressed gentleman, about three or four-and-twenty years of age—with a dark complexion, and somewhat large features. He asked me, with an insolent stare, whether I was not Miss Smith?—but suspecting this mode of address to be merely an excuse for getting into conversation with me, I bridled up—flung upon him an indignant look—and endeavoured to pass without making any reply. But his manner all of a sudden altered, and became so respectful that I fancied I had misjudged him in the first instance. He begged me a thousand pardons if his somewhat abrupt address had offended me; but vowed and protested that he thought I was a certain Miss Smith with whom he had some little acquaintance. I informed him that he was decidedly wrong, for that was not my name. Then he persisted that he had seen me before,—although perhaps he might have made a mistake as to the name; and he spoke so earnestly, as well as with so much apparent sincerity, that I really believed him. I therefore answered him civilly,—repeating my assurance that he was labouring under an error; and not choosing to be seen walking with a gentleman, I hurried my pace. In a few moments he was by my side again; and apologizing for his rudeness in once more approaching me, begged that he might be permitted to cultivate the acquaintance he had thus accidentally formed. He addressed me as 'my dear young lady:' I told him that I was no lady—merely an attendant upon one; that there was evidently a very great distinction between his position in society and my own; and that I begged he would leave me at once. He looked very much chagrined, and said something more: but what I did not exactly catch—for I was getting rather alarmed; and quickening my pace, took refuge in the linendraper's shop. He did not attempt to follow me: but I was so much flurried, that I remained in that shop for nearly half-an-hour,—buying several things I did not want, and looking at others which I had no intention to purchase. At length I recovered my composure; and recollecting that the grocer's cart would be waiting for me, hastened to leave the establishment. On issuing forth, I was again both annoyed and frightened at seeing that young gentleman standing at a little distance on the opposite side of the way, and evidently watching for my reappearance. I was half inclined to go back to the linendraper's—to state how I was molested—and solicit an escort as far as the grocer's: but I was ashamed to give so much trouble, and shrank from the idea of being thought one who was making a mountain of a mole-hill. For it was scarcely possible to conceive that any outrage could be attempted at such an hour of the day, in the midst

of a city where people were walking about in every direction. So I hurried on; and the next moment was rejoiced that I had not returned to the linendraper's: for the gentleman, instead of re-accosting me, was no more to be seen. He had disappeared, I knew not how."

Charlotte Murray paused for a few instants: and then resumed her narrative in the following manner:—

"A little distance ahead, in the street along which I was passing, stood a carriage. The coachman was on the box: a livery-servant held the door open, as if expecting some one to issue from the shop at which the equipage was drawn up. At the very moment that I was about to pass that carriage, a couple of ill-looking men seized upon me——yes, actually and literally seized upon me then and there, in the open street and in broad daylight; and thrust me into the carriage. It was all the work of a moment: but I shrieked out for assistance. Three or four persons who were passing, stopped short in evident amazement at the outrage: but just as the equipage dashed away, I heard one of the men say to the bystanders, 'It's all right! she is mad, poor creature, and going to an asylum.'—I had been thrust into the carriage in the manner described; and was instantaneously clasped round the waist by a person already seated within. A glance showed me that this was the gentleman who had already so molested me in the street. Burning with indignation, I commanded him to let me go forth: but he only laughed at my anger,—assuring me that I was completely in his power, and that it was utterly useless for me to cry out, as it would only be thought it was a mad-woman being taken to a lunatic asylum. Nevertheless I endeavoured to put down the window: he seized my arms to prevent me—I struggled violently—dashed one of my hands through the glass—and cried for assistance. But the carriage went like the wind: the outskirts of the city were quickly reached—and we proceeded along a road which I recognised to be that leading towards the Lodge. Exhausted by my struggles and my screams, I sank back half-fainting in the carriage: but quickly recovering my presence of mind, I changed to the opposite seat, and began upbraiding my persecutor for his vile, ungentlemanly, and unlawful conduct. He proceeded to assure me, with the coolest insolence in the world, that my reproaches were utterly thrown away upon him—that he was a man of fortune, accustomed to pursue his pleasures and his inclinations regardless alike of expense or of danger—that he had taken a sudden fancy for me—and as I had told him that I was not a lady, he would make a lady of me. Then he adopted a coaxing tone, and the language of cajolery as well as of entreaty,—beseeching me not to prove cruel towards one who would lavish riches upon me. But I scorned his advances, vowing that I would sooner die than yield to his dishonourable propositions. Meanwhile the carriage rolled rapidly along; and I kept an anxious look out from my window, in the hope of obtaining the succour of any person whom we might overtake or meet. I saw three or four straggling peasants, and cried out to them: but the equipage swept past like the wind; and finding it thus impossible to call succour unto myself, I grew very seriously alarmed. In a few minutes the carriage turned out of the road leading towards the Lodge and entered a bye-lane, which was only just wide enough to afford it a passage; and if we had met any other vehicle, there must have been a dead stop. This was now my hope—but it proved futile; and the carriage, at length emerging upon a broader road, to which that bye-lane was evidently a short cut, proceeded at a still more rapid pace than hitherto. Some way-side houses were passed—an occasional cart or waggon—once a party of ladies and gentlemen on horseback: and every time I screamed out for assistance. But none was afforded; and my companion gave me to understand that all my cries and efforts to escape would be unavailing. To be brief, at the expiration of another quarter of an hour after we had emerged from the lane, the carriage stopped at a spacious but gloomy-looking red brick house, standing in the midst of huge trees by the road side. Here I was desired to alight,—my companion holding me by the arm to prevent my escape. The footman likewise stood near, evidently for the purpose of anticipating such an attempt on my part. The front-door of the house was opened by an old and cross-looking woman, having the appearance of a housekeeper, so far as I could judge by her dress, which was matronly and respectable. Without saying a word—but seeming as if she were perfectly well accustomed to incidents of this nature, she began to lead the way up the staircase. I stopped short in the hall, and demanded where I was and by what authority I was brought thither? The young gentleman then gave me to understand that he was Sir Malcolm Wavenham—that this was a house in his possession—and that it was perfectly useless for me to offer resistance or expect succour, as the domestics would obey his commands to the very letter. Both angry and frightened, as you may readily suppose——"

"I can indeed—the villain!" was the ejaculation that burst from my lips: for I was furious against the miscreant; not only in consequence of what I was now hearing, but likewise because I reflected that he could not even keep faithful to the unfortunate and perhaps too confiding victim whose image was ever uppermost in my thoughts.

"I informed Sir Malcolm Wavenham," proceeded Charlotte, "that I was attached to the service of Lady Calanthe Dundas, then a visitress at Myrtle Lodge: at which announcement Sir Malcolm appeared to be amazed for a moment——"

"No doubt," I observed; "inasmuch as he was invited to the dinner-party given last evening in honour of Lady Calanthe's presence."

"I went on to assure him," continued Charlotte, "that a rigorous search would be instituted after me, and that punishment would not fail to overtake him for the outrage which he was perpetrating against me. At this he laughed,—observing that in a day or two I should sing quite a different song, and express my willingness to become a lady at his expense. Again I repelled the prophetic overture with scorn; and rushed towards the front-door. Sir Malcolm seized me round the waist, vowing with a tremendous oath that I should not escape him thus; and in order to avoid farther violence at his hands, I consented to go whithersoever the housekeeper was preparing to lead me. I was accordingly conducted up-stairs,

to a parlour on the second-floor, and whence a bed-chamber opened. There I was left to myself, —the doors being locked upon me. You may conceive what my feelings were, Joseph, on finding myself thus made a prisoner. I looked eagerly and anxiously about for the means of escape: but there were none. The windows were too high to allow me to entertain for an instant the thought of flight in that direction. Some hours passed, during which no one came near me, and total silence reigned throughout the dwelling. At length, about three o'clock—as it was getting dusk —the housekeeper made her appearance, followed by another female domestic, bearing a tray containing several dishes. The table was spread for my repast; and I was respectfully invited to seat myself thereat. But I demanded my liberty, threatening these women with the vengeance of the law if they continued to be accomplices in their master's outrageous proceeding against me. They seemed unmoved by my menaces: I had recourse to entreaties—these were equally unavailing. They left me, locking the door behind me; and I was again alone—a captive—and a prey to my distressing thoughts."

"Poor Charlotte!" I murmured: "what must you have suffered!"

"I did indeed suffer much, Joseph. I was not merely alarmed on my own account, but tortured with anxiety as to what would be thought at the Lodge of my strange disappearance. But I will not dwell at unnecessary length on my narrative. Suffice it to say that I was very, very wretched, and that I did not touch a morsel of the food spread upon the table. I however drank copiously of water; for my throat was parched. At about seven o'clock the housekeeper and the other female re-appeared; and clearing away the dinner things, they placed tea upon the table. Again I had recourse to mingled threats and entreaties—but all in vain; and once more was I left to myself. Then there was another interval of wretched reflections and torturing alarms; hours passed—and it was near eleven o'clock, when I heard the footsteps of a man approaching the door. It opened —and Sir Malcolm Wavenham made his appearance. His countenance was flushed: he had evidently been paying his respects to the bottle; and though he was not exactly tipsy, he was excited. I was filled with the direst apprehensions; for I reflected that a man who had already shown himself so desperately regardless of all consequences even in his coolest moments, would be capable of any wickedness when under the influence of wine. The housekeeper followed him into the room, bearing a salver, on which were decanters and glasses; and having deposited them upon the table, she was about to retire, when I adjured her to stop.—'Pooh! pooh!' said the Baronet: 'she knows her duty:'—and away she accordingly went. Sir Malcolm Wavenham then sat down; and filling two glasses, besought me to take one. You may be sure that I refused: whereupon he began remonstrating with me for what he called my foolish scruples. I will not tell you, Joseph, all the temptations with which he plied me: but I will observe that I rejected them indignantly,—again and again demanding my freedom, or entreating it, by turns. Thus did an hour pass; and it was midnight: Sir Malcolm had continued drinking; and I hoped that he would become so intoxicated that I should be enabled to escape. Indeed I was all along watching my opportunity from the moment he had entered, as the door of the apartment had remained unlocked. But he seemed thoroughly on his guard in that respect; while, with reference to the wine, it appeared to produce little effect upon him. Looking at his watch, he suddenly ejaculated it was midnight; and rising from his seat, he had just begun to address me in terms which made me red with shame and indignation,—when he stopped short as the sounds of a horse gallopping up to the door of the house, reached our ears. For a few moments he seemed frightened: but abruptly exclaiming, 'No, it can't be she!' he went on with his infamous speech. I was about to rush in wild desperation to the door of the apartment,—when it was thrown open; and a beautiful creature, dressed in a riding-habit, burst into our presence."

"Ah!" I ejaculated: and for an instant I was on the point of betraying all the emotions which were excited in my soul by this sudden allusion to one whose image was so constantly in my memory: but checking myself, I continued to listen without showing what I felt.

"Yes, she was indeed a charming creature!" continued Charlotte: "but her countenance was crimson with indignation—her eyes seemed to flash fire——"

"Unhappy Annabel!" I said in the secret depths of my own soul: but my lips gave utterance not to the words.

"Sir Malcolm Wavenham appeared for a few moments to be utterly confounded; and all his insolent assurance seemed to have abandoned him. The young lady—I do not think she could be more than seventeen or eighteen—advanced into the room; and coming straight up to me, was about to say something, when Sir Malcolm ejaculated, 'Violet, this is too bad!'—'Too bad?' she echoed bitterly: 'yes, far too bad on your part! You will at once suffer this young woman to go hence.'—'No,' cried Sir Malcolm, with a voice and look full of rage and disappointment.—'But you will!' said the young lady, in a peremptory manner: 'if not, I myself will at once proceed elsewhere to invoke the succour of the proper authorities.'—'You, Violet?' ejaculated Sir Malcolm.—'Yes, I,' she responded, with haughty firmness. And now that I can reflect with calmness upon that scene, I can vividly depict to myself this bright and beautiful creature of sylphid slenderness—but so admirably shaped—appearing of a stature far greater than she really was, as her form was drawn up and she seemed to look down with a goddess-like authority upon the Baronet. He muttered a few words: she heeded them not; but turning to me, she said, 'There, young woman, the door is open: you are free. But one word ere you take your departure:'—and she drew me aside as she thus spoke: then, abruptly lowering her voice so that it sank into a tremulous whisper, she added, 'If you feel any gratitude towards me for what I am now doing, you will spare him as much as possible. Yes, I beseech you to deal leniently with Sir Malcolm Wavenham!'—The tears were now trickling down her lovely cheeks; and I felt deeply on her behalf. Readily, and eagerly indeed, did I give her the assurance that I would take no

legal steps to punish the author of the outrage I had sustained. She seized my hand—pressed it warmly—and then motioned impatiently towards the door. I snatched up my bonnet and shawl, and darted forth from the room,—more than half expecting that Sir Malcolm Wavenham would be the next moment on my track. But my apprehension was unfounded. I descended the stairs without the slightest hindrance on the part of the housekeeper, the other female servant, and the lacquey, all three of whom I encountered on my way; and I let myself out of the front door."

"Thank heaven, you thus fortunately escaped!" I observed, but secretly wondering what afterwards transpired between Sir Malcolm and her whom he called by the name of Violet.

"Yes—I escaped," resumed Charlotte: "and I fled away from the house with the utmost precipitation. But thankful though I was at having thus regained my freedom, I was nevertheless still in a very awkward position. It was past midnight—I was in the midst of a lonely road—the darkness hung like a pall around me—I was full of apprehensions. Nevertheless, I hurried along, perfectly well convinced by the direction whence I had been brought in the morning, that every step was bringing me nearer to the neighbourhood in which the Lodge was situated. At length I met a peasant; and fortunately he was a very civil man. I asked him how far it was to Myrtle Lodge: he told me three good miles from the spot where we then stood: but he gave me such explicit directions how to find my way, that I did not despair of reaching my destination soon. I rewarded the man for his civility; and proceeding at as rapid a pace as possible, I reached the Lodge—but thoroughly worn out with exhaustion of mind and body. And now you know all."

Charlotte and I continued to discourse together for some short time longer in the garden; and when we re-entered the house, we found that Miss Dakin had taken her departure. She had gone away on foot, leaving her boxes to be sent for presently: but before she set out she tried hard to obtain an interview with Lady Georgiana,—doubtless in the hope of moving her patroness to compassion. The attempt had however proved unavailing: her ladyship positively declined to grant her an interview, and sent her out by her maid whatsoever salary was due, calculated even to the nicety of pence. On entering the servants' room, I received the congratulations of the cook, the lady's-maid, and the housemaid, on the satisfactory issue of that day's proceedings: and John Robert, with another of his usual grunts, repeated his own assurances of joy at the same result.

Mr. Tiverton, immediately after the scene in the drawing-room, set off to Exeter to give information to the proper authorities, of the burglarious attempt which had been made at the Lodge: but as he did not think fit to offer a reward for the apprehension of the villains, nor even go to the expense of handbills or placards publishing a description of their persons, the constables gave him little hope of being enabled to trace them out.

CHAPTER XXVI.

LADY CALANTHE.

On the following day, Charlotte Murray sought an opportunity of again speaking to me alone; and she said, "Joseph, I have a very agreeable duty to fulfil on behalf of my dear mistress. You have seen how slow she was to believe you guilty—how much she deplored the probability that you were so, when circumstances seemed to press heavily against you—and how unfeignedly rejoiced she was when your innocence was proved. She can well understand how painful have been your feelings, and how your spirit must have smarted under an imputation as false as it was terrible. She can likewise well understand that you must have been hurt as well as insulted at the wretched meanness of her sister and brother-in-law when speaking of recompensing you. But I dare say, Joseph, you think that I am delivering a very long oration, and in very serious terms too, for a giddy, thoughtless creature such as I am——"

"Never mind your giddiness, Charlotte," I interrupted her: "you possess a good heart and good principles too: and those are the essentials."

"Well, Joseph, I don't think that all my laughing and gaiety will ever make me the worse in any one respect. But to the point—Lady Calanthe feels that you really do deserve some little acknowledgment from some quarter or another. To be brief, however, she has desired me to request your acceptance of this. If ever you should get out of place, you know, for a time—you may find it useful."

With these words, Charlotte put a bank-note into my hands: and I perceived that it was for ten pounds.

"No," I said, "I could not think for a single moment of accepting it."

"What, Joseph!" she cried, contemplating me with amazement. "You will not take it? Come now—I give you credit for a very proper spirit and for sensitive feelings: but this, you know, is being over nice and somewhat too particular!"

"Pray don't fancy, Charlotte, that I am giving myself any airs," I hastened to say; "because of that I am incapable. I do not however conceive that I have the faintest right or title to this evidence of Lady Calanthe's bounty."

"But a person in our situation, Joseph," urged Charlotte, "may accept such things without precisely——"

"No," I again interrupted her: "I would much rather not take this bank-note."

"Why, after having prevented the house from being broken into by robbers—and perhaps all the inmates, my dear young mistress included, murdered in their beds——"

"If Mr. Tiverton had thought proper," I answered, "to proffer a fitting acknowledgment of my services, I should have accepted it as a matter of course: but from Lady Calanthe I can take nothing. She gave me her sympathy, and that was priceless above all amounts of gold. No, Charlotte—I respectfully decline to accept the note: but I return my sincerest gratitude for this additional evidence of generosity on Lady Calanthe's part."

Charlotte again surveyed me with astonishment: but I could see that as she reflected for a few instants, she thought more highly of me than even she had done before.

"You are an extraordinary youth," she observed, with a smile, displaying her white teeth; "and if you were a few years older I should be very apt to fall in love with you. But seriously speaking, Joseph—short as is the time we have been acquainted, I have conceived a very sincere friendship for you, and I shall always be glad to hear of your welfare. Now, as to this bank-note," she continued, receiving it back again from my hands, "we will say no more about it. Rest assured, however, that I shall inform Lady Calanthe of everything which has just passed between us. By the bye, Joseph, I was going to ask you a question—but it's of no great consequence:" and she blushed somewhat, looking a little confused.

"Do speak, Charlotte: what was it you were going to say?"

"Oh, only through mere curiosity—whether you made any arrangement to correspond with Charles Linton?"—and again she blushed, so that I suspected she had been rather smitten with Mr. Ravenshill's handsome valet when we met him at Exeter.

"No," I answered, with a smile; "I made no such arrangement. But I have not the slightest doubt that now Charles knows where I am living, he will write to me: and depend upon it, Charlotte," I added, still smiling, "I will show you the letter. He is a very kind-hearted, good, steady young man——"

"Oh, I have no doubt of it," ejaculated Charlotte, as she averted her blushing countenance: and here the colloquy ended.

That same afternoon I happened to meet Lady Calanthe on the stairs; and I could not help thinking that she regarded me in a way as if she were by no means offended at my having refused the bank-note. I was well pleased at this idea; inasmuch as I would not for the world have suffered in the opinion of so amiable a young lady who had shown me so much kindness.

A month passed away: several parties were given; and my fellow-servants assured me that ever since they had been at the Lodge, they had never known so much gaiety. Nothing was heard by the Exeter constables of Tom Taddy or Bill Blackbeard; and therefore I presumed these individuals had at once fled precipitately out of the neighbourhood, on the failure of their burglarious attempt at Myrtle Lodge. Neither did Lady Georgiana take any steps to procure another "companion:" the society of her sister was no doubt sufficient for the present.

The incident I am now about to relate, occurred at the expiration of the month to which I have just alluded. It was one forenoon, on a fine frosty day at the end of January, that Mr. Tiverton gave me a letter to take across to a gentleman who dwelt at a distance of about a mile and a half from Myrtle Lodge. The weather was cold, with a healthy bracing breeze, and not with that searching, nipping chill which so often prevails at the particular season of which I am writing. The sky was of almost unclouded blue,—the uniformity of the cerulean expanse being scarcely broken by a few thin fleecy vapours. The earth was as hard as marble,—one's footsteps sounding upon the ground, and the tread being free and elastic. In short, it was one of those days when the frame seems invigorated by exercise—a warmth is speedily infused into the blood—the circulation becomes rapid—and the spirits rise accordingly. My way lay through the fields, which were intersected by a beaten path,—so that there was no necessity to tread upon the grass, on which the frost glittered like myriads of seed-pearls. I had traversed a couple of fields, when I observed Lady Georgiana and her sister Calanthe, walking at some little distance ahead. I had just crossed the stile leading into the third field, in the middle of which I had thus caught sight of them,—when all in an instant, shrieks of terror smote my ears:—wild screams of horrible alarm they were;—shrill, rending, and penetrating, they rang through the clear frosty air! At the same moment, both Lady Georgiana and Lady Calanthe came flying back towards the stile; and the cause of all this as promptly met my eye. An infuriate bull was rushing across the field;—and scarcely had those piercing shrieks proclaimed the alarm of the affrighted ladies, when the bellowing of the monster sounded like the savage roar of a wild beast in a forest. As if wings were fastened to my feet, I rushed forward. I ran——no, it was not running—it was absolute flying!—and as I thus sped along, I was astonished at the miraculous rate at which I passed over the ground. It seemed as if I were borne on the pinions of the wind. But the mad bull was gallopping onward at a still faster pace,—tossing his head, and bellowing horribly. Lady Georgiana was in advance of Lady Calanthe: both were running for their lives,—but the former, having turned first, thus kept ahead of her apparently doomed sister. A horrible crisis seemed to be at hand: the danger was terrific.

On came the infuriate animal; Lady Georgiana was screaming wildly—but her sister Calanthe had ceased to cry out. Suddenly, to my anguish and dismay, Lady Calanthe fell down: she had evidently swooned with affright! Another moment, and she would have been gored to death: but with my hat held forward in one hand, and a red silk pocket handkerchief in the other, I rushed straight at the mad bull,—resolved that, if I could not thus succeed in terrifying it, I would at least become its victim, in the hope of appeasing its rage or diverting its attention from Calanthe Dundas. The effect was fortunately instantaneous: the bull stopped short so suddenly that it fell back upon its haunches, just like a horse that is rearing. And then, as I waved my kerchief before its eyes,—myself being but three feet distant from its tremendous horns,—it turned abruptly round, and gallopped away,—neither bellowing nor tossing its head any longer.

I caught up Lady Calanthe in my arms. I called out to Lady Georgiana to turn and lend me her assistance—but she sped on towards the stile, still screaming wildly. How she scrambled over it, I know not: but certain it is that as I dragged Lady Calanthe, who was still in a deep swoon, towards that point, I perceived that my mistress was lying—also inanimate—on the opposite side of the stile. Looking round, to assure myself

that the enemy had no intention of renewing his attack,—and joyfully perceiving that he had not, but that he was now standing quiet at the farther extremity of the field,—I got Lady Calanthe over the stile; and not caring to trouble myself for a single moment about Lady Georgiana, I supported her beautiful sister in my arms,—calling upon her to open her eyes, and speak: for I knew not what other means to adopt in order to recover her. She soon began to revive; and as she did open her eyes, she glanced in wild terror around,—the first idea which returning consciousness brought, being evidently the last one that was in her mind as she fainted.

"Your ladyship is safe," I said, still holding her in my arms as I sat on the step of the stile. "You are out of danger—there is nothing to fear!"

She closed her eyes, as if to enjoy the luxury of this sense of life to which she awoke in security; and as I gazed down upon her countenance, I perceived the tint of the rose coming back to the cheeks which a few moments before were so pale. A smile, too, began to play upon her lips—but faintly: and yet it *was* a smile—perceptible, though so faint! Again she opened her eyes—her bosom heaved with a long-drawn sigh—and as she slowly raised herself up, she said in a soft tremulous voice, "Joseph, how was this? Am I indebted to you for my life?"

"I had the satisfaction of saving your ladyship," was my answer.

"But how? and are you yourself altogether unhurt?" she asked, taking my hand—pressing it—and gazing upon me with an expression of tenderness ineffably sweet.

"I sustained no injury, I can assure your ladyship. My hat and my kerchief were my weapons, with which I frightened off the monster. But my mistress!"—and I pointed to Lady Georgiana.

"Heavens! and I had neglected her!" ejaculated Lady Calanthe. "Help me, Joseph, to raise her up."

I did so: and Lady Georgiana speedily began to revive. At this moment a gentleman-farmer, who lived in the neighbourhood, came running up to the spot; and seizing me by the hand, he shook it in the heartiest manner,—exclaiming, "I saw it all! You are the bravest youth that ever was! I would not have done it myself on any account!"—then addressing himself to Lady Calanthe, he said, "You may thank this noble-hearted lad for being alive at this instant. You don't know all he did for you—the fearful risk he ran! He rushed up to the very points of the bull's horns, as gallantly as the brute itself was careering along madly. It was a horrible sight—but a glorious one! Yes, he is the bravest lad I ever set eyes upon!"

Lady Calanthe bent upon me a look full of the tenderest gratitude: there seemed indeed to be love in that look. If I had been her equal, and if my heart were disengaged, I should have been justified in regarding it as an avowal. Lady Georgiana was now enabled to regain her feet; and her sister informed her of what I had done. The good-hearted farmer burst forth into a fresh ebullition of praises, so warm and glowing that they made me blush for very shame at hearing myself thus eulogized. Lady Calanthe expressed her gratitude in a few words—but these were uttered in a low deep tone, and contrasted greatly with the comparatively cold expressions which Lady Georgiana condescended to vouchsafe. The gentleman-farmer offered to escort the two ladies back to the Lodge,—intimating that as they must doubtless feel weak and feeble after the fright they had endured and the swoon through which they had passed, they would like to lean upon his arms. Lady Calanthe bade me come with them, that I might have a glass of wine after my own exhausting exertions: but I answered that I had a letter to take for Mr. Tiverton, and must proceed on my errand. I was about to climb over the stile, intending to skirt the hedge of the field in which the enemy roamed at large,—when Lady Calanthe, catching me by the arm, exclaimed, "No, Joseph! you must not go that way! It is sheer madness! I beseech and implore you not to do so!"

"I will not, in that case, my lady," was my answer: and as I descended the steps of the stile, I again noticed that she bent upon me that look of tenderness which was so ineffably sweet and appeared to reflect the feelings of the heart.

I hastened away to take another path,—while the two ladies, leaning on the gentleman-farmer's arms, repaired in the direction of the Lodge. I saw Lady Calanthe look back; and I felt that I was the object of the sincerest gratitude on her part. On I sped towards the house where I had to deliver the letter: no answer was needed—and I retraced my way homeward. On arriving at the Lodge, the first person I met was Charlotte, who came rushing out of the domestics' room the instant she saw me enter the back-yard.

"You noble fellow!" she exclaimed, in a tone full of heartfelt enthusiasm; "you have risked your life for my beloved mistress! O Joseph, you are a perfect hero!"

"The days of knight-errantry and Quixotism are gone by, Charlotte," I answered, with a smile: "or else possibly it might be said I had encountered some dreadful enchanter in the form of a bull, and whose magic spells were dissipated by the talisman of a red handkerchief."

"You good-for-nothing boy," she exclaimed, "how can you afford to laugh after the terrific danger to which you were exposed? Do you know—but of course you do—that there was a moment when your life was not worth so much as a single blade of the grass where the incident occurred? The gentleman who came home with the ladies, said so. But Lady Calanthe is in the drawing-room; and she desired me to tell you that the moment you came in, you were to go up to her: for she feels that she has not yet thanked you sufficiently."

"And Lady Georgiana—does she feel the effects of her fright?"

"She has gone to bed very ill—and Mr. Tiverton has set off himself to Exeter for a doctor. He thought he could run quicker than John Robert. But pray go up to the drawing-room at once: for Lady Calanthe positively ordered that you were not to delay a minute."

"You are coming too, Charlotte?" I said.

"I coming too? No such thing! Go quick, Joseph—and don't stand chattering here. Lady Calanthe possesses a good heart, and is in haste to acquit herself, as speedily as she can, of the debt of gratitude which she owes you——that is to say,

as far as thanks will do so: for after the affair of the bank-note, she is sure to offer you nothing else."

"And even the repetition of those thanks is unnecessary," I responded: but thus speaking, I left Charlotte and ascended at once to the drawing-room, where I found Lady Calanthe alone.

She was half-reclining upon the sofa, with that air of languor which was natural enough after the excitement she had gone through. I have already said that she was about eighteen years of age; and that the expression of her countenance was so sweet as entirely to mitigate the haughty curve of her upper lip. Her large dark eyes shone with a lustre that was subdued by the thick fringes of the lids; the raven masses of her hair fell in heavy clusters upon her shoulders of sculptural perfection; while one or two stray ringlets, twining round upon her throat, set off the alabaster purity of that dazzling neck. One fair hand supported her head as she lay thus half-reclining on the sofa: the other drooped over the black horse-hair cushion, and seemed like modelled ivory resting upon a ground of ebony. Altogether she was a most beautiful creature—endowed with charms full well calculated to make an impression upon a heart not previously engaged.

I entered into her presence with considerable diffidence: for I did not wish to be thanked over again for what I had done,—regarding the incident as perfectly natural, and my proceeding such as any other person with even the faintest courage or spirit would have adopted. I forgot at the time what the gentleman-farmer had said: namely, that on no consideration would he have run such a risk. But it was not only because I disliked being thanked so often, that I felt thus diffident. It was also because there was within me a suspicion—faint however as the ringing of far-off bells in the ear—that Lady Calanthe's looks, when at the stile, had expressed something more than gratitude. I had endeavoured to banish this suspicion: I had even blushed at my own presumption in entertaining it:—but nevertheless it would keep in my mind; and it was on account thereof that I had asked Charlotte whether she did not mean to accompany me up into the drawing-room. Thus, altogether I felt much confused and embarrassed,—just as if I had done something wrong and was sent for to be upbraided accordingly. Nor was this feeling of awkwardness mitigated when I beheld the colour coming and going in rapid transitions upon Lady Calanthe's countenance: for *she* also looked confused—and for the first few moments of my presence there, not a syllable passed her lips.

"Joseph," at length she said, her voice low and tremulous,—and having glanced at me, she quickly bent down her eyes again: "I suppose Charlotte has informed you that I wished to express my gratitude for the inestimable service you have this day rendered me. I was fearful that just now I might not have said as much as I could have wished—as much as your magnanimous conduct deserved——"

"I can assure your ladyship," I observed, "that you honoured me with the fullest and completest acknowledgments."

"Do not say that I *honoured* you, Joseph," replied Lady Calanthe: "that is a word which cannot be used in reference to one who saved the life of a fellow-creature at the dread peril of his own. I wish that I could do something for you. I will not insult you by the offer of pecuniary compensation——but if there be any other way in which, through the interest of my father Lord Mandeville, I could possibly help you on in the world——for, candidly speaking, Joseph, you seem above your position——Were you not well brought up?"

"I was educated, my lady, until the age of fifteen, at a school where the sons of gentlemen and superior tradesmen were received."

"And how happened it, then, Joseph, that subsequent circumstances have failed to correspond with those of your earlier years? Do not for a moment think," Lady Calanthe hastened to observe, "that I am questioning you from motives of idle curiosity——"

"No—I am certain your ladyship is animated by generous motives; and I thank you sincerely for all the interest you have shown on my behalf. Your ladyship treated me with kindness when all others appeared to be against me; and in one sense I am glad that the incident of this morning occurred, as it afforded me an opportunity of proving my gratitude."

"And now," added Lady Calanthe, speaking softly, and with a blush upon her cheeks, "the weight of obligation rests with me. Never can I pay the debt which I owe you! But you have not answered my question——Perhaps it is painful for you to think of the past——I remember you said that you were an orphan——"

"I have every reason to believe so," was my response, the tears trickling down my cheeks: but hastily brushing them away, I went on to observe, "There is some strange mystery attached to my earliest years——I believe that I have an uncle——at least, there is a person in the world who asserts that degree of relationship: and he tells me that my parents are no more. I cannot understand wherefore he should deceive me. Certain it is that I never knew my father or mother——"

"Poor Joseph!" murmured Lady Calanthe, as she gazed upon me with an expression of sympathy so deep, so touching, that it appeared to melt into tenderness. "But if you were so well cared for at school—so well educated as you evidently are—and your manners, too, having been so well cultivated——"

"I know what your ladyship would ask—how it is that I find myself in a menial position? The explanation can be given in a few words. The school at which I was brought up, was abandoned in consequence of the death of the master: I had no friends to take charge of me: even the very payments for my maintenance were in arrear; and thus was I turned adrift upon the world, self-dependent."

"But I thought you said, Joseph, that you had an uncle?" observed Lady Calanthe, still speaking in a voice full of a melting pathos.

"Oh, that uncle!" I ejaculated, shuddering at the bare thought of Mr. Lanover's hideous image: "heaven shield me from him!"

"Ah! I understand," said Lady Calanthe. "He proved harsh and severe to you—unkind, ungenerous?"—and then she again softly breathed the words, "Poor Joseph!"

There was now a pause, during which she looked at me with the mingled hesitation and confusion of one who longed to say something, yet had not the courage to give utterance to it; and feeling my position becoming awkward, even to painfulness, I began moving towards the door.

"Do not go for a moment," she said: and then her countenance became suffused with the brightest crimson. "I had so many things to talk to you about——And, by the bye, you have not told me whether you accept my proposal, that I should ask my father to procure you some situation better suited to your capacities—something, for instance, in a Government office——"

"In London?" I ejaculated, again shuddering at the hideous image of Mr. Lanover, as it rose up before me in all its horrible deformity, and with its diabolic expression of countenance. "No, my lady! A thousand thanks—but I much prefer living in the country."

She regarded me with earnestness—evidently thinking that there was something strange in the excited manner of my refusal, and also that there were other mysteries attached to me besides those whereat I had hinted. She did not however question me farther: she saw that the subject was painful; and once more was there an awkward pause. Again too was I moving towards the door, when she started up from the sofa; and hastening towards me, took my hand, which trembled even more than her own.

"Joseph," she said, bending her fine dark eyes upon me, while the deepest blush mantled upon her countenance, even up to the very summit of her forehead,—"I can restrain my feelings no longer! I owe you my life—it is your's——will you, will you allow me to devote it to *you?*"

I dared not understand the avowal; that is to say, I did comprehend it—but yet this very comprehension struck me as being so audacious and

presumptuous on my part, that I was utterly confounded.

"Joseph—dear Joseph," murmured Calanthe Dundas, "hear me speak the truth plainly——I love you! From the very first moment I beheld you within these walls, I felt interested in you. Then came the hideous treachery of my sister's wretched companion; and despite the weight of circumstances, my heart forbade me from believing you guilty. Oh! even then I felt so much interest on your behalf that I could have become a more enthusiastic champion of your cause than I was: but you understand—motives of delicacy restrained me. Not you yourself, Joseph, experienced a livelier joy than that which took possession of my soul when your innocence was made manifest. In the secrecy and solitude of my own chamber, I wept with delight. Next, when Charlotte informed me how you refused that little gift which I charged her to present to you, I was again smitten with joy and delight: I perceived at once that your notions were above your position—I recognised in you a high-mindedness which rendered you all the more estimable and admirable to my contemplation. A month has passed since those occurrences; and during this interval the feelings of interest which I first experienced, have deepened and widened——they have grown into love! I suspected their nature; and frankly do I confess that I endeavoured to conquer them——Yes, and I essayed to convince myself that they were only those of friendship. But to-day——Oh! to-day, the conviction has been forced upon me—I have opened my eyes to the real truth! If I had analyzed those feelings for hours, I could not have reached a conclusion so positive as that with which the adventure of this morning smote me all in an instant. Now, Joseph, I have spoken frankly and candidly——my happiness depends upon you. We are both young: we may hope that circumstances in the course of a few years will prove favourable——At all events, I will renounce everything and make any sacrifice for your sake!"

Not a single word had fallen from my lips while Lady Calanthe Dundas was thus addressing me: she still too retained my hand in her own—and there we stood in the middle of the room, that beautiful patrician lady revealing the secrets of her heart to me, a humble domestic with the livery-badge of servitude on my back! Her countenance varied in expression with every successive detail of her confessions,—now mantling in blushes, and the eyes being downcast—now glowing with a fervid animation, and the gaze of those eyes fixed upon me—then relapsing again into confusion, accompanied by the soft sinking of the voice, and by the veiling of the glances beneath the thick fringes of the eye-lids! I was filled with ineffable emotions. Though my previous suspicion was now fully cleared up, yet was I as confounded, as amazed, and as stupified as if the avowal to which I listened had been altogether unexpected. I felt proud and happy in one sense—sad and alarmed in another. It was natural that I should be flattered at what was passing: but not the less grieved was I at thus hearing the revelation of a love which I felt my heart could not reciprocate. For that heart was filled with the image of Annabel; and I thought to myself that lost, degraded, and undone though Annabel were, it was as impossible for me to cease from loving her as to extinguish the light of the sun or quench its beams at noon-day!

"You do not answer me, Joseph?" said Lady Calanthe, now trembling visibly from head to foot, as she gazed upon me with ineffable tenderness, and yet with a becoming virginal modesty over all. "Banish from your mind the idea of whatsoever inequality of social position may exist between us!—think not of it! We stand now upon the same footing——But perhaps you consider me guilty of unfeminine boldness in having thus addressed you?"

"Oh, no, dear lady!" I exclaimed, scarcely knowing what I did say: and then I stopped suddenly short,—filled with confusion—vexed and angry with myself for having suffered even those few ejaculatory words to escape my lips: for I saw that they were instantaneously caught up by Calanthe as an avowal of reciprocal affection.

"Do not call me *lady*," she gently murmured, pressing my hand tenderly between both her own. "Henceforth, whenever we may be alone together, there must be no cold formality on your side. I am only Calanthe to you."

"But your ladyship——"

"Oh! now, scarcely has the injunction been breathed, than you treat me thus!" she exclaimed, in a mild voice of reproach. "But let that pass. You will know me better soon, Joseph——thank heaven, I see that I am not indifferent to you!——you will learn to love me! And rest assured, dearest Joseph, that never, never shall I repent the avowal which I have this day made. Oh, no! my happiness is concerned therein—it is now centred wholly and solely in you!"

I knew not how to act. I was about to inform her, when she so suddenly interrupted me, that much as I was honoured and flattered by all she had said, I was incapable of reciprocating the sentiment she had avowed. But now I had not the moral courage to speak thus plainly. I could not, with a single word, destroy that happiness which she had just assured me was altogether centred in the feelings she entertained, and which those inconsiderate words of seeming endearment that I let drop, had led her to believe were fully and completely shared by me. And then too, I beheld her radiant under the influence of those feelings—I saw the animation of joy upon her beautiful countenance, its light swimming in her lustrous eyes;—and I could not—no, I could not fling so cruel a damp upon all she thus experienced! I was still a prey to an inexplicable confusion; and it was natural that she should put upon my silence and my aspect an interpretation altogether consonant with the experiences of her own heart.

"You must leave me now, Joseph—dear Joseph," she said. "Charlotte will wonder that you are here so long——For heaven's sake, do not by your looks excite her suspicions!"

"No, no," I exclaimed quickly; "not for worlds!"—and breaking abruptly from Lady Calanthe, I rushed from the room.

Feeling convinced that if at that moment I encountered Charlotte, she could not fail to read in my countenance that something extraordinary had taken place, I sped up to my own chamber.

There I sat down to reflect—deliberately, if possible—upon all that had occurred. Good heavens! was it a reality or a dream?—was I the object of Lady Calanthe's love? and had I been foolish enough to leave her in the dark as to the impossibility of my soul reciprocating it? Yes, such was the manner in which we had separated; and as I now retrospected over all the details of our interview, I could scarcely wonder at my own confusion,—though I did not the less blame myself for the fault into which it had betrayed me. I should have dealt candidly with her—I should have interrupted her at the very outset—I should not have suffered her to unbosom her revelations until the end! Oh, how vexed I was at my want of moral courage! how bitterly did I blame myself! But what was to be done? To seek another interview with Lady Calanthe, and to tell her now what I ought to have told her before, would be to cover her with humiliation. I could not do it: and yet something must be done—it was not possible to leave her undeceived! But how was a fitting explanation to be made? The longer I meditated, the more I was bewildered; and as is usual in such cases, I could arrive at no settled purpose.

Several days passed away; and no opportunity presented itself for me to be alone with Lady Calanthe for more than a few moments at a time, and this only on two or three occasions. But then she failed not to grasp my hand and press it warmly in her own,—bending upon me looks full of the deepest love; and perhaps in the mingled mournfulness and confusion of my own countenance, she fancied she beheld the evidence of love on my part. Lady Georgiana had got quite well again. I had received the thanks of Mr. Tiverton in respect to the adventure of the bull; and he had generously offered me half a sovereign as a reward,—which I had declined with perhaps somewhat more firmness than respect. Another dinner-party took place; and the time was now at hand when, according to original arrangements, Lady Calanthe was to return to her father's seat in the neighbourhood of London.

CHAPTER XXVII.

A SURPRISE.

One morning the postman brought a letter addressed to myself; and it was delivered to me by John Robert in the servants' room. Charlotte Murray was seated there at the time; and I observed that she watched me with some degree of interest as I read it.

"Now perhaps, Joseph," she said, glancing around to assure herself that we two were alone present, "you will have the goodness to tell me who is your correspondent."

"To be sure, Charlotte," I responded, smiling. "It is a certain person whom you once saw, though perhaps you may have forgotten all about it——"

"Don't be so silly, Joseph!" she interrupted me, half in good-nature, half in confusion. "Come, sir, tell me at once! that letter is from Charles Linton? Not that I am curious, you know, to penetrate into any secrets that there may be between you: but as you yourself assured me he is such a kind-hearted young man, I should like to learn that he is in good health."

"And suppose, Charlotte, that he positively and actually sends a message to you," I said, mischievously tantalizing her a little,—"should you be offended?"

"I am very certain, Joseph," she exclaimed, blushing, "that he does not even mention my name; and I defy you to prove that he does."

"Oh! very well: I will soon convince you to the contrary. It is a long letter, you perceive. I have already told you many circumstances connected with the Ravenshill family: I am now informed that the reconciliation is complete between Mr. Ravenshill's wife and her parents—therefore with Mr. Ravenshill himself. The old lord and her ladyship are still upon the Continent. Mr. Jenkinson has settled a handsome income upon the young couple: but not a word has been mentioned of his advancing any money for the purpose of buying back, if practicable, the Ravenshill estates. These are the principal news contained in Charles Linton's letter."

"Well, then," exclaimed Charlotte, "if there are really no secrets, just let me read it for myself. I am very much interested indeed in the affairs of the Ravenshills——"

"Oh, no doubt!" I said, still tantalizing Charlotte in a good-humoured manner. "By the bye, here is what Charles says, where your name is mentioned:—'Give my remembrances to Miss Murray.'"

"Well, it is laconic enough," she observed, with an evident air of disappointment: and not choosing to trifle with her any longer, I gave her the letter.

"You wicked fellow!" she exclaimed, as a blush mantled upon her cheeks, and her eyes swam with a pleasure which it was impossible for her to conceal: "how dare you tell me such stories? Your friend says, 'Pray give my very kindest regards to Miss Murray; and tell her that I have not forgotten the agreeable little walk we had in Exeter; and likewise that when she returns with her mistress to Mandeville Hall, near Enfield, I shall not fail to seek an early opportunity to pay my respects to her.'—What made you take such pleasure in teazing me, Joseph?"

"Well, I must confess, Charlotte, it was very wicked on my part," I answered, smiling: "but somehow or another, I suspected that Charles Linton was not altogether indifferent to you; and I was determined to ascertain the truth. So, as I am going to answer his letter presently, I shall not forget to mention that his message pleased you; and I can also convey him one from you in reply."

"If you must mention my name," answered Charlotte, blushing, "you can tell him that as a matter of course I shall be happy to see him at Mandeville Hall. It is but ordinary civility, you know; and therefore, Master Joseph, you are not to put any of your own mischievous constructions upon the proceeding."

At this moment the bell of Lady Calanthe's bed-chamber rang; and as Charlotte was obliged to hasten off and attend upon her mistress, our colloquy ended.

On the following day letters arrived from Mandeville Hall for Lady Calanthe Dundas; and I presently learnt from Charlotte that her ladyship's parents and sisters were now anxious for her to return home. A few minutes after receiving this intelligence, I had occasion to ascend to the parlour, where Lady Calanthe and Lady Georgiana were seated,—Mr. Tiverton being out at the time; and I could not help observing that Charlotte's young mistress seemed low-spirited, and that she threw upon me a mournful look—though her eyes were instantaneously averted again, no doubt through fear of being noticed by Lady Georgiana. Having delivered to my mistress the message which had taken me to the parlour, I retired; and was traversing the hall, when the door which I had just closed behind me, opened again—and Lady Calanthe came forth. She beckoned me towards her in a hasty and excited manner; and in a low quick whisper, said, "Meet me at one o'clock precisely, at the stile leading into the field which was the scene of your noble conduct the other day. I will find some excuse to walk forth alone. Do you think you can manage it?"—then, as footsteps were suddenly heard descending the stairs, she added quickly, "You must—you must!"

She hastened away in one direction, while I retreated in another; and when I had somewhat recovered from the confusion, excitement, and perplexity into which that rapidly given assignation had thrown me, I felt glad that it was to take place. As the reader is aware, I had blamed myself for my moral weakness in not speaking candidly and frankly to Lady Calanthe Dundas on the memorable day when she avowed her love in the drawing-room: no opportunity had since then occurred for me to repair the injury which I had so involuntarily done; and therefore was I rejoiced that an occasion was now offered for me to disabuse her of a deplorable error into which my weakness, timidity, and confusion had led her at the time. But while in one sense I was thus rejoiced, in another I was afflicted; for it was not a very agreeable task which I had to perform:—on the contrary, it was a duty of a painful character.

The dinner in the servants' room being at one o'clock, and the routine of the household being observed with a scrupulous regularity, I did not exactly see on what pretext I could issue forth at the time; and I was puzzling myself what apology to invent for my absence for an hour or so, when circumstances favoured my wishes. The parlour bell again rang a little after mid-day; and Mr. Tiverton, who in the meantime had come home from his walk, gave me a letter to take to that very same house whither I was bound on the day of the memorable adventure with the savage bull. I lost no time in setting out, purposing to deliver the letter off-hand, and thus meet Lady Calanthe on my return. As the bull was still in the field, I was not foolhardy enough to pass through it: but the turn I had to make was so insignificantly circuitous, that it did not delay my progress for many minutes. It was with a beating heart that, on my return, I approached the stile. The young lady was not as yet there: but I beheld her approaching from a little distance—and she was coming alone. I felt the colour mantling in crimson to my cheeks at one moment—vanishing from them rapidly the next. I was again all confusion and bewilderment: I had a sense of moral weakness and of a failing purpose, which made me ashamed of myself;—but I did my best to summon my courage to my aid. There was a moment, during this sort of struggle which was taking place within me, when I asked myself whether I really did entertain any feeling of tenderness towards Lady Calanthe? and whether circumstances had somewhat cooled down the ardour of that youthful enthusiasm with which I had been wont to cherish the image of Annabel? But no: the mere fact of asking myself this question, brought up a gush of indescribable emotions into my very throat; and I could not doubt the undiminished intensity of my love for Annabel, when I found myself strong in the conviction that if she would only turn away from a career of error, I could forget and forgive all the past—so deeply enamoured was I of that being of seraphic beauty! But at the same instant another thought darted into my mind. In a few months more it would be Midsummer again: the year would terminate, from that memorable eve on which the adventure of the churchyard at Charlton had occurred:—was it only fancy on my part? or was it a preternatural test which would indeed prove fatally accurate in its fulfilment? The idea that it might be so, brought tears to the very brims of my eyes: but by a strong effort I kept them back; for at this instant Lady Calanthe Dundas came up to the place of appointment.

She approached with a becoming air of bashful modesty, mingled with that tender confidence which is the accompaniment of love where it is believed that the sentiment is reciprocated. There was also some degree of sorrow and excitement indefinably blended in her looks; and as she took my hand in both her own, they trembled violently. The deepest blush suffused her cheeks: the liquid warmth of tenderness, mingled with the glitter of uneasiness, was in her large dark eyes, as she bent them upon me. Then she looked hastily around;—and, satisfied that no observers were near, she became calmer.

"Joseph—dear Joseph," she said, "I have received letters urging my return home; and I cannot postpone my departure beyond to-morrow. It was so necessary that I should see you—so necessary that we should arrange plans for the future! Ah, dearest Joseph, you know not how I love you! But pray, pray do not think that I am bold—that I am deficient in becoming delicacy—when I tell you this! It is impossible you can remain in your present position: something must be done for you——"

"Ah!" I ejaculated at this moment, as my looks, sweeping in wildered confusion around, caught a glimpse of some one in the distance, between the spot where we were standing and Myrtle Lodge.

Lady Calanthe glanced towards the same point: and then, quick as thought, she exclaimed, "We must separate for the moment, Joseph! I will traverse the field and reach that old ruined wall. You pass round by the other direction. We shall be enabled to converse there with less fear of observation."

With these words she sped away towards the

point she had indicated; and I, by a somewhat longer circuit, joined her there in the course of a few minutes. But while proceeding thither, I noticed that the person whom I had seen at a distance—and who, I should observe, was a female—was now no longer visible. There were several diverging paths in all this neighbourhood,—some running behind hedges: and though it was the winter season and these hedges were stripped of their foliage, yet were they high and thick enough to conceal persons from each other's view.

It was, as above stated, at a portion of an old wall,—the only remnant of a cottage which had been burnt down,—that our second meeting on the present occasion took place. I now observed that Lady Calanthe was more nervous and excited than even she had been at first: doubtless, in her state of mind, that temporary alarm had stricken forcibly upon chords which were already vibrating powerfully in her heart.

"We ought to have met here at first, Joseph," she said, evidently striving to conquer her agitation: "but I did not think of it. What was I saying when we separated? Oh, that you must indeed permit something to be done for you! Alas, would that I myself were rich, Joseph: you know not the amount of delight with which I should look forward to the time when you might become the sharer of my wealth! But unfortunately I am altogether dependent on my father ——Oh! when I think of all the difficulties which lie in our way, I am half distracted. But let us hope! Never can my heart be given to another. Tell me, dearest Joseph, that you yourself will remain faithful to me, and that you will trust to the advent of better times?"

The young lady was now weeping copiously and sobbing passionately. Her affliction filled me with the profoundest sorrow: I could not bear to see one so kind, so amiable, so beautiful, thus cruelly tortured on account of the very love which she had conceived for me. I endeavoured to speak: I know not however what I was about to say;—but the power of utterance was choked by my feelings: —and Calanthe, perceiving even through the dimness of her own tears, how much I was affected, naturally regarded it as another proof of a reciprocating love on my part.

"Oh, Joseph!" she murmured, in a voice broken with sobs, as she again pressed my hands in her own, "why is it that I have been born in a sphere which has become the cause of my unhappiness? Would to heaven that I were a poor humble girl ——But this is an unpardonable weakness on my part: and I who ere now bade you hope, am saying and doing everything to make you dispirited and desponding! My father is a proud and haughty man: or else would I hasten to throw myself at his feet, and implore that you, as the saviour of my life, may be acknowledged as the worthiest object of my heart's grateful and enthusiatic love. But it is impossible! it is impossible!"

"Impossible indeed!" cried a well-known voice at this juncture: and as a shriek burst from Lady Calanthe's lips—I myself staggering back in utter consternation—Lady Georgiana Tiverton stepped from behind the wall, where she had been concealed. Her countenance was literally distorted with rage: she, who was wont to be so prim and so demure, seemed animated with the fury of a fiend: her eyes, naturally of glossy dulness, literally flashed forth fire: her lean gaunt frame quivered visibly from head to foot.

The terror into which Lady Calanthe Dundas was for an instant thrown, and which had caused that shriek to burst from her lips, was singularly evanescent. It lasted but for a moment; and recovering her presence of mind,—catching up, as it were, in the twinkling of an eye the armour of a naturally strong soul's fortitude,—she assumed a dignified aspect, though not one of bold hardihood or unmaidenly defiance, as she said, "Sister, you now know my secret. But think not that for a single instant do I blush to repeat in your presence the assurance of undying love and imperishable constancy towards the saviour of my life."

Thus spoke that truly noble creature; and for the moment all my other feelings and emotions were absorbed in admiration of that young patrician damsel of only eighteen, who thus made a merit of the pure and holy affection with which she had been inspired for one who was so immeasurably beneath her. Lady Georgiana Tiverton was seized with astonishment: she stepped back a pace or two, gazing upon her youthful half-sister with the air of one who could scarcely believe her own eyes or her own ears.

"Yes," continued Calanthe, hastening to take advantage of the pause thus occasioned by Lady Georgiana's dismayed wonderment, "I fear not, and I blush not, to proclaim that I love Joseph Wilmot—and that I have told him so! Young as I am, I am no silly romantic girl who would all in a moment rush into marriage: because it would only be to steep in poverty the object of my affection. But *this* I do hope—that as I shall remain constant to him, and I have the fullest certainty he will continue equally faithful to me, the time will come, a few years hence, when our happiness will be ensured."

I knew that all this was said as much for me as for Lady Georgiana herself; and that these avowals and assurances were thus thrown out in the gushing enthusiasm of Calanthe's noble and affectionate heart, under the conviction that we should not again very soon find an opportunity of being alone together. I was amazed and bewildered,—amazed at her fortitude, bewildered by the excitement of the scene—and lost too in admiration of a character which, in its magnanimity, formed so remarkable an exception to the worldly-minded pride and utter selfishness of the aristocracy generally. As for Lady Georgiana, she made a vehement gesture as if to command silence on the part of Calanthe, so that she herself might speak; but it was only too evident that rage still choked her utterance.

"One word more!" continued the young damsel. "I do not ask you, sister, not to write to our father and tell him all that has occurred; because I know that you will! You will consider it your duty; and perhaps, as the world goes, you are right. Well then, I shall return home prepared to encounter my sire's anger and my mother's reproaches,—prepared also to endure the scorn, the taunts, and the contempt of my brothers and sisters. But amidst all these, there will be one consolation—which is, that it is beyond the power of even the sternest parental authority to pluck out from my heart the love which it cherishes, or to

forbid me from hoping. Now, sister, you understand my feelings. The only favour I *do* entreat is that you will not visit your own anger, nor call down that of your husband, on Joseph's head. Remember, he saved our lives——Yes, he, a mere youth, dared do what a strong man candidly confessed he should not have ventured to undertake. And moreover, I call heaven to witness that it was I who first made avowals to Joseph—and that never of his own accord would he have approached me in that sense!"

"Calanthe," said Lady Georgiana, now recovering sufficient control over her feelings as to speak with a certain degree of calmness, "whatever remonstrances or representations I may have to make, shall be spoken elsewhere."

"That is as I could wish, sister," responded Calanthe.

"And another thing," added Lady Georgiana, "it will be Joseph's own fault if what has now taken place, becomes the subject of gossiping scandal at the Lodge."

"Joseph is incapable of mentioning my name lightly!" exclaimed Lady Calanthe, who appeared triumphantly elate at being thus enabled to act as my vindicator. "We must part now," she added, bending her looks upon me,—those looks which suddenly melted into touching and tender sweetness: and as I turned rapidly away, she appeared to shed upon me the dimness of a parting smile.

I retraced my steps to Myrtle Lodge in a state of mind which is scarcely within the power of description. I thought not of what might happen to myself. That I should probably be discharged summarily, and perhaps characterless, entered not at the moment into my meditations—or if it did, lingered not there. All my ideas were absorbed in feelings of mingled admiration and compassion for that noble-hearted and magnanimous young lady, who had so suddenly emerged from the feminine weakness of desponding love, into a true womanly fortitude in the moment of emergency. But what had I heard?—that for my sake she would now have to endure the anger of parents—the taunts and scorn of brothers and sisters,—and that all these she would encounter if not cheerfully, at least resignedly—still cherishing love, and still clinging to hope. Ah! and now the opportunity for disabusing her of her error was past: the wished-for occasion had gone by for revealing to her the truth that my heart was another's;—and she, unhappy girl, believed that it was her own! Oh, what was I to do? Could I write to her, and thus by a single stroke of the pen destroy her only source of consolation? could I all in a moment rob her of the only means which she had to strengthen and solace herself when about to enter on the ordeal of parental indignation and fraternal contumely? No, no—it was impossible!—it would be a cruelty which, even if necessary, I had not the moral courage to perpetrate.

I entered the Lodge; and fortunately found no one at the moment in the servants' room,—where my dinner, consisting of cold meat, had been left out for me. I had no appetite to touch a morsel: but I was glad at being thus left to myself, inasmuch as I had leisure to compose my feelings—or at least to study how to cast a veil over them, by the time I again met Charlotte and my fellow-servants. I bustled, with more than my wonted activity, about the work which I had to do, so as to avoid conversation: but all the while I was in a state of nervous excitement, which I felt that the most trivial incident would inevitably betray. An hour elapsed ere Lady Georgiana and Calanthe returned to the Lodge; so that I supposed they had a lengthened—perhaps serious, perhaps stormy discourse together, after I left them. That the female figure we had seen in the distance, when we were standing at the stile, was Lady Georgiana Tiverton, there could now be little doubt: that she perhaps had some reason, either of curiosity or suspicion, to follow Calanthe, who had devised a pretext for going out alone, was likewise easy to be conjectured;—and that the cunning woman had watched from some secluded spot, while Calanthe proceeded in one direction and I in another after we parted at the stile, was but an additional link in this natural chain of surmises. Moreover, the topographical features of the neighbourhood enabled Lady Georgiana to steal behind that wall where our second meeting was held—and thus to listen to at least some portion, if she were not in time to catch the whole of the grief-broken speeches in which Calanthe had addressed me.

They returned, I say, to the Lodge; and while Lady Calanthe ascended to her own chamber, Lady Georgiana rejoined Mr. Tiverton in the parlour. About half-an-hour afterwards, the bell rang. I got for the moment purposely out of the way; and so John Robert answered the summons. When I returned to the pantry, where I was occupied, a few minutes afterwards, John Robert told me that I was wanted in the parlour: but he did not make the announcement as if he had an idea that anything extraordinary had occurred, or that there was anything wrong. I must confess that I now felt rather nervous as I ascended to the parlour: I expected to be overwhelmed with reproaches for what might be considered my presumption and arrogance in aspiring to the hand of Lady Calanthe; and I wished that I could arm myself with some of that young lady's fortitude:—but this in the same degree I could not muster to my aid. As I opened the door, I perceived Mr. Tiverton standing, with his hands in his pockets, before the fire—while Lady Georgiana was seated—prim, cold, and demure, as was her wont—at the table.

"Joseph," said my master, in a voice that was glacial and severe, "sudden business calls me to Exeter; and you must accompany me. I have some errands for you to do there. Get yourself in immediate readiness."

He said no more: Lady Georgiana spoke not a word. I hastened up to my chamber, and put on my best livery. What could be my master's intention?—was he adopting this means of quietly removing me from the Lodge? I felt assured that such was the case; and with this anticipation, I lingered a few minutes to put all my things into my box, so that it should be in readiness to be sent after me.

As I descended the stairs, my heart palpitated violently: for methought that Lady Calanthe might possibly be on the watch to catch sight of me, and that she would issue forth from her chamber. Nor was I mistaken. The door opened: and she abruptly made her appearance. Her

countenance was pale—but wore an air of mingled decision, sorrow, and love.

"Write to me at the post-office, Enfield!" she hastily whispered, as she threw her arms round my neck and strained me in her embrace. The next instant she tore herself away—re-entered the room—and closed the door.

All this took place in far less time than it has occupied to record: and though I was in a measure prepared for the incident,—yet when it did occur, I was too much confused to give utterance to a syllable. I hurried down stairs with the sensation of her last fond kiss still upon my cheek, and a strange excitement in the heart. Again I felt I had been traitorous to the sentiment which I chose to cherish for Annabel: again I accused myself of moral weakness;—but what was to be done? It was too late to remedy the past; and thus had I allowed incident to accumulate upon incident, all tending to confirm in the mind of Calanthe the idea that my heart was devoted to her. I entered the parlour; and Mr. Tiverton at once bade me follow him. His wife said not a word: nor from the countenance of either, could I glean aught to confirm or refute my suspicion, that I was now leaving Myrtle Lodge, to return no more.

My master passed out by the front door, I following him. I had it upon the tip of my tongue to say that as I presumed I was about to depart for good, I hoped he would permit me to take leave of my fellow-servants and of Charlotte Murray: but as he glanced back towards me, to see if I were behind, there was something so stern and severe in his look, that I dared not proffer the request. We passed on into the main road; and just as we entered it, a return post-chaise happened to be proceeding along in the direction of Exeter. He stopped it: a bargain was made with the post-boy: I ascended to the dickey—Mr. Tiverton entered the vehicle—and we proceeded to the city. On arriving there, Mr. Tiverton conducted me to a tavern which was connected with a coach-office; and obtaining a private room, he now began to reveal his intentions.

"I am not going, Joseph," he said, speaking with the same glacial severity as before, "to deal in reproaches or upbraidings. Your own good sense must tell you how impossible it is that *certain hopes* which have been entertained, can ever be realized; and you must also comprehend how equally impossible it is that you can remain another hour in my service. No doubt you suspected the object for which you were brought hither?"

"I did, sir," was my answer: but I did not choose to tell him that the *certain hopes* to which he had so unmistakably alluded, were never entertained by me. I was resolved that not from such lips as *his* should Lady Calanthe receive a revelation which was to clear up the fatal error into which my moral weakness had lulled her. No: for I knew where I could write to her; and it was now my purpose to communicate fully with her upon that subject, so soon as I might fancy she had returned to Mandeville Hall.

"Yes—you could not have done otherwise," resumed Mr. Tiverton, "than suspect for what purpose you were so summarily taken away from the Lodge. I do not appeal to you, Joseph, to abandon those hopes to which I have alluded; because if in boyish vanity or love-sick infatuation, you should make any endeavour to see Lady Calanthe Dundas, or communicate with her, beneath her father's roof, to which she will to-morrow return,—his lordship will know how to frustrate your views, and perhaps punish their insolence. It may be that in dealing somewhat leniently with you, I take into consideration certain circumstances which give you a sort of claim upon my consideration. I have therefore drawn up a written character which may serve you; and you are at liberty to refer any gentleman or lady to me for farther information. But I must insist that you take your departure from this neighbourhood; and above all things, that on no pretence do you come to Myrtle Lodge again. I will not do you the injustice to say that I think you would volunteer explanations in which the name of Lady Calanthe Dundas might be disagreeably mentioned——"

"No, sir," I interjected: "I am incapable of it! Of this, rest assured."

"Well," continued Mr. Tiverton, the least thing less coldly than before, "I had this good opinion of you. But inasmuch as the servants might naturally question you as to the cause of your abrupt departure, it is necessary that you should avoid the pain and confusion of refusing explanations. Therefore you will return to the Lodge no more. I will take care to say something which shall prevent your late fellow-domestics from supposing that you committed anything derogatory to your character. Your box shall be sent in the course of the evening—indeed, the moment I get back. It is my intention to pay your coach-fare to whatsoever place you may choose to go: you will likewise receive the wages that are due to you, with an additional month's salary on account of this abrupt dismissal. Now, where do you choose to proceed? to what place will you be booked by any one of the night-coaches?"

"I care not, sir—it is indifferent to me," was my answer. "I have no friends anywhere——"

And then I stopped short: for the idea of my utter friendlessness sent the emotions swelling up into my throat.

"Well, leave it to me, Joseph," said Mr. Tiverton. "I will take your place for some distant town."

"I do not wish, sir," I observed, as a sudden thought struck me, "to go back to London. I—I dislike London."

"Very well: it shall not be London, then. Here is the money due to you: here is your written character. The coach by which you will leave, departs at nine o'clock: the office is next door: your box shall be sent thither. And now good bye, Joseph: I wish you well."

Mr. Tiverton thereupon took his departure; and I remained for some minutes in the room at the tavern, pondering upon all that had occurred on this memorable day. I was unhappy for many reasons,—on Calanthe's account—at my own utter friendlessness—and at my moral weakness in not having spoken out candidly to the young lady. But still I was not completely dispirited nor downhearted: I had plenty of ready money, and two good written characters—one from Lord Ravenshill's late steward, the other from Mr. Tiverton.

It was now about five o'clock in the evening:

the dusk had long since set in; and I felt no inclination to go rambling about the streets of Exeter. I had partaken of no refreshment since the morning; and therefore went down stairs to obtain some tea in the servants' room at the tavern, as I did not like to remain in the private apartment. I was told that as the apartment had been paid for, I might use it—and that Mr. Tiverton had likewise settled for my tea and supper before he took his departure. I have no doubt that all this generosity of paying for my meals and my coach-fare was a mere matter of calculation on his part, in order to render my summary dismissal as little painful as possible, and to propitiate me into keeping silence relative to Lady Calanthe. As if such base and sordid means were necessary! and as if no credit could be given me for loftier and nobler sentiments!

When I had taken my tea in the private apartment, I descended to the coach-office to make certain inquiries; and found that my place had been booked as an inside passenger for Salisbury, which is about ninety-two miles from Exeter. An inside place! Here was another proof of Mr. Tiverton's anxiety to disarm me of any resentment, if I were capable of such a paltry feeling under such circumstances. It was evident that he was terribly alarmed lest the honour of the family to which by marriage he had become allied, should suffer through any spitefulness or vindictive malevolence on my part. In the course of the evening my box was brought down in a cart; and apparelling myself in my plain clothes, I made a parcel of my livery and took it to a neighbouring tavern, whence the carrier's van which passed near Myrtle Lodge, started daily. Nothing had been said to me by Mr. Tiverton about returning the livery; but as a matter of course I felt it to be my duty to do so. At nine o'clock I took my place in the coach, which set out upon its journey.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

MY NEXT PLACE.

THE coach was full inside, there being three passengers beside myself. Two consisted of a tradesman and his wife belonging to Salisbury, and who, as I presently learnt from their conversation, had been on a visit to some friends at Exeter. The third was a gentleman whom I must more particularly describe. He was what may be termed a comfortable-looking person—about fifty years of age—with a red face—and a large double chin overlapping a very low white cravat. When he opened his great coat to consult his watch, as the coach drew up at the various inns where it changed horses, and as the light of these establishments streamed in at the window,—I observed that he was dressed in black, and altogether had a clerical, or at least a professional appearance. He might be a parson—he might be a barrister—or he might be a doctor: but, as for a long time after the coach had started, he said not a word—but dozed in the corner, waking up only as the vehicle stopped—I gleaned not immediately which of these three he might be, or whether either of them at all. His watch was a very handsome one,—with a massive gold chain, and several large seals he wore it in his fob, and not in his waistcoat pocket. He had small twinkling eyes of greenish gray—a certain calm, self-satisfied, and placid manner—and a patronising blandness of look, as he surveyed his fellow-passengers.

The tradesman and his wife got talking to me almost immediately after the coach started: but they were too garrulous in respect to themselves, to show much curiosity as questioners. They were both very stout—and were completely jammed in, as it were, on the narrow seat as they sat side by side. Presently the wife dozed off to sleep—then the husband: and silence prevailed. I could not sleep so easily: my mind was active with various conflicting thoughts; and just as I was beginning to feel a drowsiness stealing over me, at about midnight, the coach stopped at the place where the passengers were to sup. We of the inside all got out for the purpose; for the keenness of the night air in the month of February, was sufficient to provoke an appetite, even in spite of disagreeable reflections:—and three or four of the outside passengers likewise sat down to the meal. Now was it that the gentleman in black, with the handsome gold watch, suffered his tongue to be unlocked; and he spoke in a tone of blandness fully corresponding with his manner. He observed that the night was very cold—gently and deprecatingly counselled the tradesman not to eat meat-pie, as it would produce dyspepsia—recommended the tradesman's wife to take a very little brandy and water, instead of malt liquor, which was bad for persons of a full habit of body—intimated to a young gentleman opposite, an outside passenger, that the roast-beef would do him more good than the boiled—and found time to expatiate upon the digestible qualities of cold roast fowl. From all this I argued that one of my hypotheses was correct, and that the comfortable-looking gentleman, with his suavity of manner—with his bland address, as well as his universal courtesy—must be a doctor. When we had all taken our places again, this gentleman appeared less inclined to doze than he had hitherto done: but as the tradesman and his wife were more sleepy than ever after supper, he directed his conversation to me.

"And pray, my lad," he asked, in the most dulcet tone, "where may you be going?"

"To Salisbury," was my response.

"Very good. So am I. I live there. Do you?"

"No, sir. I know nothing of the place."

"Any friends living there?" was his next question—but uttered in such a manner as if he would not for the world appear guilty of impertinent curiosity.

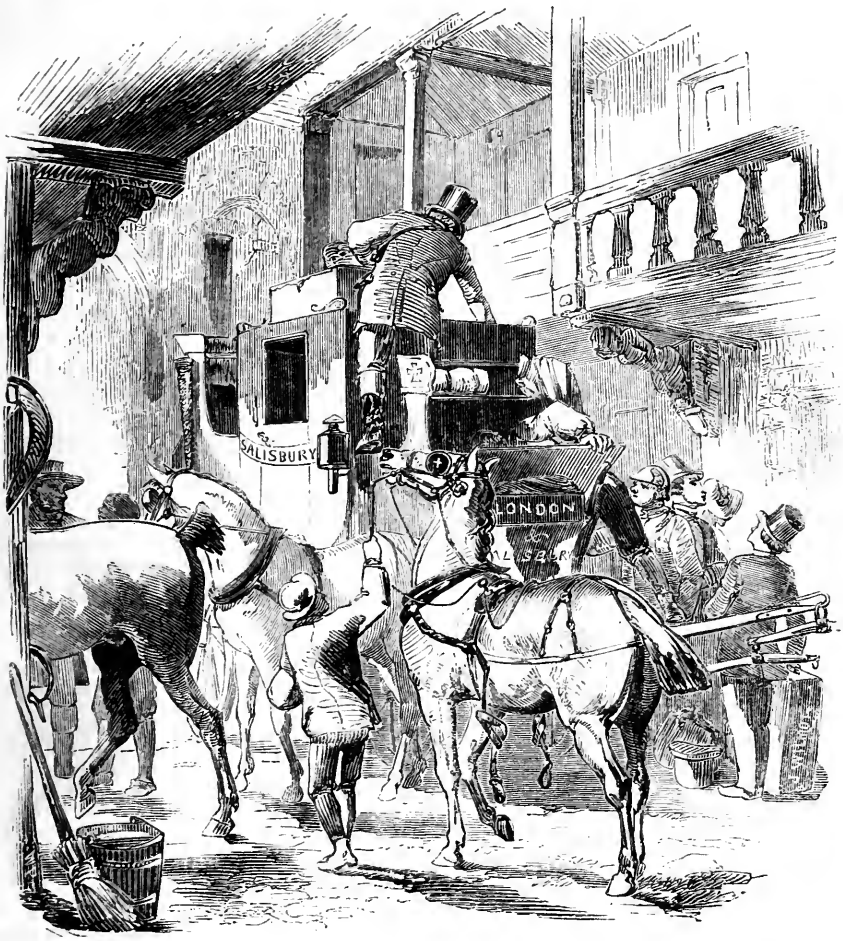
"I have no friends there, sir," I replied, choosing to be somewhat communicative, as the idea had entered my head that very possibly my fellow-traveller might be enabled to help me to a situation. "I am going to Salisbury in the hope of getting a place as a domestic servant."

"A domestic servant?" he said, slowly repeating my words, as if he fancied that he had not rightly understood them.

"Yes, sir: in that capacity."

"And have you ever been in service before?"

"Yes—at Lord Ravenshill's, and at Mr. Tiverton's of Myrtle Lodge."



"Very good," he observed. "Of course every one has heard of Lord Ravenshill; and I have no doubt that the other family you have named, must be a good one, though I have not the honour of their acquaintance. So you have had excellent places, my lad," he added, with a patronizing kind of half subdued laugh, "that you are enabled to travel as an inside passenger? But why go so far as Salisbury to look for a situation?"

"It is my wish, sir," was my rejoinder: for I knew not what other answer to give.

"Good—very good. But about your character?" continued the gentleman.

"I have written testimonials, sir, about me; and Mr. Tiverton will answer by letter any application made to him on my behalf."

"Very good—*very* good," said the gentleman: and then he repeated the words in a murmuring and musing tone. "As a page I presume you have served?"—and when I answered in the affirmative, he added, "Very good! Well, it is strange—very strange! But I suppose you have had the measles, hooping-cough, and all those kind of things—and you have been vaccinated?"

I again answered satisfactorily: for the gentleman—who, I was now more convinced than ever, must be a doctor—repeated the words, "Very good," two or three times in the same musing way as before. Silence followed: he dozed off to sleep—and so did I. No farther conversation of any consequence took place until the coach was entering the city of Salisbury at about eight o'clock in the morning; and then the gentleman said to me, in a blandly whispering tone, "Just permit me, my lad, to see those little testimonials to which you alluded when we were talking during the night."

As I produced them, he put on a pair of gold spectacles—read them both very deliberately—and returning them to me said, in that same musing

manner as before, "Good—very good:" so that I really did entertain the hope of having somewhat interested the gentleman on my behalf. Nor was I mistaken: for when the coach drove into the yard of the hotel which was its destination, he said to me, as he alighted first, "Don't go away for a minute, my lad. See to your luggage, while I look after mine; and keep in the way, as I want another word with you."

I thanked him, and obeyed his directions. The guard cried out the names of the passengers as he handed down the trunks, inspecting at the same time the card upon each; and when he called, "Dr. Pomfret!" the comfortable-looking gentleman signalized himself as that individual.

"Good—very good," he observed as he saw his luggage safe. "And now, my lad," he resumed, turning again to me, "I suppose you have no particular place where you wish to go—and that if you were to obtain a situation at once, you are prepared to enter upon it?"

I assured Dr. Pomfret that such was my earnest wish: whereupon he exclaimed, "Good—very good! Step aside for a moment; and possibly we may come to an arrangement:"—an announcement at which I felt considerably cheered. "The fact is," he continued, "I want just such a lad as you are. It's strange—very strange—is it not? But so it is. Wages liberal—two suits of livery a year—plenty to eat and drink—and not much work to do. I am a physician——I may say," he added, with an increased self-complacency very much akin to arrant conceit, "I am *the* physician of Salisbury; and the principal duty you will have to perform, is attending the front door to usher in the patients and going out with the carriage."

I expressed not merely my willingness to accept the situation, but also my gratitude for the proffer; and the wages he named being really very liberal, the bargain was at once struck. He accordingly bade me follow him; and when he had given instructions to the hotel-porter that my box was to be brought along to his house, together with his own, he led the way through several streets, until he at length stopped at a dwelling of handsome appearance in one of the principal thoroughfares. As we stood for a few moments at the front door, until the summons was answered by a man in a groom's undress, I noticed that there was a large apothecary's shop precisely opposite, with a lamp of coloured glass over the door; and upon this lamp, in gold letters, were the words—"MR. SAWKINS, Surgeon."

Dr. Pomfret, seeing my eyes settle upon this establishment, as I was gazing about as one does in a strange place, said, "Good—very good! You are looking at Mr. Sawkins's? A very clever man is Sawkins—a good surgeon—a good apothecary—a good accoucheur. A very nice man is Sawkins!"—then fixing his eyes upon me with a look of mysterious confidence, he added in a lower tone, "I discovered his talent—and I made him what he is."

I thought it a proof of very intelligent shrewdness on the part of Dr. Pomfret thus to discover talent—and a proof of proportionate generosity to patronise it: and no doubt my looks expressed these sentiments; for the physician stroked his chin in a complacent and satisfied manner. We now entered the house; and the doctor said, "Well, Philip—all well at home? How are your mistress and the horse?"

"Both uncommon well, sir," was the groom's reply: but I certainly thought it a somewhat strange economy of words to couple the lady and the horse in the same sentence, as if to avoid the supererogation of a separate query for each.

"Good—very good," said Dr. Pomfret, as he hung his hat up in the hall. "And now, Philip, show this lad the way to the kitchen; he is in my service, and answers to the name of Joseph."

Philip stared first at me—then at his master—as if he thought there must be some mistake; and as he afterwards informed me—though perhaps it may savour of vanity on my part to repeat the compliment—he fancied I was a young gentleman, and much too genteel to enter into service. Dr. Pomfret saw what was passing in his mind; and smiling placidly, observed, "I think he will be no discredit to my establishment."

On being introduced to the kitchen, I found a very comfortable breakfast spread upon the table, and a very comfortable-looking cook doing the honours. An exceedingly stout man—nearly sixty—and looking so apoplectic that it was fortunate for him he was in a doctor's service, and therefore could have prompt assistance in case of a sudden visitation of the kind—was doing ample justice to the cold meat; and as, I subsequently understood, he never drank "slops," he was washing it down with ale. This was the coachman. The groom, who bore the name of Philip, was a short, thin, dapper-made man; and the only fault I could find with him was, that he smelt uncommonly of the stables. A housemaid and two parlour-maids completed the domestic establishment. I wondered that there should be *two* parlour-maids—still more so when I subsequently heard that one was denominated the Family Parlour-maid, and the other the Private Parlour-maid: but the distinctions, and the separate services which they had to render, I learnt in due time, as will be hereafter explained. The domestics were all very kind and friendly in their manner towards me,—the old coachman especially giving it as his opinion, in a very husky voice, "that I was an uncommon likely lad to sit by his side on the box."

Immediately after breakfast I was sent for into the parlour, to be measured for my liveries; and this time there was no trying on of old ones—no endeavour to convert impossibly-fitting garments into fresh use. The doctor had never before kept a page: the coachman had been wont to act also as footman and attend the front door;—but he was getting too corpulent for such a purpose—the physician's practice was rapidly extending—and therefore it appeared that he had resolved to increase his domestic establishment by the addition of a page. I may here observe that Mrs. Pomfret was by no means in appearance such a lady as I had expected to see. I had pictured to myself a stout matronly dame, as comfortable-looking as her husband: but my ideal portraiture was wrong. She was slender, without however being of the emaciated leanness of Lady Georgiana Tiverton—quiet in her manners—speaking in a softly subdued voice, as if much accustomed to attend upon the sick-room—walking with that lightness of tread which has almost the stealthiness of the cat—taking care never to open nor shut doors violently—but mov-

ing about the house as noiselessly as a ghost. She was a few years younger than her husband—sufficiently good looking—but yet methought with a certain sinister mysteriousness of expression of countenance—as if harbouring secrets and always watchful not to be surprised into a betrayal of them. She had however a great deal of that suavity of manner and blandness of speech which characterized the doctor; and, as I soon found, she was by no means a bad mistress towards her servants.

The duties I had to perform in my new place, were pretty well as Dr. Pomfret had described them—answering the front door and going out with the carriage. The routine of each day may be thus described:—At eight o'clock in the morning Dr. Pomfret came down in a very handsome flowered silk dressing-gown, and received the poor patients: namely, those who came to consult him gratuitously. These were admitted into the hall, where as many as could find seats took possession of them, while the others stood. One after another were they hurried into the physician's presence; and I soon perceived that he knocked them off with as much rapidity as possible. This generally lasted till nine—when the breakfast was served in the parlour; and my positive instructions were that if any "poor person" came even a moment after the clock in the hall had proclaimed the hour of nine, no admittance was to be given. After breakfast the doctor ascended to his dressing-room, and apparelled himself with the utmost nicety and neatness to receive his paying patients. These were admitted into the various parlours on the ground-floor,—Dr. Pomfret's reception-room being at the back of the premises, and approached by a long passage leading out of the hall. Ladies were shown into one parlour—gentlemen into another—and a third apartment was kept exclusively for those who arrived in carriages,—this being far more sumptuously furnished than the others, though the entire dwelling was well appointed throughout. The visits of the paying patients ranged over three hours: namely, from ten till one. At one Dr. and Mrs. Pomfret lunched; and dinner was served in the kitchen. At two the carriage came round to the door: it was one of the old fashioned doctor's-chaises, drawn by one horse, having a box seat, but no rumble behind: and thus my place was next to the coachman. When once he was on the box, he seemed to be nailed there,—my duty being to jump down at every place where we stopped—give an immense long knock and a loud ring at the front door (save in cases where the illness was severe)—then open the carriage-door and let the doctor out. The period for these calls generally extended from two till five: for at some houses the physician would remain chatting much longer than at others. When the rounds were over, Dr. Pomfret's day's labours were finished: he sat down to an excellent dinner at six o'clock—drank his couple of bottles of wine every night of his life—and would not be disturbed by anybody. No one could expatiate better on temperance in eating and drinking: but no one more enjoyed the pleasures of the table than Dr. Pomfret.

Two or three days after I had entered my new situation, I availed myself of my leisure time in the evening to pen a letter to Lady Calanthe Dundas. But before I could draw up one which in any way pleased me—or rather, I should say, gave me satisfaction; for a *pleasure* it assuredly was not—I spoilt half-a-dozen sheets, and had to begin over and over again. It was some time before I could even decide how to commence it—whether as "My lady," or "My dear lady," or "Dear Lady Calanthe Dundas:" but I ultimately determined on this last-mentioned mode of address. I commenced by expressing how deeply I was flattered by her esteem—how highly I prized her friendship—and how impossible it was for me ever to forget all the kind interest I had experienced at her hands. I then proceeded to explain that I myself had been ungrateful in one sense—namely, in the weakness of having hesitated to reveal the actual state of my feelings: but this self-reproach I qualified by reminding her that on each occasion when she had spoken to me, I was too much confused and bewildered to act as I ought to have done. I went on to explain that my heart had been for some time attached to another—whom however I did not name; and I besought Lady Calanthe to forget that there was such a humble and obscure being as myself in existence. I expressed the deepest regret that I had not spoken out frankly on the first day when she honoured me with a particular avowal; inasmuch as such candour on my part would have no doubt prevented subsequent embarrassments and difficulties. I said that I was only too well aware that for more reasons than one I merited her reproaches, and must be regarded by her as the source of whatsoever troubles and annoyances she might have undergone, or be still undergoing, at the hands of her relatives. I concluded by beseeching her forgiveness, and recording many earnest wishes—which were indeed most heartfelt—for her happiness and welfare. I gave the address at which I was living—as I did not consider it either handsome or necessary to practise any concealment or make any mystery in this respect; though I sincerely hoped that if Lady Calanthe did condescend to answer me, it would be in a style which, while pardoning me for my weakness and want of frankness, would show that she considered everything at an end between us.

This letter I took the next morning to the post. Days passed—no response came: they grew into weeks—and still was my epistle unanswered. I could not help a feeling of annoyance at this silence. It now became quite clear that Lady Calanthe would not condescend to notice my letter. I felt that I deserved this treatment at her hands: but nevertheless I could not conquer that vexation. If she had really loved me as much as she said, surely she would have penned one single line expressive of a wish for my welfare, even though she should in the same sentence have rebuked me for that moral weakness which I had at length so candidly avowed. Yet could I doubt that she had really loved me? No: there was every evidence that she had indeed loved me passionately—fondly—a time. But now I depicted to myself that fine spirit of her's, so full of fine feminine elasticity—so yielding to the softest feelings—so vigorous in its resistance of tyrannous coercion,—I depicted it, I say, haughtily hurt, yet dignified, and even seeking to be disdainful while smarting with its wounds. But perhaps the letter never reached her at all? perhaps it had been intercepted? I must confess that this was an idea to which I more or less clung: for though

I wished everything to be at an end between Lady Calanthe and myself, yet would I have been pleased with the receipt of a single line to show that she did not now hate me. I thought of writing to her again in the same sense as before: but I did not —for the reflection was naturally forced upon me, that if the first letter had been intercepted, a second would be sure to share the same fate.

I must now proceed to give the reader a little farther insight into Dr. Pomfret's real character—his mode of conducting his business—and the nature of one part of his establishment. As a matter of course the insight I thus obtained into these matters, was only gradually acquired, and not until I had been some months in his service. That suavity of manner and blandness of speech, were to a very great extent assumed. In some little degree they had become habitual to him: that is to say, so far habitual that he never failed to adopt them on occasions where he thought it either necessary or expedient. This, too, was for the most part the case: inasmuch as even when not dealing with patients, it was his study and interest to keep up a certain appearance and maintain a character for mildness and gentleness. But, in his heart he was a hypocrite and a tyrant; and it was towards his pauper patients—those who visited him for gratuitous consultation from eight to nine—that he exhibited himself in his true colours, or at least with a very flimsy mask. To them he was ever hasty and impatient—sometimes abrupt and brutal. If a poor woman entered into a long tale relative to the ailments of her child, he would cut her short in a moment—tell her he knew very well what was the matter with the child and how to treat it—then, writing her a prescription, would fling it across his desk with not half so much gentleness as one tosses a bone to a dog. He would only again put on an air of blandness when giving her a parting instruction in these terms:—

"Now, my good woman, you must get this prescription made up at once—and the sooner the better. It is all the same to me to what chemist or apothecary you go for the purpose. I have no interest in recommending any one in particular. But if you *do* ask me, I can scarcely hesitate to say that Mr. Sawkins opposite dispenses the best drugs and is the safest apothecary in all Salisbury. He never gives oxalic acid for Epsom salts, as I am sorry to say is too often the case with *other* dispensers. However, you can do as you like: but for my part I think that you will find Sawkins the cheapest as well as the best."

This sort of recommendation — altered, as a matter of course, according to circumstances—invariably closed Dr. Pomfret's advice to all patients, whether non-paying or feeing ones; and when I inform the reader that Mr. Sawkins regularly divided his profits with my master, it will be seen that the latter had very good reason indeed for the recommendation thus given. But if Dr. Pomfret met Mr. Sawkins in the street, they never stood talking together—they passed with a mere exchange of bows: they carefully avoided the possibility of being thought too intimate. Of an evening, however, when it was dusk, Mr. Sawkins would enter the doctor's house by the back-way; and joining him in the dining-room, would help him to discuss an extra bottle of wine,—on which occasions I frequently heard them enjoying the merriest peal of laughter—very likely at the ease and success with which they carried on their double-dealings.

Mr. Sawkins was a mean-looking man, of very slight figure, and much pitted with the small-pox. He was bustling and active—excessively civil—and to the doctor humble and cringing. He readily endorsed every opinion which his patron chose to put forth, and never ventured upon the slightest contradiction. Like Mrs. Pomfret, he also had at times a certain stealthy manner of moving about, and a hushed mysteriousness of voice: for if on some occasions the merriest shouts of laughter pealed from the dining-room when he and the doctor were in the middle of their second bottle,—on other occasions, when I entered for any purpose, I might find them conversing together in accents subdued almost to a whisper. Mr. Sawkins was about eight-and-thirty years of age—had been married some years—and had several children. He was considered to be a highly respectable man: that is to say, he paid his way with regularity, and never had a dun at his door: he contributed to charities, and was as regular in attendance at church as his professional engagements would permit—or at least the world thought so, which was precisely the same thing. But so was Dr. Pomfret; and on this point I have now a little secret to tell. The very first Sunday that I was in my new place, the old fat coachman, when taking a glass of ale and a piece of bread and cheese by way of lunch at half-past eleven, looked up at the kitchen clock; and in his hoarse asthmatic voice, exclaimed, "Why, the Litany must have begun by this time, I declare! Run off to church, Joseph —ask the sexton to tell you which is master's pew —and whisper in the doctor's ear that he is wanted directly." This instruction I accordingly obeyed, without troubling myself to reflect much upon the circumstance itself; and on proceeding to the church and delivering my message, Dr. Pomfret rose with a certain air of mysterious importance; and though apparently anxious to make his *exit* as gently as possible, so as not to disturb the congregation, he nevertheless seemed perfectly conscious that every one *was* looking at him. On the following Sunday I was despatched to the church with a similar message, just as the Commandments were beginning—the Sunday after at the commencement of the sermon. On the Sunday next ensuing, Dr. Pomfret stayed away from church altogether, and amused himself with a novel in the parlour: but as if to make amends, he remained throughout the service on the Sunday which came next. Afterwards, for the three or four ensuing Sabbaths, I had to fetch him out as before, though at different periods of the service; and therefore, by the skilfulness of these arrangements, he avoided the suspicion that it was all a preconcerted scheme. Such was the way in which my master fulfilled his religious duties: and very likely Mr. Sawkins adopted a similar policy.

The old coachman had been for a great number of years in the physician's service; and though tolerably well attached to his master, yet there were times when having taken an extra glass of ale, or perhaps a tumbler of brandy-and-water in the evening, he would chat familiarly enough upon the physician's proceedings. Not that he did this in a spirit of reprehension—but as if he considered

Dr. Pomfret's tortuous pursuits and artifices a subject for a capital joke. So true it is that the example of masters and mistresses too often tends to destroy proper feelings, and indeed absolutely demoralize their servants, both male and female. The coachman would tell us how Dr. Pomfret encouraged hypochondriacs in their delusions relative to their ailments, and would write out lengthy prescriptions which were sent to Sawkins to be made up, and consisted of pills and potions that contained really no medicament at all. For notwithstanding the great caution adopted by the physician and the apothecary in all their proceedings, such little matters as these would occasionally ooze out, by a word incautiously dropped, or by the gossipping of Mr. Sawkins' assistants; and thus it was intelligible enough how a domestic who had been so long in Dr. Pomfret's service as the old coachman, should have gleaned several particulars of this kind. In short, I had not been many weeks in my new place before I obtained a sufficient insight into my master's character to inspire me with very considerable disgust and contempt for him. He was however kind enough to us servants—and so was his wife: we lived well—our wages were not merely liberal, but were punctually paid: and therefore, whatsoever I might think of my master and mistress, I had no reason to complain on my own account.

I now proceed to speak of another matter at which I have already lightly glanced: I mean the nature of one part of the doctor's establishment. The first and second floors were so arranged that each formed a complete suite of apartments, shut out by a door from the landing: that is to say, any one occupying, for instance, the apartments on the first floor, might pass from one room to another without being seen by persons going up and down the stairs. When first I was in my new place, I noticed that at about the same time the breakfast things were prepared for the parlour, another tray was got in readiness: and this was carried up-stairs by the female-servant who bore the denomination of the Private Parlour-maid. A separate dinner was likewise cooked, and borne up-stairs by her: a separate tea and supper in the same manner. There was a great deal of mystery observed in all this; and whenever a particular bell rang from the up-stairs rooms, only the Private Parlour-maid answered it; and if she did not happen to be in the kitchen at the time, it was not attended to by any other of the female servants—but she was hastily summoned, with the intimation, "Jane, *your* bell has rung." This Private Parlour-maid, I should add, was a somewhat silent and reserved young woman; and by her appearance as well as her manner, seemed discretion personified. Sometimes, if I entered the kitchen suddenly, I did happen to catch her talking in a low tone to the cook or one of the other females: but the moment I made my appearance they would glance at me—then exchange significant looks—and hold their peace. All these circumstances naturally struck me as being singular; and I do not hesitate to confess that they excited my curiosity: but I asked no questions—and for many weeks remained in ignorance of what I really desired to know. That there was however some person in the house whom I had not as yet seen, was evident enough: but whether an invalid lodger, or whether a relation of the doctor or his wife, I could not possibly conjecture. The individual—whoever *he* or *she* might be—never came out of the rooms on the first floor, received no visitors, and appeared to be shrouded in complete mystery as well as buried in total seclusion. No—not *total:* for after a time I ascertained that Mrs. Pomfret was wont to pass several hours with that person each day.

At length my fellow-servants, when they came to know me better, grew somewhat less reserved in respect to a matter which was evidently no secret to them. First they began to talk a trifle more openly in my presence: one word led on to another—so that in due course the mystery became revealed to me. The plain fact was this: Dr. and Mrs. Pomfret received ladies who had very good reasons for retiring for a few weeks or months, as the case might be, from the society in which they habitually moved. Beneath that roof shame sought an asylum and frailty a hiding-place; and those who, unwedded, were about to bear a mother's name, received every accommodation in return for a commensurate reward. The utmost privacy was thus secured to them: the good faith and honour of the doctor and his wife could be relied upon—the bribes they received, being no doubt sufficiently high to ensure such inviolable secrecy. I moreover learnt that there was at that present time a lady occupying the first-floor apartments. None of the servants except the Private Parlour-maid had ever seen her. She had come one night, deeply veiled as an additional precaution; and having once crossed the threshold of the outer door of that particular suite of apartments, she had never as yet re-crossed it. The Private Parlour-maid knew not her name: perhaps even the physician and his wife were equally ignorant of it. After a lapse of about two months she became a mother: a nurse, who was ready in attendance, departed at once with the new-born infant; and about three weeks afterwards the lady herself went away in the same mysterious manner in which she had come.

I farther learnt that the accommodation thus furnished at Dr. Pomfret's house to ladies seeking temporary retirement, was a circumstance not generally known in the city of Salisbury. There were of course whispers to that effect in some quarters: but it was kept as quiet as possible, for fear lest, if universally known, it might injure the physician's regular practice. But from all I understood, these private arrangements were even more lucrative than his more open professional pursuits: and if he had been compelled to abandon either, it would have been the latter which he would have given up. I now began to comprehend how it was that Mrs. Pomfret had acquired that cat-like stealthiness of locomotion—that mysterious look—that habit of speaking in a low half-hushed voice,—in short, that air with which she impressed one of being much accustomed to attend upon the sick-room. And here, too, was another explanation of the intimacy of that connexion which subsisted between the doctor and Mr. Sawkins, the professional attentions of the latter as an accoucheur being frequently put into requisition at my master's house.

Having now afforded the reader some greater insight than I was at first enabled to give, into

Dr. Pomfret's pursuits, and the nature of one part of his establishment, I may resume the thread of my narrative. I had been nearly four months in my new place: and it was now the beginning of June. One evening, as I was sitting in the kitchen, talking with the other servants,—Mr. Sawkins being with the physician in the dining-room, and Mrs. Pomfret out at an evening party, as she had then no lady in the house who wanted her society,—a loud and imperious knock, accompanied by an equally peremptory ring, sounded through the dwelling. I hastened to answer the summons; and by some accident the hall-lamp had not been lighted, although it was past nine o'clock, and therefore dusk. No street-lamp was near on the same side of the street: but at that season it is seldom so dark as to prevent persons observing each other with a tolerable degree of accuracy. Moreover Mr. Sawkins's brilliant-coloured lamp opposite threw its beams to the edge of the pavement at the doctor's front door;—and there, on that pavement, stood an individual whom I at once recognised as Sir Malcolm Wavenham.

"Is Dr. Pomfret at home?" he at once asked.

"Yes, sir," was my response, tremblingly given: for I was stricken with astonishment on beholding that man there,—a man towards whom I had so many reasons for entertaining the strongest aversion.

"Then say that a gentleman wishes to see him immediately," he hastened to observe. "It's of no use to give any name: my business is altogether private—and I must see the doctor alone."

I did not ask him to walk in: I could not give utterance to another word: his presence there had so painfully conjured up every circumstance, thought, fear, and association, in respect to Annabel. I mechanically turned back into the hall, leaving the front door wide open: he followed me, no doubt taking it for granted that I meant him to do so; and I threw open the door of a parlour, where lights were kept burning in case a visitor should arrive. He passed hastily in, with a certain hurried excitement of manner; and I closed the door behind him. He evidently had not recognised me: I felt assured he had not. Indeed, it was hardly to be expected that he could have done so: for as I stood in the hall, I was completely in the shade—and moreover he knew so little of me. He had seen me but two or three times at Charlton Hall:—at the theatre, on the night that I beheld him with Violet Mortimer (as the radiant being was then called) he had not noticed me at all; and on that other night, many months afterwards, when I had rushed up to his carriage as it had stopped at the wayside public-house near Exeter, he had no opportunity of catching more than the slightest glimpse of my features by the lamp-light. Thus, altogether, it was not strange that he did not know me: it would have been more remarkable if he had recognised me. A year and a half had passed since last he beheld me at Charlton Hall: I had grown considerably since then;—for at the time of life of which I am speaking, an interval of eighteen months effects a considerable alteration in the personal appearance of a youth.

But to continue. Having hastily shut the front door, I lighted the hall-lamp, lest Dr. Pomfret should be angry at the omission—and then proceeded to the dining-room, where he was seated with Mr. Sawkins. His countenance was somewhat flushed with wine; and by the empty bottles upon the sideboard, it was evident that he and the apothecary had made the best of their time in that respect since dinner. I had regained my composure as well as I was able: at least I assumed it outwardly, though my mind was filled with painful thoughts of Annabel. I informed Dr. Pomfret that a gentleman wished to see him on immediate business: he bade me give him a bottle of soda-water without a moment's delay; and when he had drunk it, he put on an air of bland and affable self-complacency, as he proceeded to the apartment to which the Baronet had been shown.

I then descended to the kitchen, wondering what business could possibly have brought Sir Malcolm Wavenham to my master's house. Certain misgivings—certain dreadful thoughts—floated in my brain: but I endeavoured with all my power to disperse them. I will not dwell upon them now; but will rather hasten to observe that at the expiration of about twenty minutes Sir Malcolm took his departure, and the doctor rejoined Mr. Sawkins in the dining-room.

Three days elapsed, during which interval I was rendered very restless, uneasy, and anxious by those thoughts to which I have alluded; and these were by no means mitigated in their painful poignancy, when I observed that the Private Parlour-maid was much engaged up-stairs, as if preparing one of the suites of rooms for the reception of a visitress. There is no use in disguising what my apprehensions really were. The reader has doubtless already penetrated them: for it was impossible for me to disconnect the image of Annabel from whatsoever pursuits I found engaging the attention of Sir Malcolm Wavenham. But then I thought to myself, that as he was a thoroughly profligate young man, and in the course of his unscrupulous pleasures had no doubt effected the ruin of many female victims, he might have called at the doctor's house to make private arrangements for the reception of any one of these; and that it was ridiculous to take it as a matter of absolute certainty that it could be for Annabel, and Annabel *only*. Such was the argument with which I strove to quiet my apprehensions and deaden my misgivings: but they nevertheless constantly recurred in spite of me.

It was not until the middle of the fourth day after Sir Malcolm Wavenham's visit, I acquired the positive certainty that the suite of apartments on the first floor was actually being prepared for the reception of some one. Then however I gathered from the discourse of my fellow-servants that such was the case. But the Private Parlour-maid spoke a very few words on the subject—and these guardedly. The name of Sir Malcolm was not mentioned at all: perhaps she did not know it;—and I need not add that an equal silence was maintained in respect to her who was coming. I was not even sure that this expected arrival was the result of any arrangement made by that Baronet: it might have no connexion with him at all: he might have sought the doctor on other business? Alas, no!—the state of my mind would not suffer it to be quieted by these reasonings!

Inasmuch as there was more bustle and activity on the part of Mrs. Pomfret on this fourth day than on the three preceding ones, I suspected that the visitress would come to the house in the course of the approaching night; and when soon after ten o'clock I retired to my chamber as usual, I was tortured with such anxieties—such poignant excruciations of feeling—that it would have been vain to think of rest. I sat up: my room was on the highest storey of the house, the window looking upon the street—but with so wide a ledge or cornice just beneath it, that I could not see down upon the pavement. Every time my ear caught the sounds of a vehicle approaching along the street, I listened with the utmost suspense to discover whether it would stop at the doctor's door. Three or four thus passed—time was going on—midnight was approaching—when at length the sounds of another vehicle reached me. Again I listened; and this time they ceased immediately below. I opened the room-door: I even went partially down the stairs—I heard a low double knock given at the front door—and then footsteps hurrying through the hall. I felt sick at heart:—so unhappy, so wretched, with the frightful misgivings which haunted me, that I thought I must cry out—or at least rush down to arrive at some certainty as to my fears. But no: I remained where I was—transfixed, yet shuddering. Yes—shuddering as if suddenly and all in a moment transferred to the midst of a hyperborean realm of eternal ice!

I heard voices speaking in hushed tones: but I could not recognise any one in particular. Then I heard footsteps ascending the first flight of stairs: the outer door of the suite of apartments on the first-floor opened; and when it closed again, I staggered, with reeling brain and wildly palpitating heart, back to my own chamber. There, throwing myself upon the bed, I gave vent to my anguish in floods of tears and passionate sobs. My heart told me that I was now beneath the same roof as Annabel: I felt convinced of it; and I knew that it must be under circumstances of branding shame and dishonour for her! For many a long hour that night did I thus abandon myself to the bitterness of my thoughts,—until grief and despair expended themselves, as it were, with their own violence, leaving me weak, feeble, and exhausted, alike in mind and body: so that when at last I put off my apparel and entered the bed, sleep at once fell upon my eyes.

But what dream was it that now followed me in my slumber? Methought that I beheld Annabel standing by my bedside, radiant as I had first seen her nearly two years back, at the age of fifteen, invested with all the charms of beauty in its first virginal blossom. I beheld her with the myriad of ringlets of a golden hue clustering and waving around her exquisitely shaped head—her large azure eyes filled with a modest softness, and beaming with the light of innocence—the expression of mingled ingenuousness, simplicity, and serene thoughtfulness upon her countenance—the coral lips slightly apart, yet sufficiently so to afford a glimpse of the pearls within. Yes—I beheld her as I had first seen her, in all respects the same except with regard to the apparel: for the fanciful nature of my dream clothed her with a seraphic raiment,—azure and white garments investing her form, and displaying the fairy lightness and sylphid symmetry of her shape with a ravishing effect. The undulations of the bust—the slope of the shoulders—the slenderness of the waist—and the lithe willowy elasticity of the figure, were all thus exquisitely defined—thus charmingly outlined; and she wore the semblance of a guardian angel as she appeared to be standing by my couch. Methought that I stretched out my arms towards her: but that movement on my part dissolved the spell of the delicious dream: the bright apparition vanished—and quick as incidents can alone succeed each other in a vision of the night, was another scene conjured up to my view. For now I fancied that I was in the churchyard of Charlton village—that I was gazing in at the window of the sacred fane—that the iron din of the clock, clanging in my ear, was proclaiming the hour of midnight—and that all in a moment I beheld the form of Annabel, clad in the garments of the grave, passing down the aisle. The moonlight poured into the church, silvery and cold—Oh, so cold!—methought it struck like ice-shafts to the very marrow of my bones; so that I shuddered and shivered in my very dream. Then towards me was turned the countenance of that white form—a countenance pale as the face of death; and with a convulsing start and a cry of horror I awoke.

That I did thus start, and that I did thus give give vent to a cry, I well knew so soon as I was enabled to collect my ideas: for I found myself still shuddering—and the door opening hurriedly, Philip the groom, who slept in the next chamber to me, rushed in, asking me what was the matter, that I had called out so loudly? I told him—and it was indeed the truth—that I had just awakened from the midst of an unpleasant dream. This explanation, which of course satisfied him, was but too well corroborated by my affrighted and almost agonizing looks. For when he had retired, and I sprang out of bed and caught a glimpse of my features in the glass, I recoiled from the reflection of my own face. I was compelled to sit down, and exert all my mental energies in order to regain a degree of composure: for that dream struck me as being fearfully ominous. This was the beginning of June: in three weeks more it would be Midsummer's Eve again: and when the clock should strike twelve on that night, the year would be completed since the memorable date when either the freak of a morbid fancy or else a terrible preterhuman reality, had shown me the image of Annabel in the aisle of Charlton church.

CHAPTER XXIX.

MIDSUMMER'S EVE AGAIN.

I FELT very ill for all the rest of that day; and when my fellow-servants noticed my appearance, I accounted for it by stating that I had passed a very bad night, which was troubled by sad dreams—a circumstance which Philip at once undertook to corroborate. How I longed to ask Jane, the Private Parlour-maid, for some particulars relative to the personal appearance of the new occupant of the first-floor apartments; but I dared not:—and even if I had, she would not have answered my

questions. She was too well paid, both by her mistress, and by those on whom it was her exclusive duty to attend, to risk the loss of her situation by any idle gossiping. Besides, she was naturally discreet and reserved; and her disposition was thus well calculated to support her personal interest. But what suspense and what painful anxiety for me, to believe myself to be beneath the same roof with Annabel, and yet not dare to seek her presence! Perhaps she was unhappy—alas, how could she be otherwise, if all I suspected was true? —and what else could I suspect save the very worst? Yet again, how did I know it *was* she? Was it not the very height of folly for me to adopt as a certainty that which at best was still a matter of doubt? Nevertheless, again and again must I repeat that my heart told me my conjecture was the truth.

Were I to record all the various thoughts which were excited in my mind, and all the conflicting emotions that were aroused into cruel agitation in my heart, the narrative would prove a most painful analysis of the human feelings. I will not therefore be unnecessarily explicit on this point; but will hasten to observe that several days passed, and the occupant of the first-floor suite of apartments kept as closely to them as the preceding lodger had done. Jane, the Private Parlour-maid, was unremitting in her attentions: Mrs. Pomfret passed several hours each day with the lady. Often and often did I linger on the staircase near the first-floor landing, in the hope that the inmate of those rooms might possibly come forth, if only for an instant—or that if the outer door should be accidentally left open, I might see her pass from one chamber to another. But no: what I hoped for, did not occur. At length it struck me all of a sudden,—and then I wondered I had not thought of it before,—that so far from seeking to obtain an interview with Annabel, if she it really were, I ought to avoid the chance thereof as much as possible. Why take a step which, if successful, would only be plunging a fresh dagger into her heart? why add to the amount of shame and anguish which she must already experience? It would be cruel on my part. Besides, what could I now possibly be to *her?* and ought *I* to cling to her image so tenaciously as I did? No—it was my duty, for a hundred reasons, to banish her from my thoughts. Ah! duty does not always run parallel with volition and inclination! And let it not be for a moment fancied that I now entertained the hope of ever becoming the husband of Annabel. Under existing circumstances I felt it to be impossible. But to act towards her as a brother—to do my best to conduct her into another and a better path—to raise up that broken flower, still so beautiful even in its ruin—to save her from a relapse into error —and by gentlest yet most earnest suasion, to fix her mind upon the necessity of atoning for the past,—this had been my hope—this my aim, when seeking an interview with her. But I obtained it not: and now, as I bethought me that such an interview, if procured, would be painful in the extreme, I resolved to watch for it no longer—but to await other circumstances and more fitting opportunities to carry out my design.

Whenever a double knock was heard at the front door, it was with a palpitating heart I went to answer the summons, in the expectation of beholding Sir Malcolm Wavenham. But no. Day after day passed—and he came not. At least I did not behold him: if he came at all, it was at a late hour, after I had retired to rest. And this methought was not improbable; for in such an establishment as Dr. Pomfret's, knocks and rings during the night were not unfrequent: but it was the duty of Philip the groom to attend to them.

A fortnight had elapsed from the date of the arrival of the new inmate of the first-floor apartments, when an incident occurred which left not the slightest doubt in my mind—if any indeed had before existed—that this inmate was Annabel. Dr. Pomfret gave me several letters to take to the post; and as I proceeded along the street, I happened to notice the direction on the envelope of one of them. It was to "*Mrs. Lanover, No.——, Great Russell Street, Bloomsbury, London.*" But the handwriting——Oh! could I doubt it? was it not that of Annabel, though traced as if with a tremulous hand! I stopped and read that direction a dozen times over. I examined every word—scrutinized every letter. Yes—I felt assured it was the writing of Annabel. Slowly, thoughtfully, and mournfully did I continue my way to the post-office; and I do believe there was an instant when I was tempted to open that letter, to ascertain in what terms and in what frame of mind an erring daughter was thus addressing an affectionate and doubtless afflicted mother. But no: that impulse was as transitory as a rapidly passing thought could be:—not for worlds would I have violated the sanctity of the correspondence thus entrusted to me! But now my thoughts flowed into another channel. I had thus acquired the certainty that Mrs. Lanover was still with her husband—or at least, it was reasonable to suppose so; and that however cruel his conduct might have been to Annabel, after my flight from the house—however much such treatment might have tended to force her away from her home, and induce her to take to the stage, her mother had not been expelled or urged to departure at the same time. How I pitied poor Mrs. Lanover—that amiable, suffering, kind-hearted woman, who was cursed with such a husband, and who had ceased to enjoy the blessing of a virtuous and dutiful daughter!

Occupied in such reflections as these, I retraced my way from the post-office to the doctor's house; and for the remainder of that day, I was so abstracted that my fellow-servants questioned me on the subject. I gave evasive responses, and bustled with unusual activity about my duties in order to avoid farther questionings.

Days passed on; and the 23rd of June arrived. The threshold of Midsummer's Eve was now closely touched upon. The instant I opened my eyes in the morning, the very first thought that flashed to my mind was this ominous date. In a few more hours, I said to myself, the year which seemed so intimately connected with Annabel's destinies would die into the eternity of the past. Was she to disappear with it? Notwithstanding the powerful efforts I made to combat against superstitious ideas, I could not help feeling most restless, most anxious, most uneasy, as that sinister date stood in colossal figures before me. They resembled gaunt spectres whose outstretched arms were prophetic of a fellow-creature's doom. The reader cannot wonder that I should have thus been

troubled and agitated by such terrors and apprehensions as these: despite all my efforts to the contrary, my mind was filled with the gloomiest forebodings. I saw how difficult it would be to conceal my agitation from my fellow-servants—and how unsatisfactory any evasive replies would be to their questionings. They would naturally think I had something hanging very heavy on my mind; and from motives of kindness, as well as of curiosity, they would be certain to interrogate me. I therefore did the best I could to avoid them throughout that day: but it cost me an almost preterhuman exercise of self-control to assume an air of composure at meal times.

And how wretchedly passed that day—how slowly—amidst what dark forebodings and mental excruciations! If I said to myself, "The incident in Charlton churchyard was a mere phantom of a disordered fancy,"—there seemed to be a voice responding solemnly in the depths of my soul, "No, it was a reality!" How I longed that the morrow should come! how I dreaded to seek my chamber! with what profound apprehension did I look forward to the hour of midnight! I was in the condition of one who felt assured that something terrible was about to happen, but who all the time was endeavouring to persuade himself that his fears were foolish, puerile, and groundless.

At half-past ten the servants separated for the night,—all except the Private Parlour-maid, who seemed more than usually busy, and who was constantly hastening up and down stairs. When the other domestics sought their chambers, she still remained in the kitchen, where the fire was kept burning, as if she had for the present no intention of retiring to rest. But a fire in the middle of summer—she needed it not for the sake

of warmth: it was evidently for the preparation of things that might be needed by an invalid under particular circumstances.

However, I was now alone in my own chamber; and not for a moment did I think of seeking my couch. I did not put off an article of my apparel—but sat down and gave way to my reflections. Eleven o'clock was proclaimed by the deep-toned bell of the nearest church: another hour, and the year would be complete! If Annabel should be still alive when the last stroke of twelve had ceased to vibrate in the air, then indeed might I adopt the conclusion that the incident of Charlton church was all a freak of the fancy——but not till *then*. For now, as midnight approached, my superstitious terrors grew more and more profound, and likewise more poignant.

Half-an-hour passed; one half-hour alone remained to complete the year. I now heard the front-door open and close with some little degree of violence, as if in the excitement of haste on the part of the individual who had either just gone out or just come in. Almost immediately afterwards my ear caught the sounds of a loud knocking at Mr. Sawkins' door opposite; and hurrying to my window, I distinctly perceived Dr. Pomfret standing on the steps of the apothecary's house: for the ledge which ran underneath my easement, did not shut out from my view the pavement on the opposite side of the way. I hastened to extinguish the light, which I had still kept burning in my room,—for fear the physician, on looking up, should perceive it, and would be angry at the circumstance. But again, in a moment, was I at the window; and by the light of the brilliant-coloured lamp I beheld Mr. Sawkins come forth and instantaneously cross the way with the doctor. The front-door of the house now opened and closed again; and I, a prey to the most torturing anxiety, could not possibly resist the impulse which my feelings gave to open the door of my own chamber. I went forth, and listened: the sounds of several footsteps and the murmurs of voices reached me from below. All in an instant I felt shocked and ashamed at my own conduct—and stole back into my chamber. But in the excitement of my mind I forgot to close the door behind me. I threw myself on a chair, and again gave way to my reflections. Ten minutes or a quarter of an hour must have thus passed, when I was startled up by hearing footsteps again moving about in the lower part of the house, and now as if in a very hurried and excited manner. Once more did such wild apprehensions seize upon me—such dreadful alarms—that I ceased to have any control over my thoughts or actions. I rushed forth. It struck me that something terrible had occurred. I felt convinced of it. All my superstitious alarms of the day—all my dread forebodings, appeared to accumulate as if to strike me with one tremendous blow. Again was I on the landing; and voices from the first floor reached my ears. Good heavens, what were the words which I thus caught!

"It is all over, poor thing!" said Mrs. Pomfret, whose voice I at once recognised. "She is——"

"Dead?" ejaculated the Private Parlour-maid, who at the moment was hurriedly ascending the stairs to that floor.

"Dead!" was the thrilling echo which burst from my lips: for, Oh! the horrible word smote with such terrific power upon my brain, and sent a pang of such ineffable agony piercing through my heart, that I lost all control over myself. Dead! Good heavens, Annabel was dead! Wildly I rushed down the stairs. Mrs. Pomfret and the Private Parlour-maid, who had heard the dread monosyllable echoed from my lips, and had then caught the sounds of my precipitating footsteps, were standing transfixed with mingled dismay and amazement at the wild excitement thus evidenced on my part. I bounded past them: the arms of both were outstretched to hold me back as I rushed towards the door, which stood open, and through which a light was glimmering from within. But a whole army of men would not have retained me then! Onward I flew—madly! I remember that a room having the appearance of a parlour, was traversed with the speed of the whirlwind. Into the room beyond did I precipitate myself. It was a bed-chamber: a light was burning on a table—an old woman (a nurse) was hastening out as I entered: Dr. Pomfret and Mr. Sawkins were likewise advancing towards the door—I suppose to ascertain what the disturbance meant. But, reckless of everything—a prey to mingled madness and despair—I dashed past them. And there, in that bed, lay a lifeless form:—upon the pillow reposed a head the wealth of whose luxuriant hair flowed all wildly about, and whose countenance was of the marble pallor of death!

"Annabel! dearest Annabel!" I exclaimed in a passionate outburst of grief; as I threw myself upon my knees, extending my clasped hands wildly towards her who slumbered in the sleep that knew no waking.

At that instant the neighbouring church-clock began to proclaim the hour of midnight; and as its deep metallic tones, penetrating into the room, rolled upon my ear, methought they were the same as those of Charlton Church when proclaiming the same hour, precisely one year back, on that Midsummer's Eve which showed me the prophetic vision that was now so fatally fulfilled. A rude hand grasped me violently by the shoulder: the voice of Dr. Pomfret sternly and roughly spoke something, the sense of which I did not however catch: a dizziness seized upon my brain—the room appeared to be turning round—the corpse itself seemed moving likewise—and with a heavy groan I sank senseless upon the floor.

CHAPTER XXX.

MY CHAMBER.

When I awoke to consciousness, I was undressed, and in my bed in my own attic chamber. It was broad daylight; and it appeared as if I were awakening from some horrible dream, but the nature of which I could not immediately remember. Full soon however did a dreadful recollection flash to my mind; and the whole scene of that chamber of death was vividly conjured up to my view all in a moment. I started up,—as if with the wild glance which I flung round the chamber, I could at once catch at something that would clear up the horrible uncertainty in which I was involved, and

either convince me that it was a vision or a reality. But I sank back with a sensation of utter weakness, as if just recovering from a long, a severe, and an exhausting illness. I experienced, too, such a racking pain in the head, that I mechanically raised my hand to my brow—and found that it was bandaged. As I passed my hand over that bandage, the movement was accompanied by suddenly-excited sharp stinging pains on either temple; so that the idea at once struck me that I had been leeched. I shuddered coldly from head to foot, while a horrible consternation seized upon my mind. Was it all true? had I indeed fallen down in a swoon by the side of the couch whereon reposed the dead Annabel? and had that incident been followed by a severe illness—perhaps an illness which, for aught I knew to the contrary, might have already lasted several days, and not merely several hours? And then too arose in my memory the prophetic vision in Charlton Church: thoughts of awful solemnity gradually crept into my mind—a superstitious terror, which was not however *all* a terror; because, if the spirit of Annabel had suddenly glided up to my bedside, I felt that I should not have been afraid!

I lay for some minutes in a state of mind which cannot be easily explained. How I wished that some one would enter, that I might put the questions for which I so yearned to receive answers. How long had I been ill?—had only hours elapsed, or had days passed, since I beheld the inanimate form of Annabel stretched like a beauteous marble statue in that couch of death, her lovely head reposing in stillness upon the golden masses of her luxuriant hair? Again I strove to rise—but I could not: it seemed as if all my physical energies had been crushed out of me: I was thoroughly powerless, prostrate—as incapable of following my volition as the infant child.

Gradually — doubtless through exhaustion — a drowsiness stole over me: the objects in the chamber grew fancifully dim—till at length they faded from my view,—while the mist of sleep deepened around me. Then methought I heard the door gently opening; and that old nurse whom I had seen in the chamber of death, stole slowly round the bed towards me. But she was immediately followed by another figure—a slender and youthful shape, habited in deep mourning. But, Oh! it seemed as if wild and ecstatic fancies suddenly sprang into existence in my brain, as I beheld the hair which crowned the head of that young creature. It was of the same precious golden hue as that of Annabel: but instead of showering down in myriads of shining curls on her neck and shoulders, it was gathered up in rich massive bands and fastened with black ribbons. I did not immediately catch a glimpse of the countenance: but soon I did, as it was bent upon me. And then—Oh, wilder thoughts!—Oh, vision more ecstatic still!—it seemed to me the countenance of Annabel. Yes, *her* countenance—but pale—indeed colourless—all save the vermilion lips, which had their bright vital colouring. Was it a spirit from the other world which I thus beheld? Ah! how touchingly mournful—how full of a sweet pathetic interest and of an angelic sympathy—was the expression of that face, as the soft mournful azure eyes were fixed upon mine! I longed to stretch out my arms towards that beauteous vision: but it suddenly disappeared from my view—and it seemed as if the darkest, blackest night fell upon my eyes.

When I again woke, a rushlight was burning on the chest of drawers in my little chamber; and I perceived a medicine-bottle standing near it. I raised my hand to my forehead to steady my thoughts: it was merely a mechanical movement—but it made me aware that the bandage was gone. I felt my temples; and the evidences of leech-bites were there. Then, I had indeed been very ill:—perhaps I had raved in delirium? perhaps I had passed through the ordeal of a dangerous fever? I now felt convinced that whole days, and not merely hours, must have elapsed since I sank down senseless by the side of the couch whereon I beheld the dead one. Oh! if days had thus passed by, she was perhaps already in the cold grave—at least in the narrow coffin; and never more could it be given to me to look again upon the countenance of her whom I had loved so tenderly and so well! The tears streamed from my eyes—my heart was convulsed with bitterest sobs—and I murmured continuously for some minutes the name of Annabel. I lay awake for more than three hours. I heard the church-clock strike one—then two. I beheld the glimmering of the midsummer dawn come tremulously in at the window and make the rushlight grow pale. The clock struck three; and then again did a drowsiness come upon me, and sleep revisited my eyes. How long I slept I know not: but after awhile methought that I had another singular dream. It appeared to me as if it was now altogether light in the chamber—that the door opened—that the old nurse came cautiously in—and that she was followed by the same figure clad in deep mourning, that I had before beheld and that bore the likeness of Annabel. Methought that in a species of holy and serene rapture did my eyes follow this angelic being as she approached the couch; and that her looks were again bent upon me with the mournfulest, holiest sympathy. It seemed also that I studied her attentively, and that the similitude she bore to Annabel was perfect. There was the same exquisite symmetry of the figure, with the developed charms of sweet seventeen—the same classic profile of the countenance—the same clear azure of the large and mournful-looking eyes—and there too the same glory of the rich golden hair. And the transparent fairness of the skin was set off even dazzlingly by the sable garments:—every feature, every lineament, every graceful contour, every elegant attribute,—all these were the characteristics of Annabel. But what meant the singularity of this dream? Wherefore a second time should I fancy that she thus followed that old nurse into the room?—and this nurse, too, an ugly creature whose wrinkled countenance and hatchet features seemed positively repulsive when viewed by the side of Annabel's exquisite loveliness. Again did the vision fade from my view; but after a short interval I awoke completely, and found myself alone.

The church clock was striking eight in the morning. I looked towards the drawers: the rushlight was gone—the medicine bottle was removed from the table—and its contents had diminished; for I well recollected up to what mark they were when I had first noticed that bottle in

the night. I had too in my mouth a nauseous taste, which was not merely that of fever, but evidently of a medicine which had been poured between my lips. Therefore some one had been in the room very recently. Perhaps it was that old nurse? But methought how diseased must my imagination be—how ecstatically morbid—how superstitiously fanciful, to depict that old hag as being on each occasion followed by the mourning spirit of the dead Annabel!

I felt a little stronger than I was on the previous day—but only a very little. I could sit up in the bed for a few minutes, without a sense of such complete exhaustion as that which had previously flung me back again upon my pillow: but I could not get out of bed—I was still too weak for that. Now I resolved to lie awake until some one should come, that I might ask the questions which I so much longed to put. In a few minutes I heard footsteps approaching the door: it opened—and, sure enough, the old nurse entered. Ah! with what a wild palpitation of the heart did I keep my eyes fixed upon that door, to see whether the spirit-form of Annabel, clad in its deep mourning garments, would follow now. But no: the old woman had closed the door—and it opened not again to admit that shape so anxiously awaited. But if it were a vision, it needed no opening doors. Walls of adamant and barriers of brass—ramparts of stone, thick as those of any fortalice—would not keep out the gliding apparition from another world. But it came not: the nurse was alone.

"How long have I been ill?" I inquired: and I was struck with a sort of dismay at the sound of my own voice—so weak and feeble was it, and such a painful effort did it cost me to give utterance to those accents at all.

"Ah! my poor young man, you are really awake now?" said the old woman; and though her features were so ugly, her manner was kind and her tone soothing. "You have been ill about ten days—very, very ill indeed; and you must not talk much——no, not at all; for you are yet excessively weak."

"I have been ill ten days?" I said, in accents scarcely audible even to myself: and the tears gushed forth from my eyes as I murmured, "Then it is all over! Annabel reposes in her cold grave; and never more shall I look upon her countenance!"

"Always something of this sort in his delirium, poor Joseph!" said the nurse, evidently in a merely musing manner, and not thinking that the words would be caught or comprehended by me.

"I can assure you that I am perfectly sensible," I answered: and she gazed upon me with a strange scrutiny, in which commiseration was blended. She could scarcely bring herself to believe that what I said was correct.

"Poor youth, the fever has not yet left him!" she said, shaking her head in a sorrowful manner.

"Nurse," I responded, "believe—Oh, believe me, I am sensible now! I know where I am—I know what you have been telling me—I have been ill ten days! And I have been leeched," I added, as I raised my hand towards my temples.

"Well, my dear youth," she answered, "if you are really getting better, I am truly delighted: for you have been so very, very ill. Now a great deal depends upon yourself. You must remain very quiet—you must have nothing to excite you—you must not think of the past——indeed you must not!"

I was about to tell her of my dreams—how I had beheld the spirit-form of Annabel enter the room on two occasions at the same time with herself: but I felt ashamed of revealing such fancies; and moreover I did really experience so much weakness after the exertion of breathing even the few words I had spoken, that I held my peace. The nurse said she would go and tell Dr. Pomfret I was awake, and that I was better; and she would also inquire what food she should now give me. I found that she was altogether a very kind-hearted old creature; and with an expressive glance did I thank her for her goodness towards me. She was a well-spoken woman too; and I subsequently learnt that she had seen better days, and by misfortune was compelled to earn her bread as an attendant upon the sick-couch.

She quitted the room; and in a few minutes Dr. Pomfret, in his rich flowing silk dressing-gown, made his appearance. As I heard his well-known footsteps approaching, I was somewhat frightened, lest he should upbraid me for my conduct in bursting so rudely and unceremoniously into the chamber of death on that memorable night from which my illness dated. But I was as agreeably surprised as I was infinitely relieved, when he entered the room with an affable expression of countenance, and with a few cheering words. For as if he himself had foreseen what my apprehension would naturally be, he hastened to say, in those bland tones which he could so well assume at pleasure, "Do not be uneasy, Joseph—do not excite yourself: I am not going to scold you. Indeed, we will not speak a word of the past."

He drew a chair to the side of the bed—sat down—felt my pulse—asked me several questions with regard to my sensations—and concluded by observing that I was much better, that I was getting on as well as could be expected after so serious an illness, and that I might have some tea and dry toast if I fancied such refreshment. Not a syllable did he utter in respect to the incidents of that memorable night: not a word of inquiry did he put as to how I knew her who had died beneath his roof: not a single query as to the circumstances under which I had been impelled to the side of the death-bed! He spoke kindly—and a stranger would have thought *feelingly*,—bidding me be of good cheer—assuring me that I should want for nothing—and that if I took care of myself, I should soon be well. I was proceeding to express my thanks, when he checked me, beseeching me not to exert myself: and then he quitted the room. The nurse brought me up the promised refreshment; and soon after I had partaken of it, I again fell off into a profound slumber.

And now again—after the lapse of an interval the length of which I could not compute—methought that I entered upon the ecstatic phase of one of those dreams in which my diseased imagination proved so active. It appeared to me that I awoke—that on opening my eyes I found it was still broad daylight—and that the sun was shining with its noon-day power in at the window. Then

it seemed to me that the door gently opened: but this time instead of its being the nurse who entered, it was that same spirit-form which bore the likeness of Annabel. I heard the rustling of the mourning dress: I heard too the light tread of her steps, almost aerial as they were. It appeared to me likewise that she agitated the curtain at the foot of the bed as she passed. She came up to the side of the couch; and again her looks were bent in tenderest, mournfulest sympathy upon me. I longed to address her: I longed to speak to her as I beheld those sweet azure eyes thus looking down upon my countenance, shedding as it were a soft and benignant light in unto my very soul. Yes, I longed to speak; and I felt that I had the power to murmur a few words.

"Tell me, Annabel," I said, "wherefore do you come to me thus? Do you bear some warning or some communication from the other world? Are you happy, Annabel? God grant that you are! Oh, you know not how I loved you while you were upon earth! Yes—I loved you with all a brother's fondest devotion. Though you erred, I could not love you less! Speak to me, Annabel: speak to him who thus loved you so tenderly and so well!"

"Joseph—dear Joseph," answered the sweet soft musical voice which was so familiar to my ear; and it sounded like the most delicious music descending from the spheres.

"Oh, you speak to me at last, dearest Annabel!" I said: and my arms were outstretched towards her.

She gave me her own hand: I seized it—I pressed it in both my own——Good heavens! I was awake—it was no dream—neither was it a spirit who was thus by my side: it was a being of flesh and blood—the living, breathing Annabel herself! The shock of mingled bewilderment and joy was too much for me: and I fainted.

When I came to myself, the old nurse was by the bedside; but vainly were my anxious looks swept around in the hope of seeing Annabel. She was not there; and then again I fancied that everything which had occurred could have been nothing more than a delusive dream. The tears trickled from my eyes——Oh, it was a dream so delicious—so delightful!—but yet I said to myself that it was of too elysian a character to be realized. For how was it possible? Had I not myself seen that lovely creature a pale inanimate corpse? and if it were merely a trance—if by any miracle she had come back to life—wherefore should she be in mourning?

"Do not weep, Joseph," whispered the old nurse, in a kind soothing tone: "you shall see her again——"

"Heavens!" I ejaculated, starting up in the wildest excitement: "what mean you? Can you read the dreams which have been visiting me——"

"It was no dream," interrupted the nurse. "She whom you have seen, lives."

"Annabel lives!" I murmured—and fell back upon the pillow.

"Yes. But do not excite yourself," continued the nurse. "Annabel Lanover lives: it was her twin-sister Violet whom you saw dead!"

Her twin-sister!—what a revelation for me. As the lightning darts through the murkiest clouds, making in a moment everything a blaze of light, did this revelation sweep through my mind, dispelling all that was mysteriously dark there before. Her twin-sister! Then Annabel was still the virtuous, the well-principled, the stainless, and immaculate being that I had originally known; and it was her sister whose errors had caused me so much unhappiness! A thousand things were now accounted for: as for instance, the treatment I had experienced at the hands of Violet at the theatre—and then, many months later, the circumstance of my beholding, in the Baronet's carriage, her whom I took for Annabel, within but a few hours after having met the real Annabel at Exeter. I need not however revert to all those details: the reader will comprehend how many painful circumstances were now divested of whatsoever mystery had at the time seemed to attach itself to them. While for Annabel's sake I deplored the loss of a sister whom I knew that her generous heart must love tenderly and fondly, despite her frailties and errors,—yet, on the other hand, great was my joy at thus finding my dreams realized—or rather that they were no dreams at all, but that while my mind had been half wandering under the influence of fever, I had more than once seen the real, living, breathing Annabel visiting my sick chamber with a most tender solicitude.

"Nurse," I said, "the words you have breathed in my ears, have poured a balm into my heart. And now I feel that I shall soon be well——Oh, yes! I shall soon be well."

"You must not excite yourself," said the good old woman; "or else, instead of getting well, you will experience a reaction."

"No, no—not so long as Miss Lanover is beneath this same roof! Do hasten and tell her——"

But I stopped suddenly short: for I was stricken by the fact that although, while I was in so dangerous a condition, she might out of sisterly kindness—or as my cousin—pay me an occasional visit, it would be indecorous for me to send and request her to come to my chamber. And then, too, a horrible thought suddenly sprang up in my mind. Perhaps her father,—that dreaded humpback—he whom I was more or less bound to regard as my uncle,—might possibly be also stopping at the doctor's house: and if so, what new misfortunes, or indeed what terrible dangers, might be in store for me?

"Tell me, nurse," I said,—and my countenance must have expressed my fears; for she regarded me with uneasiness, as if apprehensive of a relapse,—"tell me, are Miss Lanover's parents here with her?"

"No," she replied. "Miss Lanover came alone. She arrived the very day after her sister's death. Her mother is, I believe, in London: but her father, from what I understood, is upon the Continent on very particular business."

This last assurance was an infinite relief to my mind; and the nurse appeared more at her ease as she beheld the altering expression of my countenance.

"You must do the best you can," she said, "to get well. Do not excite yourself—and there will be no fear of a relapse. Your cousin Miss Lanover takes her departure to-morrow; but you shall see her again in the course of the day. There!" added the nurse, doubtless struck by the sudden

brightening-up of my looks; "you will not follow my advice—you will give way to your feelings!"

"How can I prevent it?" was the involuntary exclamation which burst from my lips—just as if the old woman knew how intense was the love that I experienced for Annabel. "But if you wish me to resume a proper tranquillity," I went on to say, "you will let me see Miss Lanover again as quick as possible."

"Well, well," answered the good-natured old woman; "I will go at once."

I expressed my gratitude with a look; and she quitted the chamber. In a few minutes she returned, accompanied by Annabel; and I felt such a gush of ineffable emotions welling up as it were from the profundities of my heart, that I could not give utterance to a word: but tears of delight trickled down my cheeks. Again did Annabel give me her hand, which I pressed to my lips; and as it was not immediately withdrawn, I continued to cover it with kisses, until she gently disengaged it, while her countenance was suffused with blushes. The old nurse remained in the room:—how I wished that she would retire!—for I had so many, many things to speak of to Annabel; and I dared scarcely touch upon any one in the presence of a third person.

"Joseph," said the fair young creature, as she sat down upon a chair by the bedside—and she spoke in a low, almost whispering voice,—"you are now aware of the loss which I have sustained—the loss of a sister who was dear to me, notwithstanding——"

She stopped short; and the crystal tears burst forth from her eyes. I could not bear to see her weep; and yet I breathed not a word in vain endeavour to console her—for I knew that whatsoever I might say on so painful a subject, could only have the effect of aggravating her grief. She wiped her eyes; and bending her mournful looks again upon me, said, "I know what is passing in your mind: there are many, many things upon which we have to speak—but there are also many, many reasons why we must not touch upon them now. I return to London to-morrow; but I will leave with you a copy of certain papers——I can say no more—I have already made this copy for the purpose; and it will explain the mysteries of much which has hitherto been incomprehensible to you."

"You return to London to-morrow, Annabel?" I said, in a profoundly mournful voice. "But when—Oh, when am I likely to see you again?"

"I know not, Joseph," she answered; and it was with a certain quivering of the voice, which made me fancy that she would have been pleased to have beheld a prospect of a speedy meeting. "No—I cannot say. We must trust to circumstances——"

"Oh! will you forgive me, Annabel," I said, in so gentle a whisper that my words could not have reached the ears of the old nurse,—"will you forgive me for having told you ere now how fondly and devotedly I have loved you?—will you forgive me, too, if I add that I can never cease to love you thus fondly, thus devotedly? Tell me, dearest Annabel, that you are not angry with me! Perhaps under existing circumstances,"—and I glanced at her mourning dress,—"I ought not to be speaking thus: but you depart to-morrow—a long time may elapse ere we meet again—tell me therefore that you are not angry with me?"

As she averted her blushing countenance, she once more gave me her hand—that fair beauteous hand, so small, so white, so exquisitely modelled: and again too did I press it to my lips. It was gently withdrawn; but still it lingered long enough in my clasp to convince me that Annabel was not angry with me, and that I was not indifferent to her.

"And now, Joseph," she said, again bending her looks upon me, "I have something of a very painful nature to communicate. My father,"—and it was evidently with a strong feeling of shame and sorrow struggling against a sense of filial duty, that she spoke,—"will return to London in a short time—perhaps a fortnight; and it may probably reach his ears—though not from my lips, rest assured—that you are beneath this roof. You can well understand," she went on to observe in a very low whisper, "that I cannot request Dr. and Mrs. Pomfret *not* to say that you are here, should they communicate with my father—because I have already told them that you are my cousin, and I dare not—I must not—throw out any hint prejudicial to the character of that father of mine."

"Annabel—dearest Annabel, do not speak another word!" I hastened to say, "upon a subject so painful. I shall soon be well—Oh! now that I have seen you, and that so many causes of unhappiness are removed, my recovery will be speedy. I comprehend the counsel you would give me: I will leave this place—I will go elsewhere."

"Do so, Joseph—do so, I conjure you!" said Annabel, in a tone and with a look of such earnest heartfelt interest, that the feelings thus excited within me, absorbed entirely whatsoever painful thoughts would otherwise have taken possession of me at the prospect of having again to seek my bread elsewhere. "But tell me, dear Annabel, may I not write to you——occasionally—if only once——"

"Joseph, it is impossible," she answered. "The letter might fall into my father's hand; and——But I need say no more—the subject is a most painful one."

The nurse now interposed—but quite good-naturedly, and with the delicately exercised authority of her position as guardian of the sick-room—to put an end to the interview, as she feared that I was speaking too much. She however hinted that if Miss Lanover chose to pay me another visit in the evening, to bid me farewell, full permission would be accorded; and the promise was given by her who was more than ever the goddess of my adoration, since I now found her to be all I thought and hoped when first I knew her.

After she had quitted the chamber, the nurse gave me my medicine, and bade me endeavour to compose myself to sleep. I promised that I would; and she left me for a while. But as the reader may suppose, I was too busily occupied with my thoughts to be able to close my eyes in slumber for a considerable time. How much had I to say to Annabel! and how much had been left unsaid! She knew nothing of all that had happened to me since last we met; and I knew nothing of what had happened to her since the memorable night

when she effected my liberation from her father's house! But while I was thus giving way to my reflections, sleep gradually stole upon me; and in my dreams did the image of Annabel stand conspicuously radiant.

When I awoke, it was evening: a light was burning in the room—and the nurse was seated by the bedside. In answer to her questions, I gave her the assurance that I felt much better: she made me take some refreshment which she had in readiness; and when I had partaken of it, she smilingly intimated that she would fetch my cousin to bid me farewell. In a few minutes Annabel was again with me: but still the nurse remained in the room—and I could not possibly feel offended that she should display this discretion and propriety. I was overwhelmed with grief at the thought of parting from Annabel with no certainty of again beholding her soon—with no certainty indeed that we should ever meet again: but yet I had faith in the goodness of heaven, and thus was I saved from utter despair. Annabel too was much affected: few were the words which passed between us—for of all the many topics whereon I wished to touch, there was none that could be approached without the risk of calling up some painful feeling in her mind; and I would sooner have perished than plunge a dagger into her heart.

"Joseph," she said, "I have not forgotten my promise relative to the copies of certain papers, which contain explanations of many past circumstances. But considering your weak and enfeebled state, I do not dare to place them in your hands at present. Dr. Pomfret will give you a sealed packet when you are convalescent. Make haste, therefore, and get well, dear Joseph, in order that you may relieve yourself from suspense without the danger of a relapse from the excitement of reading a painful narrative. And now I must bid you farewell: I depart very early to-morrow morning—and we must not meet again on this occasion."

"Oh, when *shall* we meet?" I murmured, pressing her hand to my lips.

"Be of good cheer, and keep up your spirits," she responded: but her voice was tremulous with the emotions which were evidently convulsing her bosom; and quickly averting her countenance, she passed her kerchief over her eyes.

"And you will not forget me, Annabel?" I said, when she again turned her looks upon me.

"Forget you——no, Joseph! I am incapable of deceit—incapable of dissimulation. You understand me: need I say any more?"

"I understand, dearest Annabel," I answered, "that the fond and devoted love I bear for you, is not altogether without a reciprocal feeling."

She pressed my hand which clasped her own: she bent over me—her lips just touched my forehead—and the next instant she was gone.

Oh! that kiss, though slight as the touch of the butterfly upon the flower, was imprinted *there*:—I felt it—and its influence thrilled through me, but with the holiest and purest sensation! Now I knew that Annabel loved me! As plainly as her modest and bashful nature would permit her to make such an avowal, had she made it; and it was a source of ineffable solace to my soul in the despondency of separation. What to me were now all the future trials which I might have to encounter? what to me all the battlings and strugglings in the world, since I possessed the love of Annabel? To know that she was alive when I thought her dead—to know that she was immaculate when I had fancied her erring and lost—to know that she would now live for me as I should live for her—that we should be inspired by the same hope of seeing better days,—Oh, all these reflections constituted in one sense a sum of happiness which well nigh counterbalanced the anguish of separation in another sense!

But I will not dwell at unnecessary length upon this portion of my narrative. On the following morning Annabel departed: we did not meet again: but the kind old nurse informed me that she sent me her most affectionate remembrances. Days passed on: I grew rapidly better—and was at length enabled to sit up for several hours together. To be brief, a fortnight passed after Annabel's departure; and I was now convalescent. Dr. Pomfret, who came up to my chamber twice every day, at length gave me to understand that he had a packet of papers to deliver over to me, and that on the following morning I should be put in possession of them. The wished-for hour arrived—the packet was presented to me—the address was in the well-known writing of the adored Annabel—and the instant I was alone I tore open the envelope. The contents were twofold. There was a sheet of paper, closely written, and filled with explanations of Annabel's own: there was another sheet, containing a copy of a letter which her departed sister Violet had written to Mrs. Lanover a few days before her death, and which had led to Annabel's visit to the doctor's house. It was no doubt this very same letter which I had conveyed to the post, and the handwriting of the address of which had so strongly confirmed my belief that it was really Annabel herself who was beneath that roof. For I must observe that there was as remarkable a similitude between the writing of the two sisters as there was in respect to their personal appearance;—and that this latter similitude must have been great indeed—almost miraculous—to have so long kept me in error as to the fact of Annabel and Violet being two distinct individuals, the reader may well suppose.

But without lingering any longer at present upon these points, let me hasten to give, in the ensuing chapter, an outline of those explanations and revelations which I gathered from the contents of Annabel's packet.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE TWIN-SISTERS.

The earliest ideas of the twin-sisters, Violet and Annabel, were associated with a sumptuously-furnished mansion, which was their home. It was situated in a fashionable Square at the West End of London; and Mr. Lanover's mode of life seemed to indicate the possession of considerable wealth. But from their early infancy the sisters had an instinctive dread of their father,—with a proportionate amount of earnest affection for their mother. So far as their recollections could be

carried back, this poor mother of their's suffered much from her husband's brutality: but she endeavoured to bear her lot with as much Christian fortitude and resignation as she could possibly summon to her aid. Mr. Lanover, it appeared, was one of the partners in an eminent banking-house of Lombard Street; and he was therefore absent from home the greater part of the day. Then the children could indulge in their infantile sports without the fear of being repressed or coerced: but the moment their father returned home at the dinner-hour, they were either hurried up to the nursery, or else compelled to sit down in the parlour and remain perfectly quiet,—the slightest ebullition of that merriment which was so natural to their age, being immediately followed by the harshest language from Mr. Lanover—and perhaps blows. As time went on, and their mental perception grew clearer and keener, their young hearts were frequently shocked by the treatment which their mother experienced at her husband's hands; and though she evidently endeavoured to conceal from these dear children the poignant bitterness of her affliction, they often surprised her in the midst of paroxysms of grief and floods of tears. The Lanovers saw but little society: the character of Mr. Lanover himself—his manners—and his appearance, were not calculated for social intercourse, nor to gather friends around him: while Mrs. Lanover had not the power of inviting a single soul to the house unless with the previous consent of her husband. The few who did visit, were half-ruined noblemen and spendthrift gentlemen, who were under pecuniary obligations to Mr. Lanover, and whose interest it therefore was to court him.

The sisters were about seven years old when the bank suddenly failed—and under such circumstances, that a prosecution for fraud was instituted by several creditors against the partners,—the laws of bankruptcy being much more severe at that time than they are at the present day. The prosecution failed, so far as to procure the infliction of any punishment upon the fraudulent bankrupts: but its result was the total destruction of their characters. Mr. Lanover, having been the most active member of the firm, and the one whose misdeeds had chiefly tended to bring the establishment to ruin, suffered in this respect even more than his associates,—who did not fail to charge him with the whole blame of the malversations and the delinquencies in the odium of which they were made the sharers. The consequence was that when thus ruined, he had not a single friend to give him a helping hand: his sumptuous furniture—his plate and his wines—even to his very wife's jewellery, were all swept away. The family was compelled to leave the house in the West End Square, and take refuge in lodgings. Branded in character—an uncertificated bankrupt—without sympathy and without succour—Mr. Lanover had to reflect how it was possible for him to begin the world anew. He tried a variety of schemes: they failed one after another; and as time passed on, the family were plunged deeper and deeper down into the vortex of distress. The twin-sisters never heard either their father or their mother speak of any relations; and none ever visited them. Indeed neither of their parents ever made the slightest allusion to the families from which they had respectively sprung. The position to which the poor mother, with her two children, found herself reduced by her husband's nefarious deeds, was a most distressing one: but she nevertheless maintained her fortitude;—and when starvation stared them in the face, she sought needle-work,—she who had lived as a lady and possessed every luxury,—in order to obtain bread for her husband and her daughters.

For some three or four years it was a desperate struggle which she had to make, in order to provide a morsel of food and keep a roof over their heads. But she toiled on—and even found time to attend to her children's education. During that interval, however, there were periods when the family experienced the most pinching poverty—sometimes bordering on absolute want: for Mrs. Lanover could not always obtain work; and when she did, it was so poorly paid. Nor even throughout these severe trials had she the consolation of receiving the gratitude and kind attention of that husband for whom she worked as well as for their little ones: adversity soured his temper more and more; and each successive calamity only tended the more deeply to brutalize his disposition. The want of that very work for which the poor lady so often sought in vain through many hours of tedious wanderings from shop to shop, was made a reproach; and when she did procure employment, the small pittance it earned was frequently taken by him to be expended elsewhere, and in ways relative to which he would give no explanation.

After a while—when the sisters were between ten and eleven years old—Mr. Lanover by some means obtained a sufficiency of funds to open a little office as an accountant, a general agent, bill-broker, and so forth. His character was however so much against him that the business he obtained was small—until he suddenly acquired ampler means and took the house in Great Russell Street. By this time his poor wife's health had begun to fail: she was no longer able to work with her needle; and fortunately there was no longer a necessity: for Mr. Lanover's business as a bill-broker, and agent for noblemen and gentlemen in embarrassed circumstances, began to thrive. Still some severe struggles were experienced; and another year or two elapsed ere he seemed to be at all firmly established in his new position. Meanwhile Mrs. Lanover had done her best to give her two daughters a good education; and as she herself had been well brought up and was highly accomplished, she was fully competent thus to train and rear them.

It is now necessary to observe that the remarkable similitude which existed between the twins in respect to their personal appearance, did not extend to their dispositions. Annabel was timid, shrinking, and bashful—ever anxious to avoid the chance of giving her father the slightest offence, or of incurring those terrible invectives and brutal upbraidings which the most trivial circumstance would often elicit. On the other hand, Violet was of an impatient spirit—haughty and petulant—and one which never would endure a wrong without rebelling against it. Thus at the age of thirteen she already began to show her father that she was by no means willing to put up tamely with his tyranny: scenes of violence often took place; and if he threatened to beat her, she would snatch up the first convenient object which came to hand,

not merely in self-defence, but with a vow that if he dared to strike her she would strike again. Vainly would the poor mother sometimes go down upon her knees and implore Violet to restrain her fiery disposition: the girl's independence of spirit would neither yield to the despotism of a father nor to the prayers of the mother. Nevertheless, in all other respects, was she a dutiful and affectionate daughter towards the latter.

It was when the twin-sisters were a little past fourteen, that an incident occurred which led to Violet's removal from home. One day Mr. Lanover gave vent to a more than usually impetuous storm of passion; and as his invectives were chiefly directed against Violet, she rebelled as usual. Her own ire being desperately excited, she was neither the mistress of her words nor actions; and in the wild excitement of her rage, she flung at her father a bitter taunt in respect to his past misdeeds, his ruined character, and the criminal prosecution which had been instituted against him. Goaded to fury, he flew at her like a savage beast, and struck her to the floor. She sprang up, with flashing eyes, burning cheeks, and quivering frame; and catching at a large book, hurled it at him. The scene was altogether terrible; and there was a moment when poor Mrs. Lanover and Annabel both feared that Violet would be murdered by her infuriate sire. The result was however a peremptory command from Mr. Lanover's lips that Violet should quit the house and never see him more. He declared that he discarded her—he threw her off—he abandoned her. Subsequently however, either through the earnest solicitations of the mother, or else through some remorse on the part of the father—a sort of compromise was entered into, to the effect that Violet should at once be sent away to a boarding-school. The arrangement was left to Mrs. Lanover, with the solemn understanding that in less than three days Violet should

cease to be an inmate of the house, and that during the interval she should not once re-appear in her father's presence.

Violet was by no means sorry thus to escape from the sphere of the paternal tyranny; and Mrs. Lanover lost no time in finding a school for her. It was a part of Mr. Lanover's stipulations that the seminary to be thus selected should be at a distance from London; and one at Southampton was accordingly fixed upon. Thither Violet was removed; but when her father sternly refused to see her ere she took her departure, her separation from her mother and sister was deeply affecting. When she was gone, Mr. Lanover told his wife and Annabel that her name must never again be mentioned in his hearing—that he had sworn to discard her—and that his vow should be kept, with the single reserve that he would furnish his wife with the requisite sum for the girl's maintenance at school. While thus proclaiming his intentions, he worked himself up into one of those fits of ungovernable rage which rendered him so terrible a man; and with fearful imprecations swore that if his wife or Annabel ever dared to breathe the name of Violet without those walls—if they ever spoke of her to a third party—if they ever mentioned to any new acquaintance they might form, that there was such a being in existence—he would visit them with all the power of his displeasure. Such conduct on his part was a complete illustration of the man's hatefully vindictive character.

This event, which caused the removal of Violet from the paternal home, took place in the early part of the year 1836; and it was in September of that same year—consequently some seven or eight months later, that I became an inmate of Mr. Lanover's house on my abrupt removal from Delmar Manor. During the six weeks I remained in Great Russell Street, the name of Violet was never mentioned by Mrs. Lanover or Annabel—at least not in my hearing. No doubt, when the mother and daughter were alone together, the tyrant's stern injunctions were disregarded; and tremblingly and whisperingly they spoke of the absent one, mingling their tears at the thought of her being thus away from them. But there were more reasons than one wherefore, in my presence, all allusion to Violet was carefully avoided. In the first place there was the dread of its coming to Mr. Lanover's ears that they disobeyed a command which he had uttered in so terrible a manner: in the second place there was the painfulness of speaking of one whose absence was so much deplored; and in the third place there was a very natural unwillingness to give me any farther proof, beyond what my own actual experience taught me, of Mr. Lanover's fiend-like disposition. The mother and Annabel could not possibly have spoken of Violet without giving me some explanation of her absence; and they would moreover have been compelled to conjure me to keep the secret inviolable,—all of which would have been most painful, most humiliating, and most distressing to the minds of that amiable lady and her sweet-tempered daughter. Thus was it that during the six weeks of my sojourn beneath Mr. Lanover's roof, the name of Violet was never breathed in my hearing; and I remained in total ignorance of such a being's existence.

I now come to the circumstances of that memorable night when, by Annabel's intervention and at her instigation, I fled from a dwelling where a terrific peril seemed suddenly to menace me. The reader will remember that I was made a prisoner in my own room, and that I heard Annabel steal forth from her chamber after the usual hour for retiring. It seems that from some words which her father had inadvertently let drop, in the shape of a threat relative to myself, she had been seized with a fearful suspicion that mischief was intended me: so that when a man was admitted into the house under somewhat mysterious circumstances, she formed the courageous but dangerous resolve of stealing down and listening at the door of the room where the interview took place between her father and that individual. They were speaking in a very subdued tone, but in an earnest manner; and she could only catch a few broken sentences. She however heard enough to convince her that Mr. Lanover and his vile accomplice resolved upon making away with me. She learnt, too, that the wretch's name was Taddy; and from what she had previously heard me say of him, she knew that I regarded him with an immense loathing and horror, if not as a mortal enemy. The state of mind into which that young creature—then but little past fifteen—was thrown, by hearing her own father thus deliberately plotting and planning the most enormous of crimes, may be conceived but cannot be explained. No doubt the blood ran cold in her veins: no doubt she was for a space transfixed with direst horror at the door of that room. But she saw how desperate was my position; and a fortitude of which she had scarcely believed herself capable, came to her aid. She stole away from the vicinage of the room where murder was thus being resolved upon: she went straight to her mother's chamber; and to her did she reveal the sickening, harrowing, horrible tale. Mrs. Lanover could scarcely believe her ears: but yet she knew that Annabel was incapable of deceiving her; and mustering up all her own fortitude—thereby following her admirable daughter's example—she resolved that at any personal risk to themselves, I should be saved. But how? My clothes had been taken away by Mr. Lanover: my room-door was locked—and the key had likewise remained in his keeping. In respect to the garments, a plan was promptly hit upon,—it being determined that female raiment should be furnished to enable me to effect my flight. The great difficulty was therefore in respect to the key. Suddenly Annabel recollected that before the arrival of Taddy, her father had been drinking wine in the front parlour: it was just possible that he might have left the key on the mantel or the table there. Again she stole down stairs; and her joy may be conceived when she found the object of her search upon the table. She returned to her mother,—stealing up the stairs like a spirit, and trembling with the cruellest terror lest her movements should be overheard in the room below. Mrs. Lanover then gave Annabel a sum of money wherewith to present me; and being herself too ill to leave her couch and take any active part in the matter, she was compelled to trust the management of the proceeding to her daughter. I need not recapitulate the incidents which followed, as the reader is aware how my escape was effected.

After Annabel had seen me safe from the house she stole back to her mother's chamber. There

they deliberated—at the same time mingling their tears of soul-harrowing grief—what course they should adopt to shield themselves from the vengeance of Mr. Lanover. It was impossible to think of taking the key down stairs again, and placing it where Annabel had found it: it would likewise be apparent to Mr. Lanover that without my clothes I could not possibly have effected my escape unless succoured by some one inside the house. That the servants would have rendered such aid, Mr. Lanover would not for an instant suspect; and thus the mother and daughter well knew that his thoughts would at once settle upon them. They themselves spoke seriously of quitting the house: for how could they possibly thenceforth regard, the one as a husband—the other as a father, a man whom they now knew to be capable of the blackest crime? But Mrs. Lanover was chained by illness to her couch; and moreover, she dreaded lest a removal from her husband's abode would entail the direst poverty upon Annabel and Violet: for that Mr. Lanover would, under such circumstances, provide them with funds, or continue to furnish the means of maintaining Violet at school, was not to be thought of. In the midst of the most bewildering reflections and painful deliberations, Mrs. Lanover and Annabel heard footsteps ascending the stairs: there were two persons—they knew them to be Mr. Lanover and Taddy—and the room which I had so recently left, was cautiously entered. What those two men thought or said—what they felt—and how they looked, on finding the room unoccupied, must be left to conjecture. They remained not there many minutes: they descended—and in about a quarter of an hour they went out together. Mr. Lanover remained away for the rest of the night: but whether in search of me—whether in deliberation with his accomplice—or whether engaged in any other pursuit, could only be surmised by his wretched wife and daughter, who passed that sleepless night together. In the morning he returned at breakfast-time: he said not a syllable of what had taken place: he did not allude to it—he did not mention my name: but his demeanour towards Annabel was that of a wild beast filled with a terrible rage which was nevertheless subdued and controlled. Some days elapsed ere he saw his wife, she being confined to her bed; and when she was well enough to come down stairs again, he was equally reserved in his conduct towards her—but equally morose—and in that mood when the human heart resembles a mine which needs but the faintest spark to make it explode. Perhaps he thought that his terrible intention towards myself had been penetrated; and vile and unscrupulous though he were, he shrank from the idea of uttering a single word of invective or of upbraiding—of menace or of abuse—which might lead his wife and daughter to proclaim their knowledge that he was a murderer in design, if not in fact.

Thus several days passed; and not a syllable was breathed by that man in respect to me. But now a new calamity fell upon the heads of Mrs. Lanover and Annabel. The schoolmistress at Southampton wrote up to convey the astounding and distressing intelligence that Violet had disappeared; and that there was too much reason to suspect she had been enticed away by two females with whom she had been seen in earnest conversation the day previous to her flight. Who those females were, the schoolmistress knew not. Violet had been severely reprimanded, and ordered to keep her chamber as a punishment, for issuing forth alone from the precincts of the establishment, and for talking with strangers. She had fled during the night; and not the slightest trace could be obtained of her. Mrs. Lanover and Annabel were almost distracted at this intelligence: and when the letter which conveyed it, was presented to Mr. Lanover, he flew into a furious passion, venting all his wrath upon those who were, as a matter of course, totally innocent of any share or complicity in the occurrence. He now declared that it was all the mother's fault that Violet had been sent away from home—that she (Mrs. Lanover) had not properly curbed her daughter's spirit, and had encouraged her to give way to those rebellious demonstrations which led to her removal to Southampton. Then he turned round upon poor Annabel,—accusing her likewise of having fostered that spirit on the part of her sister; and thus did the ill-conditioned monster pour forth the vials of his infuriate feelings upon the heads of the innocent. In his mad ravings he let out that he had intended in about six months' time to have Violet home again,—his purpose being to seek eligible matches in due course for both his daughters. Finally he set off to Southampton to make all possible inquiries concerning Violet, and endeavour to trace out the route she had taken. He remained away for about a fortnight,—never once writing to his wife the whole time; but leaving her and Annabel in the most painful suspense. On his return, they saw immediately by his manner and his words, that his search had been fruitless; and again did he vent all the fury of his wrath upon those guiltless heads. The disappearance of Violet, and the harrowing conjectures which were necessarily connected therewith, proved the source of the bitterest affliction which Mrs. Lanover and Annabel had ever yet known.

But in working out this narrative, it will now be necessary to take a temporary leave of those unhappy beings, and follow the footsteps of Violet. The school at which she had been placed, was one where a most rigid discipline was exercised—a discipline which frequently merged into downright tyranny; and this treatment was not likely to pass unresented by one of Violet's impatient and independent spirit. The consequence was that her position became a most uncomfortable one—the more so as it was utterly useless to appeal to her parents to remove her elsewhere: for she knew that no such appeal would be received by her father, even if she could so far humble herself as to make it—while on the other hand, her mother had not the power to act of her own free will in the matter. On several occasions Violet, in total contravention of the school's regulations, wandered forth from the garden into some adjacent fields; and for these derelictions she was frequently punished. But she longed to be free; and chastisement only rendered her all the more impatient of control, without breaking her of her rebellious habits. In one of those wanderings she fell in with a couple of females belonging to a troop of itinerant performers temporarily sojourning at

Southampton. They got into conversation with her: they spoke to her of the pleasures of the life they led—the variety of scenes which they beheld—the applause which greeted them at the theatres where they performed—and the constant novelty and excitement which belonged to their roving state of existence. Violet, with a headstrong disposition, was thoroughly inexperienced in the ways of the world: she was of a lofty spirit and of impetuous character, but knew nothing of the perils into which such attributes might lead her. She received as gospel every word which the two actresses uttered; and she was at once smitten with the charms of that free, independent, roving life which was depicted to her in such fascinating colours. Nevertheless, she thought of home—or rather of two beings there,—her mother and Annabel: and the recollection of their beloved images held her back. On that occasion she gave no decisive answer to the two actresses; but merely promised to find an opportunity of seeing them again on the morrow.

On the following day she stole forth again from the precincts of the seminary; and was speedily joined by the two women. This time they were accompanied by a flashily-dressed man, who was introduced to Violet as the manager of the company. He no doubt came to see whether the representations which had been made to him by his two actresses, were perfectly correct, and that the young maiden was indeed the rare specimen of seraphic loveliness, aerial lightness, and sylphid grace she had no doubt been described to him. That he must have at once coincided with the views of the two women in foreseeing that Violet would prove an immense acquisition to his dramatic *corps*, may of course be surmised. Violet fancied him to be an elegantly-dressed and most agreeable man: the theatrical trinkets with which he was bedizened, she took for real solid jewellery; and she conceived his bowings and scrapings, his bland smiles and his inflated speeches, to be the evidences of polished gentility. She had been taught dancing at school, and was already a proficient in the art: for where the mind is passionately attached to a particular accomplishment, and there is a taste for it, a degree of perfection is soon attained. The manager and the actresses gleaned from her that she was thus skilled; and the knowledge of that fact no doubt made them resolve to obtain at any risk the services of so lovely a creature, whose sylph-like appearance alone was sufficient to produce a startling effect upon the stage. To be brief, Violet yielded to their representations — fell into their views—and accepted their proposals. Thoughts of home were so far banished from her mind, that while she endeavoured to throw into the background those two loved images which should have prompted a negative to the cajolery of the beguilers,—she prominently brought forward that other dreaded and almost hated image, the bare recollection of which was sufficient to lead to an affirmative.

On the following day she met the two actresses again, and this time they were not accompanied by the manager. The present interview was to settle the arrangements for her flight; and these were made. On re-entering the seminary after this interview, she was accused of having been out and of having spoken to strangers; and she was ordered to her own room as a punishment. But little recked Violet for the upbraidings she thus received, and the penalty which her fault had entailed: for she felt that she stood upon the threshold of freedom. Indeed, if anything had been required to strengthen her resolve in what she considered the accomplishment of her self-emancipation, it would have been those upbraidings and that chastisement. At midnight she stole forth from the seminary—that young creature of little more than fifteen—and joined the two women who were waiting for her at the place of appointment. A sort of covered spring cart was ready at a little distance; and in this vehicle did Violet and her companions journey to some town fifteen or sixteen miles distant, whither the remainder of the company had repaired on the day previous.

And now commenced Violet's theatrical career. She retained her Christian name, the manager assuring her it was a most captivating one; but she altered the surname for that of *Mortimer*. She did not make her first appearance until the company was at least a hundred miles away from Southampton; and thus all trace of her was lost, when her father journeyed to that town to make inquiries concerning his fugitive daughter. The manager was a married man; and his wife was considered to be a respectable woman. They took Violet to live entirely with them,—keeping her as much apart as possible from the rest of the company. They foresaw that she would prove a star of immense attraction; and they wished to retain her as much as they could under their own influence, and prevent her from forming any connexion which, at the caprice of another individual, might sever her from their troop and take her over to some rival itinerant company. Perhaps, too, there might have been a certain amount of proper feeling on the part of the manager's wife—if not on that of the manager himself—in respect to the care which ought to be taken of a young, inexperienced, and unsuspicious creature who had been beguiled away from a seminary. But whatever the motives, certain it is that Violet was guarded with as much jealous vigilance as could possibly be exercised under the circumstances; and as she lived altogether with the manager and his wife, it was not immediately that she became exposed to the corrupting influences of the career on which she had entered, or that she had to experience any of its struggles and ups and downs.

Having for two or three weeks gone through a proper course of training for theatrical dancing—and having applied herself to the study with the unwearying zeal of an absolute passion — she quickly became proficient; or at all events sufficiently so to make her appearance upon the boards of a provincial theatre. Her success was great; and the local press spoke rapturously of her. The exquisite beauty of her person—the radiant loveliness of her countenance—the sylphid symmetry of her shape—the statue-like modelling of her limbs—together with the elegance and grace of her movements, more natural than acquired,—all combined to render her a star of great attraction and ensure her triumph. The manager's treasury quickly experienced the advantage; and as his profits were thus considerable, he was enabled to provide his heroine with such comforts and even luxuries at the inns where they stopped in the pro-

vincial towns, that the representations originally made to induce her to leave school, were to a considerable extent realized.

But it was impossible that all the vigilance of the manager and his wife could shield Violet Mortimer from those evil influences already alluded to. When behind the scenes, she was frequently subject to the libertine addresses of gay and dissipated young men who obtained access thither, and whom the manager could not possibly shut out, for fear lest a cabal should be formed against him. Moreover, Violet frequently beheld scenes betwixt other actresses and some of those rakish interlopers—her ear, too, frequently caught language, which gradually undermined the natural purity of her thoughts; and she had not been many weeks in her new career, when—with the age of a girl, and still with the chastity of one—she had the experiences of a woman. But I will not keep the narrative lingering over this painful subject. Suffice it to say, it was under such evil auspices as these that the company arrived at that town in Devonshire where I was destined to behold Violet upon the stage and to take her for Annabel. It was at the end of January, 1837—just three months after her flight from school—that Violet appeared in that town. I need not recapitulate incidents which have already been fully detailed: but I must give a few succinct explanations. The reader will recollect how I passed behind the scenes, and how I beheld Violet listening to the guileful language which Sir Malcolm Wavenham was breathing in her ear. This was the second time he had sought her there. On the preceding evening he had introduced himself to her—and had hinted at certain overtures: but on this second occasion his language was bolder. He spoke of his wealth—of his power to surround her with all the elegances and luxuries of life: he laughed to scorn the shackles of the marriage ceremony: he declared that he could love well and fondly in a state of freedom—but that under the influence of rivetted bonds, a man's affection invariably cooled down as if at the contact of chilling iron chains. Violet listened: she was dazzled by his offers; and yet she did not at once give him encouragement. Her answer was postponed. He left her; and then I accosted that fair creature whom I believed to be Annabel. By this name did I address her: and no wonder was it that she started—no wonder that she suddenly burst into tears, and that she fled precipitately. A thousand emotions had been all in an instant excited in her bosom. The images of her mother and sister—those images which for months past she had endeavoured to banish from her mental view—were vividly conjured up in a moment: remorse, anguish, shame, despair, and a strong yearning to behold once again that affectionate mother and that loved sister, agitated in her heart. She hurried to her dressing-room. The reader will recollect that I sent in my name, begging to see her once more. For a moment she was inclined to grant my request, and learn how it was that I was acquainted with her sister whose name had been thrown at her, and for whom she naturally fancied she had been taken. But she felt that the die was cast, and that it was impossible to retrograde from the career in which she had entered. Perhaps, too, the dazzling overtures so recently made to her by the dissipated young Baronet, intervened with an influence like that of the genius of evil; and her mind was speedily made up. She would see no one who could speak to her of the past—that past over which she dared not retrospect, and whence she felt it was her destiny to avert her eyes in order to keep them fixed only upon the future. She accordingly sent out a message to the effect that she declined seeing me, and that she knew not the name of Joseph Wilmot—which was indeed the truth.

A few days afterwards she fled with Sir Malcolm Wavenham, leaving the manager and his troop in perfect consternation and dismay at her sudden disappearance. The Baronet bore his prize to Wavenham Park, which was situated at a very short distance from the village of Charlton. There he kept his word, so far as the surrounding her with all luxuries and elegances—making her the mistress of his extensive establishment—gratifying her slightest whims and caprices—and taking a pride in decking her with the costliest garments and the most expensive jewels. He taught her to ride on horseback; and the most beautiful steeds were purchased for her use. But Violet was not altogether happy: indeed the happiness which she did experience, was merely an unnatural excitement of the spirits at certain times, to be followed by intervals of despondency. She frequently thought of her mother and sister: her growing experience of the world made her aware of the immense errors she had committed—first in leaving her school to appear upon the public stage, and subsequently in abandoning herself to Sir Malcolm Wavenham. She longed to write to her mother or to Annabel: but she dared not. What could she say to them? Proclaim her disgrace—parade the sumptuousness of the home of her dishonourable choice—and thus prove to them that she was lost? No: better far to leave them in suspense and uncertainty as to her fate!—better even to suffer them to think she was dead, than thus make them acquainted with the very worst! But her thoughts of those loved ones, and her regrets at the false step she had taken, were not the only sources of Violet's unhappiness. She had not been many months under the protection of Sir Malcolm Wavenham, when her eyes began to open to the fact that he was unfaithful to her: she obtained unquestionable proofs of his depravity elsewhere; and though he continued to surround her with all luxuries, and to minister to her slightest wants, she found that she had really no hold upon his affections—that he was volatile—fond of variety in his amours—and that he was now reaching that point at which a man frequently retains a beautiful mistress to make a parade of her, in order to flatter his own vanity, rather than as an object of companionship and love. Violet's spirit was not likely to endure with tameness this conduct on his part: she upbraided him bitterly: he vowed that her accusations were false, and that she was a prey to an unwarranted jealousy. She said no more upon that occasion—but determined to keep upon the watch.

I now come to a very memorable day in my narrative—the 23rd of June, 1837,—five months having by this time elapsed since Violet became the mistress of Sir Malcolm Wavenham. On that day, be it remembered,—when on a visit to Charl-

ton village, to make inquiries concerning poor Kate Allen, and also relative to Miss Delmar, I beheld Sir Malcolm Wavenham and Violet, attended by a groom, dash past on horseback. Still believing her to be Annabel, I called out her name. It appears—though I knew it not at the time—that shè *did* hear me—she *did* recognise me at once as the same who had accosted her at the theatre. She however swept by without appearing either to hear or to notice me: she even forced herself to talk gaily and blithely to her companion, though the mention of her sister's name had made the worm of remorse uncoil in her bosom and fix its fangs upon her heart's most sensitive chord.

On returning to Wavenham Park, she ascertained in the course of the day—both by a letter which Sir Malcolm accidentally left lying about, and by overhearing some verbal message which he sent by a faithful valet,—that he had an appointment for that same evening in the village of Charlton—an appointment which was little flattering to the pride or agreeable to the feelings of Violet. She said not a word: she suffered him not to perceive she knew what was going on; but she resolved to watch his movements—to unmask him—and to fulminate her wrath against her rustic rival. He stated that he was going out to dinner: and that it was very probable he should pass the night at the house of the friend whose hospitality he was to enjoy. Violet kept her countenance—and the Baronet went forth. She knew very well that, for the sake of appearances, he would go and dine with the friend whom he had named, and who lived close by Charlton—and that he would also remain there until past ten o'clock. At about that hour she issued from the mansion. The night was serenely beautiful and brilliantly starlit, as the reader will remember I described it to be when I visited the churchyard on that same memorable Midsummer Eve. Indeed the weather was so genial that Violet retained the light summer-dress which she had assumed when returning from her ride; and her shawl was also of a light colour. These facts were mentioned, with all other minute details, in that narrative of her's which has furnished materials for the chapter which I am now writing.

She reached Charlton at about eleven o'clock,—the village being but the distance of a pleasant walk from Wavenham Park. She watched in the neighbourhood of the dwelling which she expected to see Sir Malcolm enter: but the time passed on —and he appeared not. It will be as well here to observe that the joviality of the party whom he met at his friend's house, led him on to such an excessive use of the bottle, that he became incapable of keeping his appointment elsewhere. It was close upon midnight when Violet decided upon giving up the watch, and returning home. She knew that there was a short cut through the churchyard: and having no superstitious fears, she hesitated not to take it. But upon entering that churchyard, thoughts of a solemn contexture arose in her mind. Only a few hours back her sister's name, thrown forth from my lips, had smitten her ear: it had gone down into her heart with the force of a remorse. She thought too of her mother; and as she beheld the turf-covered graves around, and the tombstones seeming ghastly in the starlight, indescribable emotions rose up in her bosom: for she said to herself that her disappearance, the uncertainty of what had become of her—or perhaps even worse, the knowledge of what *had* become of her—might have sent down that loving mother of her's heartbroken to the grave! She seated herself on a flat tombstone, and wept bitterly. Her soul was in the excruciations of poignant remorse: profoundly did she repent the past: she would have given worlds to recall it; and her mental tortures were aggravated by the conviction that she had abandoned herself to a man who appreciated not the sacrifice she had made, but who recompensed it with the ingratitude of infidelity. While she sat there, upon the tombstone, she felt an inclination to pray—an inclination which she had not experienced for a long, long time past. It was while in this state of mind that she beheld two men approaching, both of them carrying masons' tools. They were at first startled, and even frightened on beholding her there,—looking like a spirit in her light dress, as she sat upon the tombstone: but she spoke to them—and they then recognised her as the young lady who dwelt at Wavenham Park. It appeared that one was the sexton—the other a mason—and that a vault was to be that night opened in the church, to receive the remains of a scion of the family to which it belonged, and who was to be buried on the ensuing morning. The funeral had for some reason been accelerated a day earlier than was originally intended; and the notice of this change had only been sent to the sexton at a late hour on this particular evening. He could not immediately find the mason who was wont to assist him on such occasions as this; and hence their visit to the church when it was so closely bordering upon midnight. These explanations were given by the garrulous sexton to Violet; and of course the reader will understand that the scene which I am describing must have taken place on one side of the church, while I was advancing towards it on the other side.

Violet was a singular being; her mind was of no ordinary contexture; and she was in one of those moods, from the circumstances already explained, which rendered such a mind as her's strangely, wildly fanciful. She had longed to pray:—for many, many months no prayer had passed her lips: she thought it would soothe and solace her now; and that it would be a species of homage to those recollections of the past which were associated with a mother who had reared her in that religious and virtuous path from which she had strayed. She intimated to the sexton that she would enter the church with him; and the fee which she slipped into his hand, prevented him from putting any impertinent questions. Doubtless he thought it a whim or caprice on the part of the young lady: at all events, he had no remonstrance to offer. The church-door was opened—and Violet passed into the edifice, which, though in the neighbourhood of the Park, she now visited for the first time. The moonlight was streaming in full through the windows,—making the place look so bright and so silvery cold, and rendering every object completely visible. Violet observed in which direction the sexton and his companion proceeded, and she went in another. As she passed along the aisle, it struck her that she observed some one looking through a window; and she turned her countenance towards that case-

ment. According to her own belief, the individual fled with a cry of alarm: but this apparent disappearance was, as the reader may suppose, produced by the fact that I fell down senseless. She took no farther notice of the incident, and after remaining in the church for some little while, sped back to Wavenham Park. On the following day she very candidly told Sir Malcolm how she had gone forth to watch him; for she thought that he might hear it whispered that she had been seen at the midnight hour in the village—and she would not allow him to suppose that she had any other purpose in view than the one which had really taken her thither. Then was it that she learnt how the Baronet had remained all night at his friend's house: for he vowed and protested that so far from having any appointment to keep, he had enjoyed himself so thoroughly as to pass the bounds of moderation.

The narrative must now return to Violet's relatives in London. Many months had elapsed since they learnt the intelligence of her disappearance from the boarding-school at Southampton; and during this interval they had received not any tidings of her. It is scarcely necessary to observe that Mrs. Lanover and Annabel were both a prey to the utmost suspense on Violet's account; and they did even sometimes think that she must be dead, inasmuch as she had never sent them a single line; nor had Mr. Lanover succeeded in obtaining the slightest clue as to what had become of her. It was at the end of September of that same year—namely, 1837—that Mr. Lanover one day informed Annabel that she was to make preparations to accompany him in a journey upon which he should set out on the following morning. The announcement was made with so much abruptness that both Annabel and her mother were not merely surprised, but even alarmed: for Mr. Lanover, instead of volunteering the least explanation, had put on his hat and immediately quitted the house. Annabel's mother was very ill at the time: indeed she had been getting worse and worse ever since that period when two blows struck her, the one so closely following the other—I mean the knowledge that her husband had meditated the crime of murder, and the disappearance of Violet. She herself, being thus very ill, could not have undertaken a journey, even if she had been asked—but she was *not*: Annabel was to go alone with her father. The mother and daughter naturally bewildered themselves in conjectures as to what the object of the journey could be: but it was impossible to arrive at any conclusion—and equally impossible for Annabel to think of remonstrating with her father against being taken away from her mother while the latter stood in so much need of her ministrations and attentions. Accordingly she set off with Mr. Lanover on the following morning; and on reaching the coach-office, they took their places in a stage bound for Exeter. Throughout the journey Mr. Lanover gave not a syllable of explanation to Annabel as to his motive in undertaking it: and she dared not question him. They arrived at Exeter, and took up their quarters at a second-rate hotel. On the day after they reached that city, Mr. Lanover bade Annabel dress herself in her best apparel, and accompany him to make a call upon a family to whom he was desirous of introducing her. They set out together—and presently stopped in front of a handsome haberdashery shop, over the door of which shone the name of *Dobbins* in large gilt letters. Mr. Lanover bade Annabel wait outside for a few moments while he entered first.

It was during the brief interval the young lady was thus waiting for her father, that I suddenly encountered her, as described in an earlier chapter. She was delighted to see me; and I, utterly ignorant of the distinction between Annabel and Violet, addressed her in those terms which were duly recorded in their place, and which were to the effect that she was dear to me under any circumstances in which she might be placed. She was naturally at a loss to comprehend what I meant by so singular a mode of expression: but still more bewildered was she when I asked her "whether she had altogether"——the sentence stopping short there; for I had not dared to complete the question. I meant "whether she had altogether broken off with Sir Malcolm Wavenham?" and methought that she must naturally comprehend me. But she did not:—how could she? and it was no wonder that she eyed me strangely—no wonder she bent upon me a look which I could not possibly comprehend at the time. The next instant I had to fly precipitately: for Annabel perceived her father issuing forth from the shop. That same evening, while proceeding to my new place at Myrtle Lodge, I saw Violet in the Baronet's carriage, which had stopped at the public-house by the way-side; and naturally believing that it was Annabel who had fled from her father in order to return to her lover, I gave vent to an ejaculation of mingled grief and astonishment. Violet saw and recognised me: but she was as much at a loss to comprehend the meaning of my words as Annabel had been a few hours previously. It would farther appear that it was only a coincidence that the Baronet and Violet had been at Exeter at the same time as Mr. Lanover and Annabel—but the two sisters had not met—had not seen each other—and were ignorant at the time that they were so near.

But this narrative of explanations must now go back to Annabel herself, whom I left at the door of Mr. Dobbins' shop. Immediately after I fled in the precipitate manner which has been described, the young lady recovered her composure as well as she was able; and her father desired her to enter the shop. The spacious warehouse was threaded; and they passed into a parlour at the back,—where an elderly man, with a disagreeable countenance and a sinister expression of the eyes, was seated. He was introduced to Annabel as Mr. Dobbins, the proprietor of the establishment; and the young lady thought that he surveyed her in a somewhat peculiar manner—so that she felt both annoyed and confused. No business was discussed between Mr. Dobbins and Mr. Lanover: the conversation was on general subjects; and as Annabel only spoke when actually compelled to give answers to the haberdasher's remarks, her father bent scowling looks upon her, as if to give her to understand that she had better try to make herself a little more amiable. The interview lasted about half-an-hour; and Annabel was then conducted back to the hotel by her father. On the following day they dined with Mr. Dobbins, who, it appeared, was a widower and

had several children, but all grown up, provided for, and settled in various ways. The sojourn at Exeter lasted exactly a week; and every day visits were paid to this Mr. Dobbins: but at the end of that period, Mr. Lanover abruptly bade Annabel prepare for departure; and they returned to London,—the young lady being no wiser as to the object of the journey than she was when she first set off upon it.

The narrative now passes on to the close of that same year, and pauses for a moment at the Christmas season. Violet had during the interval received fresh proofs of Sir Malcolm Wavenham's infidelity towards her; and she obtained the private intelligence that he had a house situated in a lonely spot—at no great distance from Exeter—which he frequently rendered available for his profligate amours. Her high and proud spirit was more than ever chafed at these additional evidences of his heartless depravity; and she was resolved to avenge herself by doing her best to defeat whatsoever profligate designs he might have in other quarters. On one occasion Sir Malcolm had business to transact at Exeter; and he proposed that they should pass a week there. Thither they accordingly repaired, taking their saddle-horses with them, in addition to the travelling equipage; and they put up at the principal hotel in the city. The very day after their arrival, Sir Malcolm sent a hastily written note in the evening to Violet, to the effect that he had fallen in with a friend residing a few miles distant—that this friend had insisted upon taking him home to dinner—and that it was very probable he should not return to the hotel until the next morning. Violet did not believe a single syllable contained in this note; and her resolve was speedily taken. Apparelling herself in her riding-habit, she ordered her horse to be gotten in readiness; and having made certain inquiries of the hotel-servants as to the exact situation of a particular house, she rode off alone in that direction. She reached the place; and, as the reader has seen, arrived just in time to rescue Charlotte Murray from the power of Sir Malcolm Wavenham. The result of this exposure of her lover's perfidy, was an inflexible determination on her part to leave him; and despite his entreaties to the contrary—despite his solemn vows and protestations that his conduct should amend for the future—she carried her resolve into execution. On thus breaking off her connexion with Sir Malcolm, she would not take away with her any of the costly jewels which he had so profusely lavished upon her:—nothing but a requisite supply of apparel, and the ready money which she had in her possession, would she consent to keep; and this proceeding was perfectly consistent with the proud spirit of Violet Lanover. She retired into the seclusion of a little village, a few miles distant from Exeter; and there dwelt in a humble and virtuous manner. She had some forty or fifty pounds in her possession at the time that she separated from Sir Malcolm; and by dispensing her resources sparingly, she made them suffice for several months. But the unfortunate girl was in a way to become a mother; and as the time drew near, she found her funds close upon exhaustion. She knew not what to do: her spirit revolted at the thought of applying to Sir Malcolm Wavenham: but when she reflected that he was the father of her yet unborn babe, she came to the conclusion that it was her duty to ensure the expected offspring, and herself also for the child's sake, against the pangs of want. During this interval of more than five months, she had kept the place of her seclusion a secret from the Baronet: indeed, she had not once corresponded with him since they parted. But now she wrote to him at Wavenham Park. A few days elapsed, during which she received no answer; and the agonizing thought that he had altogether abandoned her, was strengthening in her mind, when a letter came. It was dated from Salisbury, and informed her that Sir Malcolm had been staying there for the last month—that her communication had been forwarded to him from Wavenham Park—and hence the delay in sending the response. It was couched in terms more affectionate than Violet had even expected—stated that all requisite arrangements should be at once made to ensure her comfort in the approaching crisis—and that he would be with her on the day following that on which she would receive his letter. He kept his word: but when he sought to address her in a loving strain, she assured him that thenceforth they could only be friends—nothing more; that she bitterly repented of her errors, and was firmly resolved to atone for the past as much as possible by her future conduct. He informed her that he had made certain arrangements with Dr. Pomfret at Salisbury; and that though the distance thither from her present place of abode was so great, he hoped she would be enabled to accomplish it, as his travelling-carriage should take her by easy stages. She accepted the proposal; and two or three days afterwards entered the doctor's establishment in the night-time. This was in the early part of June, and within about a fortnight of the anniversary of that Midsummer's Eve when I had seen her in the church. It appears that Sir Malcolm Wavenham promised to behave most honourably to her, and to settle upon her an adequate income for the maintenance of herself and the expected babe; and as a proof of his good intentions he left a liberal sum in the hands of Dr. Pomfret, with strict injunctions that no expense was to be spared in rendering Violet as comfortable as possible. But when he proposed to call upon her occasionally, she was resolute in insisting that their connexion should remain severed—an alternative to which the Baronet was forced to assent.

Days passed on; and Mrs. Pomfret gave Violet as much of her society as she thought the young lady needed for the sake of companionship. It never transpired in the course of conversation that a youth named Joseph Wilmot was a page in the doctor's service: and therefore Violet remained in total ignorance that I was beneath the same roof. Moreover, we never once caught a glimpse of each other, inasmuch as she kept constantly to her own apartments, as I have already stated. But as the time drew near when she was to pass through the most painful ordeal which belongs to the lot of woman, the images of her mother and sister were more frequently present to her mind: she longed to communicate with them—she dreaded lest death might snatch her away from this world without her ever again beholding those beloved ones—and in a mood of the deepest contrition for the past, she sat down and penned a long letter to her

mother. In this letter she gave a complete narrative of everything that had occurred to her since her flight from the boarding-school at Southampton: and it may easily be comprehended how, having so much time hanging heavily on her hands in the seclusion of her apartments at the doctor's house, she elaborated her letter into the minutest details. Besides—as she expressed herself in this letter—"it was a relief to her mind to avow everything;" so that the epistle constituted a complete record of all the incidents, thoughts, feelings, and emotions which she had experienced from the date of her leaving Southampton up to the moment that she was then writing. This letter was finished on the 20th of June; and it was the one given to me to put into the post,—Violet little thinking at the time through whose hands it was thus passing. By some unaccountable delay in its transmission through the post-office, it did not reach Mrs. Lanover until the morning of the 23rd. Mr. Lanover was on the Continent,—engaged in some business the nature of which was entirely unknown to his wife and Annabel, whom, as usual, he chose to keep in the dark relative to his proceedings. The affliction which the narrative of frailty excited in the minds of the mother and daughter may be easily conceived: but still they were not altogether unprepared for the tale of Violet's dishonour—as it was impossible to imagine that the course she had taken in flying from school nearly two years back, could have been otherwise than the first step towards her ruin. But still there was this consolation—that she was deeply penitent, and that she had solemnly determined to make such atonement for the past as her future good conduct could render. Mrs. Lanover was chained by illness to her bed; and this illness was so severe, that she dared not attempt to undertake a journey. Annabel was therefore at once sent off to Salisbury in order to

assure her erring but repentant sister of a mother's forgiveness. Alas! she reached not the doctor's house until the morning of the 24th; and during the preceding night her sister Violet had perished in giving birth to a dead babe.

The grief of Annabel was for some hours of the most distracting nature: but by degrees she grew more composed; and in due course she learnt, with infinite surprise, that I was an inmate of the doctor's house. The wild scene which had occurred within a few minutes after Violet had breathed her last, and in which I figured in a manner so unaccountable to those who beheld my conduct, was mentioned to Annabel; and she at once explained the mystery by stating that I was her cousin. Inasmuch as I had passionately ejaculated her own name—that name of Annabel—when flinging myself on my knees by the side of the couch, she at once comprehended the error into which I had fallen, and that I had mistaken Violet for herself. Then also she understood for the first time the meaning of my singular conduct towards her when we met at Exeter; and she naturally longed for the time to come when I might be disabused of an impression so little favourable to her own immaculate virtue. That I was treated so kindly by the Pomfrets during my illness—that the nurse originally engaged for Violet, was retained to attend upon me—that the doctor himself forbore from aught bordering on reproach for my conduct on the night of Violet's death—and that Annabel had been enabled, without the risk of being taxed with impropriety, to pay me frequent visits in my chamber,—all these circumstances were now fully comprehensible; inasmuch as the Pomfrets had been informed that I was the cousin of the two sisters. Annabel had of course tarried until after the funeral of the unfortunate Violet; and she lingered longer still beneath that roof, in order that she might have speech with me when I should return to a state of consciousness. I should add that Dr. Pomfret communicated the circumstance of Violet's death to Sir Malcolm Wavenham, who was then at his own mansion near Charlton in Devonshire; and it was delicately intimated that as Violet's sister was at the house, it would probably be better if the Baronet did not make his appearance there, but should entrust to the physician himself all the arrangements for the funeral. These suggestions were duly adopted by Sir Malcolm Wavenham; and there can be no doubt that Dr. Pomfret had every reason to be satisfied with the Baronet's liberality, inasmuch as his own conduct and that of his wife was most courteous and kind towards Annabel—and, for her sake, towards me as her cousin.

CHAPTER XXXII.

CHELTENHAM.

As I have already stated, the above narrative has been compiled from the contents of the packet which Annabel left behind her, and which Dr. Pomfret placed in my hands when I became convalescent. I will not pause to describe the varied emotions with which I perused Annabel's letter and the one which Violet had written to her mother: but I cannot resume the thread of my own narrative without observing that I was filled with solemn sensations, and indeed awful feelings, when I reflected how Violet had sunk into the arms of death in the very last hour of the year which dated from that memorable Midsummer's Eve when I beheld her through the window of Charlton Church. Her appearance there had nothing superstitious in it: it was she herself, in the veritable flesh and blood, whom I had seen on the occasion: but there *did* appear something stupendously preternatural in the fact that the incident should have been really prophetic of her doom, in compliance with the very superstition itself which had prompted me to pay that visit to the village church. Those who read this narrative, may account for it as a coincidence—as a mere accidental occurrence: but to me it wore the aspect of something providential; and even as I think of it now, with a matured intelligence and with ideas sobered down from everything savouring of youthful enthusiasm, I can view it in no less serious light.

I now resume the thread of my narrative. The reader will recollect I had faithfully promised Annabel that I would leave Dr. Pomfret's service as soon as possible;—and not merely because I had given this pledge, but likewise for my own sake, was I anxious to get away from Salisbury, so as to avoid any possibility of again falling into the hands of Mr. Lanover. Being now convalescent, I took the earliest opportunity of expressing to Dr. Pomfret my wish to remove elsewhere. He attributed this desire on my part to a natural distaste to remain beneath a roof where my cousin had died under such mournful circumstances; and I did not choose to inform him that there were other and stronger motives influencing me in that respect. He asked me if I thought fit to remain a month longer, or if I wished to leave at once?—and I decided upon the latter alternative, at the same time expressing my gratitude for the kindness I had received during my illness. He inquired whither I was going?—and not knowing exactly how to answer, I said that I should return into Devonshire, where I had some few acquaintances who might help me to another situation. I requested him to give me a written character, which might be added to my other testimonials; and with this demand he willingly complied: for he had no doubt been so well paid on behalf of poor Violet, as to think it but right and proper to behave with kindness towards her cousin. Besides, this kindness cost the physician nothing; and I knew that the written testimonial I solicited, was no more than I deserved.

On the second morning after the perusal of the contents of Annabel's packet, I took leave of Dr. and Mrs. Pomfret and my fellow-servants, and repaired to the coach-office, a porter bringing my box. I knew not in which direction to proceed—whether north, east, south, or west. I might have imitated the pilgrims and the mendicants of the olden time, who, setting up a staff on one end, let it fall, and then bent their way in the direction thus indicated. To one thing however I made up my mind: and this was not to go into Devonshire, for the very reason that I had told the doctor I was about to proceed thither. I was in a mortal terror of Mr. Lanover whenever I thought of him; and the details of Annabel's narrative had by no

means tended to mitigate the dread which I thus entertained of that man's unscrupulous character. I therefore wished to get as far beyond his reach as possible; and when I heard in the coach-office, almost immediately upon entering, that a stage was about to leave for Cheltenham, I resolved upon repairing thither.

To be brief, I arrived safely in that fashionable watering-place; and taking up my quarters at a modest but respectable lodging-house to which I was recommended by the coachman, I remained there about a fortnight, in order to recruit my health fully before I sought for a new situation. I had plenty of ready money, and was therefore enabled to enjoy this interval of rest: for I knew full well that it would be useless to apply for employment if I presented a pale and sickly appearance. That fortnight completely restored me: the colour came back to my cheeks—I felt strong and vigorous once again. I then resolved to sally forth, and inquire at the most respectable shops for any intelligence which I might be enabled to obtain of such a situation as I wanted.

It was about noon that I was proceeding along one of the principal streets, when I was struck by an elegant little pony-equipage that was approaching. A lady was driving; and in the box behind a youthful groom, or "tiger," was seated. As it drew nearer, I recognised in the fair driver none other than Lady Calanthe Dundas. This recognition was mutual; and she instantaneously stopped her little equipage. I could not do otherwise than halt also; and raised my hat with respectful politeness: but I felt that I would much rather have avoided this encounter. I was well but plainly dressed; and having a genteel appearance, might have passed for something much better than I really was in respect to my social grade. Lady Calanthe, with a blush mantling upon her cheeks, and joy swimming in her large dark eyes, proffered her hand,—saying, "Mr. Wilmot, I am very glad to see you:"—then turning to the youthful tiger, she exclaimed, "By the bye, I forgot to call at the stationer's shop yonder. Hasten you and order paper, envelopes, and sealing-wax, to be sent home in the course of the day."

The groom,—evidently suspecting not that this was a mere stratagem on Lady Calanthe's part to enable her to have a few moments' private conversation with myself,—leapt down from his seat, touched his hat, and hurried away.

"Joseph," said her ladyship, the instant he was beyond ear-shot, "it is absolutely necessary we should have an interview——I beseech you to meet me this evening at nine o'clock—under those trees which you perceive at the end of this street. You must come——do not deem the step I am taking indelicate: but it is of the highest importance I should converse with you unrestrainedly for a few minutes. And now leave me."

I hurried away in obedience to her words: indeed I was so full of confusion, and so bewildered by the rapidly-uttered appointment she had given, that I was not the master of my own actions. The groom re-appeared from the stationer's shop almost at the same instant; and as I looked back, I saw the elegant equipage pursuing its way. When I was somewhat recovered from the agitation and trouble into which I had been thrown, I deliberated with myself whether I ought to keep the appointment, or not. I considered myself engaged to Annabel: I considered likewise that she was affianced to me. Our last interview at Dr. Pomfret's had all that significancy, though the compact might not have been solemnly expressed in words;—but was it not ratified by the kiss which the beloved girl had bestowed upon me? Therefore it seemed as if I should be guilty of an act of infidelity towards Annabel, if I went to the trysting-place named by Lady Calanthe. On the other hand, might not her ladyship have something to say to me of a real importance apart from that sentiment of love which she had avowed at Myrtle Lodge? might she not have some explanation to give in order to account for why she had not answered the letter I wrote to her from Dr. Pomfret's? or might she not wish to make some comment upon its contents, and assure me of her forgiveness for the want of candour that I had been guilty of towards her at the time? At all events I felt that my heart was so thoroughly engaged to Annabel, I could not possibly prove virtually and literally faithless to her: while it would be unkind, rude, and ungracious towards Lady Calanthe not to give her an opportunity of saying whatsoever she might have to impart. Therefore, all things considered, I was more than half resolved to keep the appointment.

This circumstance which I have just related, did not prevent me from making my inquiries in respect to a situation. At the very first shop which I entered for the purpose, I received an intimation that a widow lady, temporarily occupying lodgings in a neighbouring street, was in want of a page. I accordingly proceeded to the address given me; and was at once conducted up-stairs to a handsomely furnished drawing-room, where Mrs. Robinson—for this was the lady's name—was seated. She was a little past thirty years of age; and as she was not dressed in widow's weeds—but, on the contrary, was most fashionably apparelled—I perceived at once that she could not have recently lost her husband. She was by no means good-looking, but was very pale and had a sickly appearance, as if she were an invalid. There was moreover a certain languor in her looks and her speech, which evidently was not altogether affected: though she nevertheless gave herself some little airs—but of a drooping, desponding, lack-a-daisical character, as if she regarded her ill-health as the means of creating great sympathy on her behalf, as well as serving as an apology for an habitual indolence. Two little girls—respectively of the ages of eight and ten—were seated upon footstools, playing with dolls and other toys. They were not interesting children—but also seemed pale and sickly; and in their countenances very much resembled their mother.

Mrs. Robinson put to me the usual questions—as to my age, the places in which I had formerly served, the wages I expected, and the references I had to give. I produced my testimonials, with which she appeared perfectly satisfied—the more so as I intimated that if she required farther information, she could write to Mr. Tiverton, for instance, of Myrtle Lodge, who would no doubt send an immediate answer. This she however declared to be unnecessary, and said that she would receive me into her service.

"But I must inform you," she went on to state,

"that I am about to remove from Cheltenham. The place does not agree with me; and besides, I cannot live any longer in odious lodgings. These are all very well in their way," she added, glancing slowly and languidly round the handsomely furnished room; "but they have not the comfort of one's own house. Poor Colonel Robinson died in India upwards of two years ago: his life was a sacrifice to the climate—and therefore to the service of his country."

Here she applied her kerchief to her eyes; and there was a pause for a few moments.

"I have been recommended by physicians," she went on to observe, "to try the genial climate of the Isle of Wight; and I go thither in a day or two. My solicitor has taken and furnished a suitable residence for me in the neighbourhood of Ryde; so that everything will be prepared for my reception. You will have to make yourself as useful as you can; for there will be no footman kept; —and this you must understand at the outset."

I made a suitable answer; and being fully engaged to enter upon my new place when sent for, took my leave. As I was descending the stairs, I was somewhat startled by the appearance of a dark woman, clad in a white dress, which at the first glimpse struck me as being a shroud: for she had a piece of linen thrown over her head, only just leaving her dusky face visible. She was hideously ugly; and as far as I could judge of her age, about forty. She hurried past me, without taking any notice of my presence; and as the maid of the house let me out at the front-door, she said with the air of one who was making a very important revelation, "That woman in white is Mrs. Robinson's ayah."

"Ayah?" I repeated, never having heard the term before.

"Yes—her Hindoo maid. She is such a queer creature—eats nothing but rice—and speaks such wretched broken English, it's impossible to understand her."

I left the house, wondering whether I should like my new situation—but deciding rather in favour of it than otherwise: for I thought that I had already seen enough of Mrs. Robinson to enable me to judge that she was not a lady who would interfere unnecessarily with her servants. The place of destination—namely, the Isle of Wight—was sufficiently remote from the metropolis to suit my purposes well enough, and guarantee me against whatsoever inquiries Mr. Lanover might at any time take it into his head to make concerning me. I considered myself fortunate in having so readily obtained a situation; and went back with cheerful spirits to my modest lodging. Again I deliberated whether I should keep the appointment with Lady Calanthe Dundas: but when the hour drew near, I definitively made up my mind in the affirmative sense. I was not insensible of the kindness I had received at her hands, when circumstances pressed so heavily upon me at Myrtle Lodge; and I could not bear the idea of afflicting or wounding the feelings of that generous-hearted young lady.

A few minutes before nine o'clock I issued forth, and proceeded to the place of appointment. It was a narrow path at the back of a dead wall, seeming to be the boundary of a garden,—and skirted by large trees, in the shade of which there was an almost complete darkness, broken only by an occasional lamp. It was an evening in the month of August, and beautifully serene. I walked to and fro beneath those trees for nearly a quarter of an hour; and Lady Calanthe did not make her appearance. I began to think that she was unable to keep the appointment; and I hoped that such was the case. I could then hold myself acquitted of any unkindness towards her: she would not know where to communicate with me; and I might take good care not to fall in her way again during the brief space I was likely to remain at Cheltenham. But while I was thus reflecting, a door in the garden-wall suddenly opened, just as I was passing it; and the soft musical voice of Lady Calanthe whispered the name of "Joseph!"

It was she herself, in an evening dress—a scarf thrown over her shoulders—and a straw bonnet upon her head. An adjacent lamp threw its beams upon her countenance, which I saw was animated with mingled pleasure and trepidation.

"This way!" she said, catching me by the hand and leading me into the garden: then gently closing the door, she conducted me along a gravel-walk to an arbour at the extremity; and this was in the angle of the enclosure remotest from the house, the distance being about fifty yards—so that there was no danger of a conversation being overheard within the dwelling from that point.

"Dearest Joseph!" said the young lady, when we were seated together in that arbour—and at the same time she pressed both my hands in her own: "wherefore did you not write to me? Oh! you know not the suspense and anxiety I have endured——"

"I did write to your ladyship——"

"Ladyship!"—and she instantaneously dropped my hands. "Ah! methought there was something singular in your manner and looks this morning! You did not experience the same pleasure which I did on beholding you—a pleasure which I could scarcely conceal from the groom! Joseph, this is cruel—this is unkind! for you cannot conjecture how much I have suffered on your account."

Her voice became tremulous as she gave utterance to these last words; and as the beams of the starlight penetrated, like silver threads, through the openings of the canopy of verdure overhead, they were reflected in the glistening tears which were trickling down her cheeks.

"Yes—I have suffered much," she went on to say, in a hurried and excited tone, thus anticipating whatsoever I myself was about to speak: "but it was a martyrdom willingly and courageously endured—because it was for your sake! The stern resentment of my father—the bitter reproaches of my mother—the mockery, the jeers, and the taunts of my brothers and sisters——all these have I endured! It is only within the last few weeks that my relatives have ceased to torment and torture me. We are all staying at Cheltenham now—in that very house; and you may therefore imagine the risk I have run in keeping the appointment. Indeed, I feared that I should be unable to leave the drawing-room at all——It was only by pleading headach——But of all this no matter! I would have incurred any risk, ten thousand times greater, for the sake of being with you! You do not speak to me, Joseph? Why are you thus cool?"

"My lady, I am not—I am afflicted——I know not what to say——"

"Tell me, Joseph," she interrupted me vehemently,—"is it true that you *did* write to me? If so, the letter was intercepted——"

"On my soul I wrote to you! It was from Salisbury, whither I removed after leaving Myrtle Lodge. I directed to you at the post-office, Enfield."

"Then the letter *was* intercepted!" said Calanthe, with a bitterness which was evidently levelled against her relatives. "Ah! they doubtless suspected that some arrangement might have been made for our correspondence——But what did you say in that letter? You told me, no doubt, that you would love me as faithfully as I loved you——for I *have* loved you faithfully, Joseph!—and never has your image been absent from my mind. Oh! what anguish I experienced when day after day elapsed—weeks went past—they grew into months—and still no tidings came! Did you not tell me in your letter that you loved me?"

"I confessed everything," was my response, as I mustered up all my courage to give it. "I made avowals which——"

"Dearest Joseph!" exclaimed Calanthe, in a perfect paroxysm of enthusiastic joy: and in a moment her arms were wound about my neck, and her lips were pressed to my cheeks. "Ah!" she suddenly ejaculated, "wherefore do you treat me thus coldly? What! no return of my loving caress? Joseph, there is something strange in your manner—I cannot comprehend you!"

"You have misunderstood me all along," I said, determined to reveal the truth at last, no matter what pangs I might inflict—no matter what deep humiliation I might cause: for I felt that my duty towards Annabel imperiously commanded this frank and honest course.

"Misunderstood you?" ejaculated Calanthe, recoiling from me as it were in utter amazement. "What mean you? Speak! Did you dare to trifle with my affections? Speak, sir!" she added, with a sudden access of haughty indignation.

"For heaven's sake, be not offended with me!" I said, in an earnest and imploring tone. "Had you received my letter, it would have explained everything!"

"I understand you, Joseph," she cried. "Forgive me—Oh! forgive me, for that momentary expression of feeling on my part. I can conjecture full well what you must have said in that letter! You doubtless told me that it were madness and folly for us to think of remaining pledged to each other. Oh! but love is in its very essence both hope and faith:—love for the present is the same as confidence for the future; and I have cherished all that hope, all that faith, and all that confidence!"

"Pray listen to me!" I exclaimed, almost impetuously: "I beseech you to listen to me! I have a duty to perform alike to myself and to your ladyship——"

"Ah, ladyship again!" ejaculated Calanthe; and in the silvery beams of the starlight which penetrated into the arbour, I saw that she started with the petulance of vexation, and that her eyes flashed with the same feeling. "But go on, Joseph—go on! I will hear you—I was wrong to interrupt you!"

"If you will but look back," I said, now carefully avoiding to address her by any name or title at all; for I saw that she was feverishly excited, and from the depths of my very soul I pitied her,—"if you will but look back to all the incidents which occurred at Myrtle Lodge, you will remember that I never——"

"Oh, Joseph! I have not patience to refer to those times," she interrupted me vehemently,—"only to recollect that it was at Myrtle Lodge I first saw you—at Myrtle Lodge I learnt to love you——

"But Lady Calanthe——"

"Call me Calanthe! I am Calanthe to *you!* Do not attempt to reason, Joseph—do not argue! Such a love as our's is above mere cold deliberation. You see that I am resolved to cling to this love as the only anchor of my heart's happiness——Good heavens, what is that?"

We both started up suddenly; and Calanthe clung to me in a wild terror: for her name, called forth in a stern masculine voice, smote our ears.

"My father!" she murmured. "You must away, Joseph! you must away! Come quickly!"—and she hurried me out of the arbour. "We must see each other again," she went on to observe, in low but hasty and excited whispers. "In a few days I will manage to communicate with you——"

"I am about to leave Cheltenham immediately," was my answer: and I myself was so excited and alarmed that I scarcely knew what I said.

"Leave Cheltenham? But whither are you going? Tell me, that I may write to you."

"Yes, yes—do so—that I may write to you in return—and as speedily as possible: for I have much, very much to say."

"But where are you going, Joseph?" she demanded with feverish impatience.

"With a family named Robinson—to the Isle of Wight. The residence is in the neighbourhood of Ryde——"

Calanthe's name was now again called forth by her father; and his voice seemed to be drawing nearer to the path which we were pursuing.

"Here is the gate, Joseph!" said the young lady, in the same hurried whisper as before. "Dearest, dearest Joseph!"—and she embraced me with all the fervour and enthusiasm of her illimitable fondness. "Farewell, my beloved Joseph!"—and the next instant the garden-gate closed behind me.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE ROOM OF THE DREADFUL PICTURE.

I WAS once more in the pathway deeply shaded by the trees; and I hurried along with painfully dissatisfied thoughts in my mind. Another interview had taken place with Lady Calanthe—another opportunity had for the moment seemed to present itself for me to reveal the actual state of my feelings towards her; and yet it had terminated without this most vitally important aim being achieved. But it was through no deficiency of moral courage on my part *this time:* it was on account of that sudden interruption caused by Lord Mandeville's voice. Alas! Calanthe was still left in the belief

that her love was reciprocated: she would still cherish that passion which I feared must inevitably prove fatal to her happiness; and I had no immediate means of disabusing her. Ah! and the warmth of her kisses was still upon my cheeks—the impress of her lips was there—the glow of her hand still seemed to attach itself to mine; and in all this I felt that Annabel was wronged and outraged. It was with a troubled spirit that I sped onward: it was with a voice of lamentation crying up from the depths of my soul, that I hastened through the brilliantly lighted streets. Splendid equipages were dashing past, bearing fashionable gentlemen and gem-bedecked ladies to soirées and entertainments; and the din thereof only seemed to add to the confusion of my brain. I turned out of the wide and well-lit thoroughfare which I had been pursuing: I longed to seek some lonely and retired spot, where I could escape from the turmoil of gay and busy life which seemed to be whirling around me. I felt that it would be a luxury to find myself altogether alone.

In a few minutes my steps, taken at hazard, did bring me to such a retired spot as I had been craving for; and there, in the deep shade of some huge trees, I paced to and fro in an agitated manner. Vain was my endeavour to calm and tranquillize my reflections: the scene with Calanthe had left a remorse behind it: I felt as if I were no longer worthy of Annabel;—though heaven knows I had not voluntarily abandoned myself to the fervid embraces of the loving patrician damsel. As I was thus walking to and fro, I suddenly observed the form of a man emerge from the depth of gloom cast by the group of huge trees; and he stopped short on beholding me. There was just light enough at the particular place where he thus confronted me, for me to observe that he was a gentleman of about thirty years of age—remarkably handsome—but with a haughty expression of countenance. His face too seemed unnaturally pale, as if he were at the instant experiencing some powerful inward emotions; and as his eyes were fixed keenly upon me, their looks seemed intended to penetrate into the very depth of my soul. He was tall—of a fine manly form—and fashionably dressed: but it seemed to me by the manner in which his coat was buttoned over his breast, and his hat was drawn down somewhat upon his countenance, that he had been anxious to avoid observation ere reaching this spot where he would have found utter loneliness, had it not been for my accidental presence.

"Young man," he said placing his hand upon my shoulder, and grasping it with so much spasmodic violence that he hurt me severely,—"everything is known, and you must accompany me."

I was seized with dismay—not so much on account of aught that might happen to myself, but for poor Lady Calanthe's sake: for it instantaneously struck me that this individual must be one of her brothers, or at all events some one who had a right to interfere in the matter to which he seemed so pointedly to allude.

"Yes—you must come with me," he repeated, still retaining his hold upon my shoulder; "and the less perhaps that passes between us during our brief walk, the better."

"But for what purpose am I to go with you," I inquired, assuming a resolute tone of voice.

"This is absurd!" ejaculated the stranger with vehement petulance. "Everything is confessed—everything is known! But if it be needful, I adjure you by her whose fatal love has brought disgrace on her family, to accompany me. Not another word! You doubtless suspect—if you do not already know—that I am her brother. Yes—a brother who is rendered half mad by her conduct! Beware therefore how you provoke me: beware how you refuse—or this pistol shall lay you dead at my feet!"

The infuriate man shook me violently as he thus spoke; and as one hand retained its firm grasp upon my shoulder, the other suddenly drew forth a pistol, the barrel of which gleamed in the starlight that penetrated through the trees. I confess that I was for the moment much frightened: but the next instant recovering my presence of mind, I said, "My lord—for I presume that I am right in addressing you by that title—you shall not coerce me by threats. I will go with you, because I have explanations to give; and it were better perhaps for every one concerned that they should be given at once."

"Explanations!" repeated the nobleman bitterly: then in an abrupt manner, he added, "But as I ere now said, it were better that nothing more should pass between us until we reach the house."

"Put up your weapon—loosen your hold upon me—and I will accompany you. Do not think that I am afraid!"—and I spoke with a dignity and a fearlessness of tone which even astonished myself.

We were moving away from the spot,—he having returned the pistol to his pocket, and likewise withdrawn his vice-like grasp from my shoulder,—when another individual emerged from the gloom a little way ahead: but on catching sight of us, he instantaneously disappeared again. My companion was evidently struck by this circumstance, as I myself also was: for it seemed to me strange and suspicious—though I was utterly at a loss to give any particular complexion or significancy to the incident.

"Did you expect to meet any male friend here?" inquired the nobleman, with a peremptory sternness in which astonishment was also blended.

"I? No—certainly not," was my response: and I was surprised at the question, inasmuch as accident alone had taken me to that spot:—but this, I the next instant remembered, my companion could not know.

"Enough!" he said. "I believe you. It must be some one who has his own private reasons for not being perceived."

We continued our way in silence; and during the walk I settled in my mind the course which I should adopt. That I was about to be conducted into the presence of Lady Calanthe's father, Lord Mandeville, I could not doubt: and it was my determination to set at rest all fears which the family might entertain of her ladyship's forming what would be regarded an unworthy match,—by declaring that my heart was devoted to another, and that though I regarded Calanthe with an esteem that could never die, I did not aspire to the possession of her hand. But while thus determining upon all the details of the line of conduct which it was now my duty to pursue—and while wondering how the nobleman whom I was

accompanying, could have tracked me to that particular spot where he had so suddenly encountered me—I did not notice the precise direction which we took. I however perceived that we did not plunge into the brilliantly lighted thoroughfares: but when I at length began to wonder where we were, and to look about me, I felt assured that we must have been keeping on the outskirts of the town. Our walk had already lasted a quarter of an hour; and methought that by this time we should be at our destination. Still however my companion went on,—I continuing by his side. I glanced towards his countenance: it was coldly stern—the features were rigid, with the expression of a fixed and settled purpose. He glanced not at me—but looked straightforward; and I had no doubt in my own mind that he hated, scorned, and despised me with all the energy of a proud heart's susceptibilities.

For five more minutes was our walk continued; and then it terminated at an iron gate in the middle of a garden-wall. Within the enclosure a large mansion was situated; and in several windows lights were burning. A strange feeling of bewilderment came over me: for this did not appear to have the aspect of the same premises from which I had been so quickly hurried away by Calanthe, three quarters of an hour back. And yet I said to myself that it might have been by the side or in the rear of the garden that I had been admitted by Lady Calanthe: whereas this was evidently the front entrance. While I was thus silently deliberating, my companion had taken forth a key from his pocket and opened the iron gate. We passed in: but instead of making straight across the lawn, or even pursuing the circular course of the carriage-drive towards the portico, where brilliant lamps were burning, we turned abruptly into a path to the right—thus plunging into the shade of an avenue of trees. Then we turned to the left,—the path following the direction of the walls; so that now I began to think it must be at the end of this very avenue that the arbour was situated, and that the door by which I had been admitted must be, as I ere now suspected, in the rear of the premises. But ere we reached the farther end, we turned into another path,—which brought us up to the side of the mansion; and we stopped short at a glass-door shaded with pink curtains, but not so much as to prevent me from observing that there was a faint light within.

My companion knocked gently at one of the panes of glass: the door was opened—the curtain drawn aside—and I passed into a large and apparently sumptuously furnished apartment. I say *apparently*, because there was but one wax-candle burning there; and this was totally insufficient to light so spacious a room. The individual who had opened the door, and thus given admission to myself and companion, was a very old man—short in stature—slightly bowed in form—with a thin white countenance, and cold gray glassy eyes. His lips were firmly compressed: he had precisely that same rigidity and settled sternness of features which I had observed on the part of him who had guided me thither; and notwithstanding the great discrepancy of their ages, it was by no means difficult to discern by the profile that the younger one was the son of the elder. The cold glassy eyes of the latter were immediately fixed upon me as I entered the room, with an earnest, searching, scrutinizing look: there was a knitting too of the brows, a firmer compression of the lips, and a deepening of that rigidity of expression on the part of the old man,—all tending to convince me that I was regarded not lovingly by him. Still my courage failed not. I knew that in reality I had done no harm—that I was the object of a passion which I had never encouraged voluntarily, and certainly never sought to engage: my mind was made up to perform a duty—and the integrity of my purpose served to arm me with fortitude. That I was now in the presence of Calanthe's father, Lord Mandeville, I could not doubt; and the expression of his countenance was but too well calculated to justify her ladyship's assurance that she had experienced the sternest upbraidings from his lips.

The nobleman who had brought me thither closed the glass-door as he followed me into the room, and drew the curtain over the window. His father slowly traversed the apartment, and seated himself in an arm-chair,—whence he again fixed his glassy eyes upon me, but still without speaking a word. He surveyed me with the scrutinizing air of one who sees for the first time an individual of whom he has nevertheless heard much, but whom he has little cause to like. Slowly did his gaze wander over me, thus travelling from my head to my feet; and the survey lasted upwards of a minute. I did not feel comfortable under that scrutiny: I did not like that old nobleman's glacial, glassy look, in the very dull deadness of which there was nevertheless a sort of sinister, almost horrible animation. It was as if a corpse were mystically inspired with the power to gaze on the object of its life-time's hate. I could not endure to meet that look; and as I averted my own eyes, they encountered an immense picture suspended to the wall, the hideous subject of which, though but dimly shadowed forth in the feeble light which but partially shone in the apartment, made me suddenly recoil from it. Indeed the blood turned cold in my veins: for that picture represented an enormous snake flinging itself down from the boughs of a tree to which its tail still clung, while its other extremity circled in enormous coils the body of a man on horseback. The steed itself was represented as rearing in wild affright; and the subject—evidently an Indian scene—was on so vast a scale, that it really seemed as if it were the living reality, and not a mere picture from which I thus suddenly shrank back. But ashamed of that terror which had seized upon me, I turned my eyes again on the old nobleman,—who at the moment beckoned with his hand for me to draw nearer to him.

"Young man," he said, in a stern voice, which for the first instant trembled slightly, but immediately became coldly firm,—"you have brought disgrace down upon a family which never knew disgrace before; and you must make such amends as lie in your power. Your guilty partner—for I shall no longer call her daughter of mine—has confessed everything. Three days ago did she reveal all the agonizing circumstances to her mother: she named the author of her degradation—she mentioned your presence in this town, and the appointment which was made for to-night——"

"My lord!" I exclaimed, perfectly bewildered by these announcements, which struck me as being singularly impossible as to accuracy of date, for it was only in the morning of that very day I had met Calanthe,—announcements, too, which appeared to give a far more serious complexion to all that had taken place between us than the matter really deserved.

"Nay, interrupt me not!" said the old nobleman, with so peremptory a wave of his hand, and such a stern expression of countenance, that for the instant I was overawed and dismayed: "listen to me—and you shall speak afterwards. But if your own sentiments be rightly explained by her whom I once called daughter, it cannot be a remonstrance which you will have to offer—much less a refusal that you will dare to give. The world is as yet unacquainted with her degradation: the secret is known but to three persons besides you and her unhappy self. Those three are her parents and this indignant and half-maddened brother whom you see here."

"But, my lord," I again interrupted him, and with passionate vehemence too: for what I now heard corresponded but very little indeed with what Lady Calanthe had told me, when she had spoken of the taunts and the jeers of *all* her brothers and *all* her sisters.

"Silence, sir!" exclaimed the old nobleman. "Instead of interjecting your own remarks, you ought to fall down upon your knees and implore my pardon——No, that were useless!" he added haughtily: "for my pardon never can be afforded. What I am about to do, must not be regarded by you as a proof of forgiveness either for yourself or the degraded object of your most fatal love. It is to save her from the crowning disgrace—to place her beyond the reach of the world's opprobrium and scorn—that I am taking this step. In a word, sir, your hands must be united within the hour that is passing!"

"My lord!" I once more ejaculated wildly, as the image of Annabel sprang up in my mind.

"Silence!" exclaimed the young nobleman, in a deep stern voice, as he clutched me by the shoulder as forcibly as he had done on the spot where we first met. "By heaven! if you dare offer a remonstrance—if you dare hesitate—I will stretch you dead at my feet, even though I were to mount the gallows to-morrow for the deed!"—and again his pistol was produced.

I do not hesitate to confess that I was a prey to the profoundest terror. The extraordinary turn which the evening's adventures had taken—my mysterious introduction into this mansion—that spacious apartment with its dark massive furniture, and all so dimly lighted—that old man with his thin white hair, his ghastly expression of countenance, and his dead-looking eyes fixed upon me—the evident resoluteness of purpose which animated both him and his son—the forcible grasp rivetted upon me—the threatening weapon—the horrible menace which had accompanied its production—and that dreadful picture to which my glances were every now and then flung, as if the snake upon the canvass possessed all the fascinating power of the loathsome, hideous, living reality—the entire scene, in short, was but too well calculated thus to fill me with a solemn awe and terrific consternation.

"Everything is arranged," continued the old nobleman: "the special license is procured—the clergyman will be here in a few minutes:" and he looked at his watch as he spoke. "Five thousand pounds will be remitted to Calcutta, to be received by you on your arrival there with her who is presently to become your wife; and sufficient means shall be at once afforded you for the voyage. My son—he who stands by your side—will accompany his degraded sister and yourself to the sea-port whence you will embark. In the far-off clime to which you are about to repair, you may enter upon some career which may lead to wealth: but I warn you never to write to any member of her family——She is discarded—she is thrown off!"

"My lord," I exclaimed, the wild agony of my feelings now loosening the spell which awful terror had affixed upon my powers of speech,—"I cannot—I will not——"

"Villain!" ejaculated the old nobleman, starting up from his seat: "dare you thus refuse to make the only atonement which it is in your power to afford?"

"Yes—villain indeed!" cried the younger nobleman, as he shook me with all his force: but the next instant he staggered back, and would have fallen if he had not come in violent contact with the table; for in a sudden paroxysm of indignation, I dealt him with all my power a blow upon the chest. The pistol dropped from his hand:—in a moment I snatched it up; and stepping back two or three paces, exclaimed in a determined tone, "If you dare to ill-treat me again, I will act as if in defence of my life: for I do firmly believe it to be menaced!"

Scarcely had I thus spoken, when the old nobleman said in a tone of earnest entreaty—very different from that in which he had hitherto been speaking,—"For heaven's sake let there be no violence! This is a matter which must be argued—if argued at all—reasonably and rationally."

"My lord," I at once answered, hastening to deposit the weapon upon the table, "it is not a personage of your gray hairs that I would for a moment threaten. But let your son understand that he has not to do with a mere boy: nor will I be coerced in any way—least of all into this marriage."

"Diabolical scoundrel!" ejaculated the younger nobleman, his countenance hideous with rage; and in a moment he caught up the pistol which I, with more magnanimity than prudence, had abandoned. "Father, stand aside! You see that we have to do with a villain. Young as he is in years, he is evidently old in the most profligate iniquity. Leave me to settle with him!"

"You are usurping advantages," I said resolutely, "which I have renounced:"—and I glanced towards the weapon.

"Every advantage is legitimate in such circumstances as these!" exclaimed the infuriate man.

"Hush! we shall be overheard," said his father, now terribly agitated.

"The disturbance, my lord," said I, "is not of my creating: and if you would only listen to me——"

"Listen to you! What have you to say?" interrupted the younger nobleman, but now speaking in a much lower tone: "what *can* you have to

say? There is no verbal argument to be used: but there is another, of a sterner and a deadlier sort;—and as there is a God above me, I will use it! Pray interfere not, father! It is an outraged brother who deals with the wretch that has brought degradation on his sister—and in so dealing, I avenge my parents likewise! Now hear me!" he continued, advancing towards me with the pistol in his hand: "hear me, I say—and interrupt not! In a few minutes the clergyman will be here. If you consent not to make the reparation sought at your hands, I swear that I will stretch you dead at my feet. Think not that I shall hesitate at the crime——No, it will not be a crime: such a deed is only too legitimate! And hark you, young man," he went on to say, drawing still nearer to me; "the blow which you have inflicted, has only tended to embitter me the more rancorously against you. Therefore hesitate but a few minutes longer—and it shall be your death. This room, purposely chosen for the present scene, is remote from the other parts of the mansion where there are inmates: the sound of a pistol would not be heard beyond these walls. What if the bullet penetrates your brain? I bear your corpse into the garden—I throw it under the wall: presently I go forth, alleging that I have heard a noise: I fire another pistol in the open air, so that all may hear it—your body is found where I shall have deposited it—and who will suspect otherwise than that it is an intruder who has been righteously slain in an attempt to enter the premises?"

I recoiled in ghastly horror from the wretch who thus deliberately shadowed forth his diabolical scheme: a dizziness seized upon me—a sickening sensation at the heart: and as I staggered half round, my eyes encountered that dreadful picture, so that in the wild confusion of my thoughts it really seemed as if the monstrous reptile were about to spring forth from the canvass upon me.

"Decide quickly—for I am impatient!" said the young nobleman: and the pistol was levelled at my head.

"One word, Eugene!" interrupted the old nobleman: "one word! Let your sister come hither. We will then see whether in her presence, this young man will refuse to do her justice?"

"Yes—he shall have this last chance," cried the son, whose Christian name I had now heard mentioned for the first time. "But do you go and fetch her, father—while I remain here to guard against his escape."

The old nobleman accordingly quitted the room; and he was absent about three minutes. During this interval not a syllable was spoken by either Eugene or myself. He stood at a little distance, eyeing me narrowly, so as to anticipate any movement on my part which might tend to flight, or to an attack upon himself; and his weapon, though now pointed downward, was evidently in readiness to be raised in the twinkling of an eye. I leant against the wall, by the side of the immense picture which reached to within two feet of the ceiling and to an equal distance from the carpet,—while a thousand distracting thoughts swept wilderingly through my brain. How was all this to end? was I to be forced into a marriage with Lady Calanthe, and thus see my hope of some day or another espousing Annabel, annihilated in an instant? But would Calanthe herself consent to such an alliance—an alliance forced at the pistol's muzzle? Oh, no! I knew the generosity of her heart—I knew the pride of her spirit—and as I reflected in a more tranquil manner upon the decision to which she was certain to come, my fortitude rose again.

The door opened—the old nobleman re-appeared, leading in a young lady whose looks were bent downward, and even of whose figure I could not immediately catch an accurate or precise view, inasmuch as she entered from the farther extremity of the spacious apartment, which at that end was involved in deep gloom. She advanced half-clinging to her father's arm: slowly they came forward; but as she thus gradually approached within the sphere of the candle-light, the amazing, overwhelming, astounding idea arose in my mind that it was not Calanthe whom I beheld before me! An ejaculation of wonderment burst from my lips: the young lady raised her eyes with a sudden start: her countenance was now fully revealed to me—it was a lovely one, but saddened and care-worn, as well as very pale; and instead of the raven hair and the dark eyes of Lord Mandeville's daughter, glossy auburn bands enframed the marble forehead, and her startled surprise and horror were expressed from large blue orbs. A shriek rang forth from her lips; and she would have fallen, had not her father sustained her in his arms.

"What mean you, Gertrude?" he exclaimed in astonishment.

"And what mean *you?*" demanded Eugene, addressing the query with equal wonderment to me.

"It is not he! it is not he! It is a stranger!" responded the young lady, in an agonizing voice, to her father's question. "Oh, the shame! the exposure!"

"Bear her away, father!" ejaculated Eugene: and the old man hurried his daughter from the room. "Who are you? and why were you at that spot at that time?" demanded the young nobleman, now fiercely and impatiently turning once more towards me.

"My name is Joseph Wilmot," I answered; "and it was accident which led me to the place where I met you."

"Accident?" he echoed, eyeing me with the keenness of suspicion. "But how was that? You seemed to understand what I meant——"

"Recollect, my lord," I at once replied, "that you merely bade me accompany you——"

"No! I adjured you by her, and in the name of that fatal love which she bore you——"

"Ah, I recollect!" I exclaimed. "But frankly speaking, there was some little coincidence—of which however I shall not breathe another word: for it is my secret, and you have no right to penetrate it. I know not even who you are—I know not your father's name: never in my life had I seen your sister until within the last few minutes!"

Eugene looked perfectly bewildered: still he eyed me suspiciously; and then he paced to and fro in a very agitated manner. The door opened again: and his father re-appeared. At the same instant there was a gentle tapping at the glass-door; and Eugene hurried thither. He went forth: he was scarcely a minute absent; and then he re-entered the room. I had no difficulty in guessing that it was the clergyman who had knocked, and whom Eugene doubtless informed that his services were not required—at least on the present occasion.

"What is the meaning of all this?" demanded the old nobleman: "what signifies the mystery? Who is this youth? how originated the mistake?"

"He says that his name is Wilmot," Eugene hastened to answer. "He declares that it was by accident he was at the spot where I expected to meet another——"

"Ah!" I suddenly exclaimed, as a reminiscence struck me: "that individual who appeared for a moment at the same place and then disappeared so abruptly on observing us."

"True!" cried Eugene: "it must have been he! Father, it is indeed but too evident that a fearful, a terrible mistake has occurred."

"And if your lordships had permitted me to explain," I hastened to interject, "you would have been spared this exposure—*you* of a daughter, and *you* of a sister:"—and I glanced from the one to the other as I spoke. "But you were violent—you were imperious—you were peremptory——"

"Ah, young man!" cried the old nobleman, "if you were acquainted with all the circumstances, you would not wonder at our conduct!"

"Acquainted with the circumstances?" echoed Eugene bitterly: "has he not obtained a far too profound insight into them? What is to be done?"

"Tell us who you are," said the father, trembling with excitement, humiliation, and annoyance, as he spoke: "where do you live? to what family do you belong? what is your station in life? Tell us everything!"

"Were the circumstances, my lord, other than what they are," I answered, "I should perhaps decline to be thus minutely catechized after the treatment I have received. But I make every allowance; and deeply, deeply do I regret that a

secret so profoundly involving the honour of your family, should have been brought by accident to my knowledge."

"You speak fairly, young man," said the old nobleman; "and you can judge full well wherefore I have put so many questions. Yes—the honour of my family is indeed in your keeping!"

"And solemnly do I declare that the secret *shall* be kept!" I exclaimed. "I will tell your lordship who and what I am. I am an orphan—friendless too—dependent upon my own industry for my bread; and my situation in life is far humbler than you perhaps may imagine."

"You are a good youth," said the father, patting me caressingly on the back; "and I must do something for you."

"Nothing, my lord!" I quickly returned: and I certainly felt somewhat indignant that not a syllable in the shape of apology was offered to me by his son for the outrageous treatment I had received and the diabolical menaces of which I had been made the object.

"Yes, yes," continued the father, drawing forth his pocket-book and taking thence a number of bank-notes: "I must make you a little present——"

"What?" I exclaimed; "as the price of keeping a secret?"—and I shrank back. "No, my lord: if I consented to be bribed, you would have no faith in my honour and good principle; and as I do not wish your daughter to tremble at the idea that her secret will ever be whispered to the world by me, the best proof I can give of my integrity, is to refuse everything in the form of bribe or hush-money."

"But you will swear, Joseph Wilmot—you will swear solemnly and sacredly," resumed the old nobleman, "that you will not reveal a single tittle of what has taken place here to night?"

"Hear me, my lord," I responded. "You behold not before you a young man who is given to idle gossiping, or who has a morbid inclination for scandal. I do not know your name—I have not the slightest idea beneath whose roof I stand at this moment: I leave Cheltenham in a day or two—perhaps never to return. At all events I pledge myself sacredly and solemnly not even to inquire who lives here. During the brief space that I may remain in the town, I will direct my walks in quite a contrary direction. If I meet your lordship or your lordship's son, I will not ask who you are. Now, have I satisfied you even more than an oath could do, that you have to deal with one who is incapable of a derogatory and contemptible action?"

"Yes, yes," answered the old nobleman, still very much excited; and very different too in his treatment of me from what he had been a little time back. "But are you sure that I can be of no assistance to you?"—and he still held the bank-notes between his trembling fingers.

"No, my lord—none!" and I at once moved towards the glass-door.

Eugene accompanied me forth: but we now took the most direct way towards the iron gate. There the younger nobleman, taking me by the hand, said, "I hope that you bear me no ill-will?"

"My lord," I answered coldly, as I withdrew my hand, "it is impossible I can think well of you after the dreadful menaces which you levelled against me, and which show you to be capable of the darkest deeds."

Thereupon I hurried away—and was already at a considerable distance from the house, ere I recollected that I knew not which direction I was taking. I was completely at a loss how to regain my lodgings. I had been to a part of the town—or rather to a mansion on the outskirt of it—with which I was previously unacquainted. I however sought the nearest streets; and by inquiry, at length arrived in parts that were familiar to me,—so that at last I reached my lodging just as the clocks were proclaiming the hour of eleven. Need I add that I went to bed with a heart unfeignedly rejoicing at the issue of an adventure which at one time had appeared to threaten all my fondest and dearest hopes with utter destruction?

I faithfully kept the promise which I gave to those noblemen, whose names were utterly unknown to me. I made no inquiries with a view to discover who they were: I rambled not in the direction where I conceived that the mansion must lie: and throughout the day which followed that evening of many incidents, I saw nothing of them in the crowded streets of Cheltenham. Neither did I behold Lady Calanthe: if I had, I should have avoided an encounter; for I vowed within myself that I would not again risk the chance of proving, even though involuntarily, unfaithful to my beloved and worshipped Annabel. In the course of the afternoon I received a message from Mrs. Robinson, to the effect that I was to prepare myself to depart with her on the following morning: and punctual to the instructions thus conveyed, I was at the coach-office at the appointed hour. My new mistress was evidently not too well off; as she had no carriage of her own, and did not travel post. Herself, the ayah, and the two children occupied the interior of the stage,—myself and a lady's-maid riding on the outside. As the coach passed through the town, I suddenly beheld a well-dressed female waving her handkerchief to me; and instantaneously recognised Charlotte Murray. She was looking admirably well, and seemed delighted to have caught even that transient glimpse of me: for the equipage was rattling quickly along, and there was no opportunity for us to exchange a single word.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE GOVERNESS.

THE town of Ryde, picturesquely situated on the northern shore of the Isle of Wight, is opposite Portsmouth,—the channel, known as Spithead, lying between. I need not pause to describe the beautiful scenery of the island which I now visited for the first time—nor to speak of the fine effect of the shipping viewed from the town, in the neighbourhood of which the residence taken for Mrs. Robinson was situated. My first impression that she was not particularly well off, was confirmed when I found the house was but a small one, and that the domestic establishment consisted only of the lady's-maid, the ayah, myself, and a

cook,—the household work being divided between those female-servants. I was also right in conjecturing that Mrs. Robinson was not a lady likely to interfere very much with the domestics' department. She had acquired all the indolent habits peculiar to the dwellers in the sultry clime where a considerable portion of her life had been passed: her languor was far from being altogether assumed: and she was sickly, without having any serious or accurately defined malady. The house was about half a mile from the town,—separated by a small flower-garden from the road leading to Newport in the interior of the island,—and having a vegetable garden of larger dimensions at the back. For these grounds the services of a man were engaged three times a week: but as he did not sleep or take his meals in the house, he could not be reckoned amongst the domestic establishment.

It appeared that Mrs. Robinson had brought letters of introduction to some good families dwelling at Ryde, by whom she was at once visited; but she evidently did not seek much society—accepted few invitations, and gave only occasional parties. Her intention, on first taking up her abode at Ryde, was to send her little girls as weekly boarders to a seminary: but being herself somewhat hypochondriacal, she fancied that the children were more sickly than they were, and therefore resolved upon having a governess to reside in the house. Accordingly, about a month after she was settled in her new home, an advertisement was inserted in one or two London newspapers, inquiring for a governess,—specifying qualifications and terms, and directing all applications to be addressed by letter to Mrs. Robinson, Oval Villa, Ryde, Isle of Wight.

In the course of a few days several letters, bearing the postmarks of different places, and all addressed in female handwriting, were delivered by the postman; and I had no doubt that these were answers to the advertisements. I happened to become aware how a decision was arrived at in respect to these explanations; inasmuch as a conversation on the subject arose in my presence, between Mrs. Robinson and two ladies who dined with her one evening; and as I waited at table, I heard what passed upon the subject. I should previously observe,—not, however that it has anything to do with the matter,—that Mrs. Robinson's repasts consisted chiefly of high-seasoned dishes,—mulligatawny-soup, and curry in some shape or another, invariably figuring upon the board. She drank little wine, but considerable quantities of bottled ale,—a habit she had acquired in India where the relaxing and enervating influence of the hot climate needs such stimulant.

The two ladies dining with my mistress on the occasion referred to, were Mrs. and Miss Brownlow—mother and daughter,—very good kind of persons in their way, but neither of them troubled with too large a quantity of brains. Like many weak-minded people, they had a habit of agreeing with everything that was said in their hearing,—seeming to have no opinion of their own, and speaking as if they thought it rude to volunteer one if it were in contradiction with anything expressed by a previous speaker. It was this ready deference on their part which confirmed Mrs. Robinson in the choice which she had already half settled in her mind in respect to the governess.

"I have had a great number of applications in answer to my advertisement," she observed, in the course of conversation; "and I have studied them all as well as ill health and depression of spirits would allow me. One seems to promise a great deal too much——"

"Exactly what they usually do in these cases, my dear Mrs. Robinson," interjected Mrs. Brownlow.

"And another," continued my mistress, "does not promise half enough."

"Always the case with these people!" exclaimed Miss Brownlow, now considering it her turn to speak.

"Some," proceeded Mrs. Robinson, "demand higher terms than I can afford to give, and endeavour to impress upon my mind that they will fully earn their salary. But——"

"Ah! I see, my dear madam," cried Mrs. Brownlow, "that you are too wise to be deceived by them."

"Besides," added the daughter, "when one has fixed what one chooses to give——"

"To be sure!" proceeded Mrs. Robinson; "one won't be persuaded into an alteration. There are others who stipulate for whole and sole control over the children, totally irrespective of the parents' wishes: but this is a concession I could not possibly think of making."

"Indeed you are quite right," cried Mrs. Brownlow.

"And though the testimonials are good," continued my mistress, "it is utterly out of the question to consent to such terms. Besides, between you and me, I have not much faith in testimonials."

"To be sure not!" ejaculated Miss Brownlow: "they are so easily vamped up."

"For my part," said Mrs. Robinson, "I would rather judge for myself from the nature of the applications."

"No doubt of it!" said Mrs. Brownlow. "Your own natural penetration and good sense can discriminate better than through the medium of anything the testimonials themselves can point out."

"I am glad you coincide with me," observed my mistress: "for the very letter which pleases me best, and strikes my fancy most of all, is written by a young person who has no testimonials to offer."

"I am sure if I were taking a governess," exclaimed Mrs. Brownlow, "I should use my own discretion, just as you, my dear friend, are so wisely and judiciously doing."

"I shall certainly follow your advice," rejoined my mistress. "The letter I allude to, is written by a young person named Matilda Palmer. She represents herself as under twenty years of age—left an orphan some years back, and thrown dependent upon an old aunt, whose recent demise has left her relationless and friendless. She therefore wishes to render her accomplishments available for her livelihood. She is willing to take charge of my dear little girls on the terms proffered: she will do her best to make herself agreeable both to them and to me: she will carefully study my wishes in all things, and will consult me in every detail relative to her pupils' studies. Of course I

do not wish to be troubled in this respect: I am too great an invalid and my spirits are too low, to permit much interference: but it is the girl's respectful and deferential style that I like. She candidly explains that she has no testimonials to transmit—but throws herself upon my kind and generous consideration."

"She could not possibly have done better," exclaimed Mrs. Brownlow. "I am sure I am already prepossessed in favour of this young person from what you have been saying; and I do not wonder that you should be so likewise."

"It is quite natural," added Miss Brownlow; "and Mrs. Robinson will be doing a charitable action by taking such an unpretending and respectful applicant."

"After all the good advice you have both given me," observed my mistress, now growing fatigued with the length of a discourse which had had no pause to afford her a rest,—"I should be wrong not to decide in favour of Matilda Palmer. I will therefore write to her to-morrow."

Here the conversation upon this subject dropped; and when discourse was revived, it turned upon other topics. I could not help thinking that Mrs. Robinson's conduct in the selection of a governess argued either a most ingenuous simplicity, or else a very wrong-headed disregard of all ordinary precautions on her part: but I had my suspicion that the real reason wherefore she decided upon the young lady who had no testimonials to offer and no references to give, was because she hated trouble, and was too indolent to write a number of letters to ascertain the genuine character of the recommendation, or to inquire for whatsoever information might be given by the referees. On the following day my mistress gave me a letter to take to the post; and I saw that it was addressed to Miss Palmer, at some street in Camden Town, London.

Three days afterwards—and at about noon—I was issuing forth from the garden-gate to go into Ryde for some purpose, when I was struck by the circumstance of a boy, belonging to the poorer class, following me at a short distance, and looking as if he were either watching me or wished to speak to me. I walked on, glancing behind every now and then, and saw that he was still following me. I stopped—and he stopped likewise: I went on—and again he advanced; so that I could no longer entertain the slightest doubt that he was in reality following in my footsteps. I therefore turned suddenly; and confronting him, asked, "Do you want anything with me?"

He looked back: we were now out of sight of the house; and with a mysterious air, he said, "Is your name Joseph Wilmot?"

"It is," I answered, wondering what on earth the lad could have to do with me.

"This is for you, then," he abruptly rejoined: and thrusting a note into my hand, scampered away with such speed towards the town that I quickly lost sight of him. The note which he had left in my hand, was directed to *Mr. Wilmot;* and the writing, though evidently disguised, was of female delicacy and fluency. I recognised it not: but the first thought that struck me, was a joyous one. I fancied it might be a communication from Annabel; and without pausing to reflect why she should think it necessary to disguise her handwriting, I tore open the billet. Its contents, which I perused with no small degree of astonishment, ran as follow:—

"October 7th, 1838.

"This evening the governess will arrive at Oval Villa. She is not unknown to you; and circumstances have compelled her to take a feigned name. You are conjured not to give vent to any ejaculation of amazement, nor to betray any surprise, when you first encounter her. Every generous feeling which you possess, is earnestly appealed to on this point. Be completely on your guard: time and opportunity will present themselves for explanations; and these shall be freely and frankly given. Reflect that the reputation of her who pens these lines, will be in your keeping; and that if by word or look, you betray her secret, her immediate expulsion from Mrs. Robinson's house will become inevitable. Again, therefore, are you solemnly adjured to exercise the strongest control over your feelings!"

No wonder that I was stricken with amazement on reading this mysterious billet; and as I walked on to Ryde, I marvelled to myself who the writer could possibly be. I bethought me of all the young females I had known at all corresponding with the age of the expected governess; and though I could point to several, yet the circumstances of none were at all similar to those in which she alleged herself to be placed, as I had heard explained from the lips of Mrs. Robinson. But might not those circumstances be as fictitious as, it appeared, the name of Matilda Palmer itself was? This question naturally suggested itself: but for the life of me, I could not settle my thoughts on any particular individual as the one who was playing this strange and unaccountable game. I stopped and studied the handwriting of the note: but it was so completely disguised that even if I should have known the original in its natural fluency, I could not identify it with this altered style of penmanship.

But other reflections now gradually entered my mind. From the very first I had thought my mistress wrong in taking a governess without proper testimonials and references:—should I now become an accomplice in the consummation of what I had too much reason to suspect was an imposture and a cheat?—though to what extent the intention might reach, or wherefore it was practised at all, I was utterly unable to conjecture. I was at first inclined to retrace my way to the villa and show the billet to Mrs. Robinson: but then it suddenly struck me that the writer might possibly be Annabel, who, driven by paternal tyranny from her home, was now seeking to earn the bread of an honest industry. Still, methought, she would scarcely have written in so mysterious a style—unless it were to render her communication as guarded as possible, through fear of not being able to rely upon the messenger to whom it was entrusted. Finally, after well weighing the matter in my mind, I resolved to wait until the evening, and see who the governess should really prove to be, and what explanations might be given by her. It would then be time to act, if a sense of duty should compel me to take any positive step in the matter.

I hastened on towards Ryde in the hope of overtaking the boy who had thrust the note into my hand: but he had evidently far outstripped me—and I saw nothing of him. Having acquitted myself of the mission with which I was charged, I

retraced my way homeward; and the remainder of that day, till the evening, was passed by me in the keenest suspense. I however concealed my agitation from my fellow-servants as well as I was able; and I believe that I did so effectually. The room for the governess was already prepared; and the servants speculated as to what kind of a young person she would prove to be. Every time there was a knock and ring at the front-door, I hastened to answer the summons with a violent palpitation of the heart. Was I soon to see Annabel? and if not she, whom else should I recognise under the name of Matilda Palmer?

At length—a little before nine o'clock—a vehicle stopped at the gate of the front garden: it was one of the flys which ply for hire in Ryde. I hastened forth: the driver was lifting down a box. I opened the door of the vehicle; and in the obscurity which prevailed at that hour—there being no lamps at the garden-gate to throw a light into the chaise—I discerned the figure of a female dressed in deep black, and with a thick veil over her countenance. She alighted: and while availing herself of my arm to descend, caught my hand and pressed it warmly—even passionately. I trembled all over—for a suspicion of the real truth flashed at the instant through my mind; and as the driver conveyed the box into the house, she flung up her veil, revealing the countenance of Lady Calanthe Dundas!

That suspicion which a moment before had seized upon me, was confirmed. Good heavens! what folly was this? I was stricken speechless with mingled amazement and vexation.

"Joseph—dearest Joseph, it is for your sake I have done this!" murmured Calanthe, as she again pressed my hand fervidly between both her own.

I could not answer a word. There were volumes on the tip of my tongue—a hurricane of language ready to burst forth, in the form of remonstrances, upbraidings, and questionings: but the spell of stupefaction and bewilderment sealed my lips. The driver, having deposited the trunk in the hall, came forth from the house: Lady Calanthe paid him his fare—and then hurried forward to the front-door, which stood open. One of the maid-servants was awaiting her in the hall; and she could not therefore bestow another word upon me: nor could I, even if the faculty of speech were restored, utter a single syllable of all that I longed to say to her. When the hall was reached, I perceived, by the light burning there, that Calanthe was plainly and neatly dressed in deep mourning,—her garb being exactly suitable to her assumed condition of a governess. Her countenance was pale; and though expressing nothing particular to a common observer, yet methought I could read beneath it a certain excitement and agitation, which, indeed, she might well be supposed to experience under the extraordinary circumstances in which she had thus willingly placed herself. She was shown up first of all to her own chamber; and afterwards introduced into the presence of Mrs. Robinson in the drawing-room; while I, pleading sudden indisposition, so as to avoid remaining in the company of my fellow-servants, hurried up to my chamber. I feared lest they should mark the trouble which my own looks displayed: for it was, in sooth, a profound trouble that was now agitating me.

When alone in my chamber, I was some time before I could settle my thoughts to calm and deliberate reflection. It was but too evident, from what Calanthe herself had hurriedly whispered to me on alighting from the vehicle, that the mad step she had taken was to be ascribed to her equally mad passion for me. More than ever did I curse my own folly and want of moral courage in not having revealed to her the true state of my affections when at Myrtle Lodge:—more than ever, too, did I deplore that interruption to our interview in the arbour at Cheltenham. Had a proper explanation been given on either of those occasions, she would have been spared the folly and the rashness—the madness indeed—of her present proceeding. But now that explanation must be given as speedily as possible: Annabel must not again be outraged by the reception on my part of Calanthe's caresses! And yet I trembled—nay, more, I shuddered at the idea of the fearful humiliation and the excruciating disappointment which Lord Mandeville's daughter would inevitably experience, when learning that all her stratagem had been thrown away on one who loved her not. To confess the truth, I wept tears of anguish as these reflections passed through my mind. I pictured to myself Calanthe having stealthily quitted the paternal home—compromising herself in every way—disguising her patrician rank under an assumed name—humbling herself to the position of a governess—seeking a place where she would be at the mercy of spoilt and ill-tempered children (as Mrs. Robinson's were)—exposed to whatsoever harsh words that lady might at any time be led to fling out against her—flying from that sphere of society to which she properly belonged—abandoning position, comfort, and the chance of forming a brilliant alliance—making, in short, every possible sacrifice for the sake of that love which she bore towards me. And I——Oh! my heart was convulsed with grief, as I thought that it was utterly impossible I could afford any adequate return—but that, on the contrary, the very first words which I must utter when opportunity should serve, would be the avowal that I loved her not, and had never loved her!

But I will not weary the reader with any more of the harrowing—excruciating reflections in which I was plunged in the solitude of my chamber on this particular night. I sought my couch—but it was a long time ere slumber visited my eyes; and when it came at last, it was accompanied with disagreeable dreams.

On descending to the kitchen in the morning, my fellow-servants were kind in their inquiries relative to my health: and I assured them that I was somewhat better. At breakfast-time they were talking of the governess, on whose personal appearance they lavished the highest praise. The lady's-maid, who had hitherto seen most of Calanthe, was also eulogistic in respect to her soft and amiable manners,—adding that there was no assumption and no undue pretension about her: but that she seemed an agreeable, unassuming young person. I listened in silence,—having the greatest difficulty to prevent my looks from betraying the agitation of my feelings. When the morning repast was over, and I had to attend to my various household duties, I dreaded at every turn to encounter Calanthe: for, until a full op-

portunity should present itself for the explanations I was resolved to give, I did not wish to become the object of even a single fond look or a passing word expressive of affection, which, to my mind, would render me a traitor to my adored Annabel.

It was however soon evident that Calanthe did not at once devise opportunities to throw herself in my way. She doubtless fully appreciated the necessity of acting with the utmost caution. Several days passed; and I saw her but on three or four occasions—and then only for an instant. Each time she bent upon me a look of ineffable tenderness: but her eyes were too quickly averted again, to enable her to perceive the expression of blended mournfulness and upbraiding which my own countenance wore. She was completely upon her guard,—not even trusting herself to touch my hand, or linger for an instant in the hall or on the stairs, for fear lest the proceeding might be observed by others. She passed all the forenoon in an apartment appropriated for the instruction of the children: she dined with them at two o'clock: then she took them out for a walk—had tea with them at six—and when they went to bed at eight, repaired to the drawing-room to pass a couple of hours with Mrs. Robinson. But even this little relief from the monotony of that life which she had voluntarily embraced, she only enjoyed by express invitation: she never of her own accord intruded in the drawing-room unless in compliance with a message expressly sent up by Mrs. Robinson, asking for her presence. Little did my mistress think that in the governess whose habits were so regular—whose demeanour was so respectful—who was so patient and pains-taking in the task of tuition, was a young lady of the highest birth, and whose proper place was in the brilliant saloons of fashionable life. The oftener I thought of the immensity of that sacrifice which had been made for me, the more excruciating became my anguish at the idea of giving those explanations for which I only awaited a proper opportunity, and which I knew would in a moment dissipate all the fond illusions cherished by the loving and tender Calanthe Dundas.

On several occasions I reflected maturely whether it were not better to commit those explanations to paper, and slip the letter into her ladyship's hands: but I know not how it was—I dreaded to undertake the task. Perhaps, if the truth were confessed, I was still deficient in the requisite amount of moral courage; and like all persons under similar circumstances, postponed the evil moment as long as possible. I even endeavoured to persuade myself that I should be better enabled to accomplish that imperious duty, and should have more courage for the purpose, if the opportunity presented itself suddenly, than if it were deliberately sought through the medium of correspondence. Wretched, wretched sophistry, with which I sought to palliate my weakness, or excuse it in my own eyes!

Thus a fortnight passed; and during this interval I never once found myself sufficiently alone with Lady Calanthe to address her a single word. We merely passed each other occasionally; and she was too much on her guard to linger for even an instant. The expressive look was bestowed upon me—the fine dark eyes which dealt it, were instantaneously withdrawn, lest some observer at the moment, unseen by us, should surprise that significant glance: and thus was I dwelling beneath the same roof with one whom I knew loved me madly, and whom I had not as yet been enabled to disabuse in respect to the condition of my own heart. My existence was a most painful one. I was constantly compelled to hear the servants lavishing the highest praises upon Miss Palmer; and even the ayah herself, in her wretched broken English, chimed in with the chorus. My opinion was often asked:—sometimes I was too much abstracted to give a response: at other times I started involuntarily, and ejaculated some vague and incoherent reply, which made all my fellow-domestics gaze upon me till I was overwhelmed with confusion. And this confusion on my part was one day completely crowned, when the lady's-maid, in a jocular and good-natured mood, exclaimed, "I do really believe that Joseph is in love with the beautiful Miss Palmer!"

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE OPPORTUNITY.

One day—a little more than a fortnight after Calanthe's arrival at the house—we were thrown together. The month of October was drawing on towards its close—the cold weather was setting in—and Mrs. Robinson, who disliked every kind of trouble, requested the governess to walk into the town and make the necessary purchases to supply the children with warmer raiment. Mrs. Robinson herself was that day in a humour to have the children with her; and she was moreover fearful that if they walked about too much while Miss Palmer was shopping, they would be over-fatigued: she therefore kept them at the house, and Calanthe set off alone to Ryde.

It happened that Mrs. Robinson had received a letter that morning from some friends in London, giving her notice of a basket of game which had been transmitted as a present; and she therefore desired me to proceed to the town and procure it at the steam-packet office, where it would be waiting. I received this instruction about three quarters of an hour after Calanthe had issued forth; and as I went along, I said to myself that now I should doubtless have the wished-for opportunity of explaining myself to her: for it was almost certain that we should meet in so small a place as Ryde. A feeling of terror came over me—a sensation of moral weakness and of failing courage which made me suddenly stop short in the middle of the road, and ask myself, "Is it possible, Joseph Wilmot, that you are a coward?" I put the question aloud; and then louder still, I exclaimed, "No, no! It shall be done!"—but I felt that it was with a sort of desperate effort that I thus answered my own self-put query. I continued my way in a restless and uneasy state of mind,—doing all I could to centre my thoughts upon the image of Annabel, and invoking that image as a good genius to aid and encourage me in the performance of my duty.

I entered the town, and repaired to the office: but the hamper had not yet arrived—and a porter

there promised that it should be brought to Oval Villa the moment it came. I issued from the office, and bent my way through the principal streets,—looking into the largest and best linen-drapers' shops with the expectation of seeing Calanthe. But I found her not. Then I thought that as she was so much in advance of me at starting, she might have finished her shopping and was on her way homeward. I hurried in that direction; and on the outskirt of the town caught sight of her proceeding along. I was soon in the trace of her footsteps: my heart beat quickly:—what now would be the issue of the interview which was at hand? O Annabel! again did I invoke thine image to inspire me with courage; and it was almost with a feeling of rage that I was compelled to acknowledge to myself that I had not the adequate amount of fortitude for the crisis!

Lady Calanthe was walking on in front. She looked not to the right nor to the left; and methought by the gentle inclination of her head, that her eyes were bent downward—perhaps in meditation. And if so, on what subject? Ah! was she cradled in those illusions which now it was my duty to dissipate? I lingered behind her. What elegance—what grace did that symmetrical form display! how much unstudied elasticity of movement—as if her tread were of airy lightness! The idea intruded upon me in spite of myself—in spite, too, of all my devotion to Annabel—that the black raiment became Calanthe's symmetrical figure admirably, and set it off to the utmost advantage. But angry with myself for allowing these reflections to pass through my mind, or even linger for a moment there, I quickened my pace, nerving my soul with all its fortitude for the accomplishment of my task. I was now speedily by her side; and as she heard footsteps close by, she glanced hurriedly over her shoulder, while she made way on the path for whomsoever it might be to pass.

"Joseph? What happiness!" she exclaimed, the animation of joy suddenly suffusing her countenance. "This is the opportunity I have so much longed for—but which I was too cautious to forestall by any device of my own!"

"And I also have awaited this opportunity with much impatience," was my immediate answer. "Good heavens! how could you have taken such a step as this?"

"What, Joseph?" she said, looking very hard at me, as if fancying that she could not have rightly comprehended my words, or read the expression of my looks: "would you reproach me?" and the sudden sinking of that bright animation of her handsome countenance into the deepest mournfulness, struck like a heavy blow upon my heart.

"Lady Calanthe," I said, mustering up all my fortitude, "the time has come when you must hear me."

"Let us hasten this way," she exclaimed abruptly, and at the same moment diverged into a narrow lane: "we may be noticed in the high road. Joseph, what would you mean me to understand? Heavens! is it possible that you are not sensible of all the tremendous sacrifices I have made for your sake? Look at these mourning garments. They are a hideous mockery: no relative of mine has died that I should wear them. I am literally clothed with hypocrisy—and all for the love that I bear you! It was part and parcel of the tale which I had to devise to obtain admission into the house where you dwelt. Oh, but this is the very least of the sacrifices I have made! A home stealthily left—parents, brothers, sisters, plunged into the deepest consternation at my sudden disappearance—my reputation ruined, or at least only to be saved by eventual marriage with you——Joseph, I could not bear to reflect on all I have done, if it were not that I glory in every sacrifice which is made for your sake!"

"Oh, this is dreadful!" I murmured to myself: and I was totally disarmed of all my fortitude.

"Your nature is more prudent and cautious than mine," Calanthe hastened to resume, bending upon me looks of the tenderest love; "and therefore you tremble at all I do for your sake. But fear not! My plans are fixed—and they shall be realized. We are both very young: let us each agree to toil on for a few years—let us accumulate whatsoever savings we can: and then, Joseph——"

"Calanthe," I exclaimed wildly, "you drive me mad!"

She fell back from me as if suddenly stricken by a heavy blow; and her eyes were fixed upon my countenance with mingled amazement and alarm.

"Good heavens! what mean you, Joseph?" she cried, trembling all over. "A horrible suspicion has entered my head——dispel it, or confirm it——let me know the best or the worst at once! Speak, Joseph! Now that I bethink me of your manner and the expressions you made use of during our brief interview at Cheltenham——But no: it cannot be! I am not deceived in you!—tell me—tell me that I am not deceived in you——it would be my death!"

She spoke vehemently, and with an awful trouble upon her countenance, which became pale as death. She seized my hands, and looked up with imploring anxiety into my face. My heart was nearly broken: I felt bound to tell the truth; and yet it was the very bitterness of crucifixion itself to accomplish the task.

"Calanthe," I said, with a sudden access of courage which surprised myself; "for God's sake compose your feelings——hear me——I have a revelation to make——prepare to receive it——"

"Anything, anything," she murmured in a dying tone, "but the assurance that you do not love me!"

"Calanthe, I esteem you—I would lay down my life to serve you—as a friend——but my heart——"

"Enough!"—and she staggered back, so that at the next instant she would have fallen, had I not caught her in my arms,—where she lay for several moments like one drooping off slowly into a swoon.

"Oh! pardon me—forgive me," I exclaimed, "if I did not tell you all this before. I sought opportunities at Myrtle Lodge: but I was weak—I was feeble of purpose——And then, too, you never received that letter in which I told you all, and in which I besought your pardon for not having been candid and frank before! That night at Cheltenham, I was about to explain everything—if you recollect my words you will see that such was my purpose——"

"Enough, Joseph!" she cried, suddenly: and as

suddenly too disengaging herself from my arms, she seemed to muster up all the energies of her naturally powerful soul. "You do not love me," she went on to say, in a low deep tone; and her countenance was of a death-like pallor. "Then you must love another: for if your heart were disengaged, it could not have remained insensible to such an affection as I have experienced for you. Who is this other? where lives she?"

"In London," I answered, feeling that she had a right thus to question me.

"In London," repeated Calanthe, in a strange abstracted manner: and then for a few moments she appeared to meditate profoundly. "Joseph," she at length went on to say, "you have not acted well towards me: but I will not reproach you. You have been deficient in candour; and you cannot but understand that I feel deeply humiliated—deplorably wretched. I am lost through you!"—and now she shivered visibly, as if an icy tremor were passing through her form from head to foot.

"Oh! what can I do—what can I say?" I exclaimed, with a riven heart at the spectacle of that illimitable woe which my own want of moral courage had mainly brought about.

"Nothing," answered Calanthe, now speaking gently and mildly. "I repeat the assurance that I will not reproach you. On the contrary, I forgive you—yes, from the very bottom of my soul do I forgive you, Joseph! I love you too well not to proclaim this pardon with the utmost sincerity; and I have already made too many sacrifices for your sake, not to resign myself to the last one——a broken heart!"

"My God, Calanthe! speak not thus mournfully!" I exclaimed: and in the wildness of my distracting thoughts, I anathematized myself for having revealed the truth.

"It is now for me," continued the young lady, "to enjoin you to compose your feelings. You are well aware, Joseph, that I have abandoned home—prospects—everything, for your sake; and now I must accept resignedly the lot which I first sought for the purpose of being beneath the same roof as you. Oh, what wild ecstatic schemes had I formed! and how cruelly have they been destroyed! Methought that we might dwell in the same house, content with the pleasure of occasionally beholding each other and exchanging a fond look—until the time should come when faith, endurance, patience, and love would be crowned with happiness as their reward. But the dream is gone. Oh, it was too bright and beautiful to last——and I should have mistrusted it from the very first!"

Calanthe turned aside for a moment, and raised her kerchief to her countenance. She had been speaking in a low plaintive tone—a voice full of the most touching pathos—and with looks of tenderness indescribably mournful. But she felt not more wretched than I: it is a question whether her misery was so acute and rending as that which was experienced by myself. For even in the depth of *her* sorrow, there was a certain blending of resigned courage, which I myself did not possess. Now that I saw her weeping, my heart was rent with excruciating tortures; and wildly and loudly did I inveigh, with bitterest reproaches, against myself.

"Be composed, Joseph," said Calanthe, again turning upon me her pale countenance, and smiling the sweetness of encouragement. "You see that I am not incensed against you: my very humiliation gives no harsh impulse to my thoughts or my demeanour. We may yet remain friends—if no other feeling can exist between us. And you will be performing a friendly part if you continue to keep my secret and betray not the truth of my real position—a betrayal which would literally deprive me of the means of earning my bread."

"Good heavens!" I exclaimed, astounded and horrified at the utter desolation of hopes and prospects which these last words all in a moment spread before my view, and of which this unfortunate young lady had become the victim through her love for me:—"do you for an instant think of continuing where you are? will you not hasten back to your home?"

"Joseph, I have no home now," she answered, with a profoundly mournful look.

"Oh! and it is I who have been the means of depriving you of it!" I exclaimed, feeling so desperate that at the moment I could have laid violent hands upon myself. "But tell me that I have not heard aright—tell me that the doors of the paternal mansion will yet be open to you!"

"Think you, Joseph, that even if the stern and proud Earl of Mandeville would receive the daughter who has fled from beneath his roof, that this daughter herself would return to where her soul would be crushed and her spirit broken by jeers and taunts, by harshest tyranny, and by every kind of injurious suspicion? Do you not see, Joseph," she continued, earnestly but not bitterly, "that my reputation is gone—and that Lady Calanthe Dundas must henceforth conceal herself beneath the humble pseudonym of Matilda Palmer!"

"Good God, what a wreck has my weakness wrought!" I exclaimed, half frantic at all I heard and all I had to reflect upon.

"Blame not yourself," responded Calanthe, in the softest tones of her melodious voice: "for I do not blame you. We must separate now, Joseph: I dare not remain longer absent. Henceforth we are to be friends. We shall live beneath the same roof; and rest assured that your welfare will ever be most dear to me. Keep my secret: this is all I conjure you—this is all I ask. Compose your feelings—and be guarded. Once more remember that my very bread is now dependent upon your prudence!"

She proffered me her hand: I was in such a cruelly bewildered state of mind that I knew not what I did—and I pressed it to my lips, moistening it with the tears which flowed in torrents from my eyes. Calanthe, likewise overcome by her emotions, sank into my arms: I strained her to my breast, as if by that most unwise and injudicious display of feeling I sought to indemnify her for the terrific woes she endured on my account. I covered her cheeks with kisses; and she smiled sweetly and softly, as if with the happiness of a last embrace ere resigning herself to look upon the ruin of the hopes which she had cherished. Those very smiles on her part deepened my own affliction. Had she stormed and raved, and treated me with indignation and hauteur, or with an outburst of fury, I should have been far less moved: but the forgiveness she had so sincerely proffered—her mild and gentle behaviour—and the patience with which she submitted to humiliation and disappointment, called forth all the tenderest feelings of my heart.

"Now I must hasten homeward," she said: and bending upon me another look of plaintive earnestness—bestowing upon me likewise another soft and melting smile—she hurried away.

I lingered in the lane for about a quarter of an hour, ere I also bent my steps towards the villa. I felt that I had again been traitorous towards Annabel: but a thousand excuses readily started up in my mind. I persuaded myself that it was but with the feeling of a brother towards a sister that I had embraced Calanthe; and that it was in the spirit of the purest, chastest consolation I had imprinted kisses upon her cheeks. I marvelled to myself that she had treated me with so much kindness. I knew that she possessed a proud spirit; and now that I reviewed the scene which had just passed, I wondered that she had not overwhelmed me with her indignant reproaches. I felt as if under the deepest obligation to her—that she had every claim upon my friendship—and that she was a being to be admired and esteemed, if not positively loved.

"But I will be as a brother unto her!" I exclaimed, while thus giving way to my reflections; "and she shall be as a very dear sister unto me! For my sake she has made the utmost sacrifices which woman could possibly accomplish; and it behoves me to watch over her welfare—to soothe and console her—to lighten as much as I can the heavy burthen of affliction which weighs upon her soul. Yes, Calanthe—I will not plunge another dagger into your bosom: I have already injured you enough! When I next see Annabel, I will tell her everything—I will confess to her all that

has taken place: she shall know you, Calanthe—and you will love each other like sisters! If fortune should sooner or later be favourable, and enable me to make Annabel my wife,—you, Calanthe, will find a home with us; and it will be our study to soothe your wounded spirit, and by our kindness compensate you as much as possible for the sacrifices you have made!"

It was thus that in the wildness of my thoughts I apostrophized Calanthe Dundas, as I walked to and fro with hurried and agitated steps in the lane where we had parted. After a while I retraced my way homeward; and I was glad when night came, that I might retire to the solitude of my own chamber and commune once more with myself.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

RICHARD FRANKLIN.

A MONTH passed without any incident worthy of record. As a matter of course I frequently met Calanthe in the house: there was always the rapid look of recognition, and always the quickly vanishing smile: but not a word passed between us—and we were not again thrown in each other's way for any length of time. But I must observe that during this interval a certain Mr. Franklin became a very frequent visitor at the house,—chiefly however dropping in of an evening between eight and ten. He belonged to a family living in Ryde, and with whom Mrs. Robinson was on very good terms: indeed they were the most intimate friends she seemed to possess in the neighbourhood. Richard Franklin was certainly a handsome young man—about two-and-twenty years of age—tall and well made—with dark hair and eyes—and an aquiline profile. He was an only son: his parents were very well off; and moreover himself, as well as his three sisters, had all received rich bequests from an uncle who had died some time back. Richard Franklin was therefore a most eligible match for any young lady of his acquaintance: he had the repute of being a steady, well-conducted young man—with no false pride,—and was therefore likely enough to marry where his heart should be engaged, rather than for the mere purpose of increasing his worldly possessions.

This gentleman it was who had latterly become a very frequent visitor at Oval Villa; and when I noticed that his calls were chiefly made in the evening, just at those hours which Calanthe was accustomed to pass with Mrs. Robinson in the drawing-room, I experienced a growing despondency of spirits, the cause of which I did not dare acknowledge to myself. To a certain extent I began to conceive a dislike for Mr. Richard Franklin; and this was all the more unwarrantable, as he invariably treated me with as much kindness as our relative positions in life enabled him to show. I was often vexed and annoyed at myself on account of that increasing sentiment of aversion towards a young gentleman of most amiable character: but I could not control it—much less subdue it entirely.

One evening, as I answered the summons of the drawing-room bell, I perceived—on entering the apartment—that Richard Franklin and Calanthe were seated together at a table, looking over a portfolio of prints, which he had brought for the purpose. He was making some lively remark at the time; and Calanthe laughed with a degree of merriment which did me harm to hear it. They were seated close to each other; and methought that there was a certain degree of intimacy already established between them—a familiarity which, though without the slightest shade of impropriety, was nevertheless somewhat too great to have been encouraged by a young lady who had so recently made such immense sacrifices for my sake. Mrs. Robinson was half reclining upon a sofa, according to her wont; and I would have given the world to be enabled to whisper in her ear, that having so beautiful a governess under her roof, she did wrong to encourage the visits of a young gentleman. But of course I dared not take such an immense liberty; and I quitted the room with a feeling of vexation and annoyance which I no longer endeavoured to conceal from myself.

On descending to the kitchen, I found the servants talking of Richard Franklin.

"It will be an excellent thing for Miss Palmer, if it should take place," observed the cook.

"Depend upon it," said the lady's-maid, "young Mr. Franklin is smitten in that quarter. He comes nearly every evening now—and always at about eight o'clock."

"I wonder whether missus suspects anything?" exclaimed the cook.

"Supposing she does," rejoined the lady's-maid, "Mr. Franklin is a very honourable young man—everybody knows that—and he would not trifle with a young girl's affections. No, no! Rest assured that if he is paying his attentions to Miss Palmer—he means to make her an offer—and I shouldn't at all wonder that when she is out of mourning, she will become a bride. But what, in heaven's name, Joseph, is the matter with you?"

"I—I——it is nothing——only a slight headache——I have not been well for the last day or two:"—and vainly did I endeavour to throw off the confusion which had seized upon me.

"On my word!" cried the lady's-maid, "I do really think that what I said to you in joke some time ago, is the actual truth. Doesn't he look just for all the world as if he was in love? Why, you silly young man—you don't think that Miss Palmer, though only a governess——"

"I beg you will not address me in this manner," I interrupted her, for the first time displaying anything akin to ill-humour towards a fellow-servant.

"Well, Joseph," said the lady's-maid, very seriously, "I didn't mean to offend you: but I cannot help thinking that you really are smitten with Miss Palmer—and that is the truth."

I answered not another word: but snatching up a candlestick, retired to my own chamber. There I sat down, and began to reflect that I had acted very foolishly, and had cut a very ridiculous figure indeed in the presence of my fellow-servants. I had angrily met something which was said in a mere jesting mood; and by my abrupt departure from the kitchen, I had given confirmation to the suspicion which had been thrown out. I felt exceedingly vexed and dissatisfied with myself: but I could not tranquillize my perturbed spirit: I did

not like that spectacle of Richard Franklin and Lady Calanthe sitting so close together, and with a certain degree of intimacy established between them. And I asked myself wherefore I should be annoyed? Did I love Calanthe? Oh, no! all my heart was devoted to Annabel. But why, then, was I jealous?—for jealousy it assuredly was. Ought I not, on the contrary, to be pleased with the prospect of Lady Calanthe's marrying a young gentleman who would give her a home and position instead of that home and that position which she had lost? Ah! it was all very fine to reason in this manner: but I could not bring myself to like Richard Franklin—nor to look pleasantly on his visits: while at the same time I thought that Calanthe could not have loved me so very much after all, if she were able thus soon to transfer her affections to another. In short, I went to bed in a strange state of excitement, vowing that I loved Annabel as much as ever, and yet wishing that Lady Calanthe had never known Richard Franklin.

On the following morning, when I descended from my chamber, I resolved by the amiability of my conduct, to make as much amends as possible for the rudeness with which I had treated my fellow-servants on the previous evening. They were naturally good-natured, and bore me no rancour: besides, I was a favourite with them; and they willingly accepted my altered demeanour as an atonement for the uncouth abruptness of which I was so heartily ashamed. But still I had not succeeded in bringing myself to regard with indifference the visits of Richard Franklin to the house; and the conversation which I had heard pass on the subject between my fellow-domestics, haunted me like a troubled vision. I longed to get out into the fresh air, and give unrestrained flow to my thoughts, without the chance of betraying them to observers by my countenance. I was therefore very glad when, on answering the summons of the parlour-bell, I was directed by Mrs. Robinson to go to Ryde and give some orders to the tradesmen with whom she dealt. As I proceeded to the town, I endeavoured to analyze my feelings completely. I asked myself if I still loved Annabel as much as ever? and I exclaimed aloud, "Yes, yes! how could it be possibly otherwise?" —yet at the same time I thought of Calanthe's handsome countenance—her beautiful figure—the music of her voice—and her elegant manners.

"But," I said to myself, "Annabel is more lovely—more charming than Calanthe. Ah! it is doubtless because I have vowed a brotherly friendship for Calanthe, that I am vexed she should think of forming an alliance without consulting me. Yet what claim have I upon her confidence? I may be nothing more to her—and assuredly she ought to be nothing to me. No: let her marry Richard Franklin—the sooner the better! for *then* my peace of mind will doubtless be restored. Annabel—sweetest Annabel! never, never will I prove treacherous to you! It is impossible! your image must always be uppermost in my mind: to you is my heart's devotion given!"

And yet, at the very instant that I was thus mentally apostrophizing the ethereal image of the beauteous Annabel, I felt a pang of jealousy on account of Calanthe and Richard Franklin. Angry with myself, I quickened my pace, as if to escape from the conflicting nature of my thoughts—and gained the town as speedily as possible. Having discharged the commissions entrusted to me, I was returning homeward,—when at the corner of a street, whom should I behold, walking arm-in-arm, but Richard Franklin and Lady Calanthe? If any doubt had previously remained in my mind as to the jealous nature of the feeling that I entertained on their account, it was now completely cleared up. Yes—I *was* jealous: a pang shot through my heart—a sickness seized upon me, as I beheld Lady Calanthe hanging to that young man's arm. I followed mechanically: it seemed to me as if she had no right to be on terms of intimacy with any one but myself. A dozen projects swept through my mind. I would hasten my steps, pass them by, and look pointedly at her. But no! this would be the height of rudeness and impertinence on the part of a menial who ought only to touch his hat respectfully to them both. Then I would follow them whithersoever they went —see how long they remained together—watch their looks—and ascertain, as well as I could, whether their discourse was of a tender nature. But if they suddenly turned and perceived me, I should feel remarkably little, mean, and foolish; and therefore this project would not do. No: but I would seek an opportunity of demanding explanations of Calanthe. Explanations indeed!—what right had I to seek for any? and would she not be justified in treating me with the haughtiest indignation? Nothing that I thought of, could I carry into effect. I was strangely excited—cruelly bewildered.

But all of a sudden Franklin and Calanthe stopped short: they shook hands—he took off his hat to make a parting bow—and as she entered a mercer's shop, he departed in another direction. I was not thirty yards distant from where this took place: and it struck me that Calanthe, glancing aside ere she entered the shop, caught sight of me. Would she think that I had been watching them? I hoped not: I did not wish to seem so little in her eyes. Hastily turning back, so as not to pass the shop, I plunged into a diverging street; and by making a short circuit, gained the road leading to the villa. For a few minutes I walked along without looking behind me,—struggling against the painfully jealous feelings which had been excited in my soul—endeavouring to force myself into a more generous and magnanimous train of thought—and likewise striving to fix my meditations completely on the image of Annabel. I was in a strange state of mind. If anybody had suddenly come to tell me that Annabel was about to bestow her hand upon another, I should have turned frantic: but, by a monstrous idiosyncracy, I could not bear the idea that Calanthe should bestow her own affection upon another! Did I love them both? I said to myself that this was impossible. Yet wherefore, if I loved Annabel *only*, was I jealous of Richard Franklin's attentions to Calanthe? I could not tell.

All in a moment the intuitive conviction seemed to spring up in my mind that Calanthe was behind me. I looked back: and sure enough, she was advancing at but a short distance. I could not help stopping till she overtook me: it would have been the height of rudeness and churlishness to have avoided her. I gazed upon her countenance, which appeared to wear a certain degree of

satisfaction—though very slight indeed—and perhaps altogether imaginary on my part. Nevertheless, methought her features *did* express that look: and again did the coiled-up reptile of jealousy lift its head in my heart.

"What brought you into the town, Joseph?" inquired Calanthe, giving me her hand: while at the same instant she glanced rapidly round, doubtless to assure herself that no observer was nigh. Ah! thought I to myself, she would not have taken this precaution if it were Richard Franklin that she met: but he was a gentleman, and I was only a livery-servant, with whom of course it would not be convenient for her to be seen shaking hands and conversing.

"I came," was my answer, coldly delivered, as I scarcely pressed the proffered hand, "to execute some commissions for Mrs. Robinson."

"And I have been shopping on my own account," observed Calanthe: and I was still more vexed with her, because she did not seem to notice the indifference with which I received her hand, nor the coldness with which my words were spoken.

"I thought you generally took out the children at this hour?" I remarked curtly.

"Not when I go shopping," she responded quietly: "because Mrs. Robinson is afraid the children will be fatigued."

"Besides," I said, with malice in my tone, "you found a companion in Ryde; and therefore you did not want to be troubled with the girls."

"Ah! then you saw me there?" observed Calanthe, still in the same quiet way as before. "Yes—I met Mr. Franklin, who was polite enough to offer me his arm along the street."

"And of course you were very glad to accept it?" I rejoined, with a rudeness for which the next instant I found myself blushing.

"Yes: I was very glad," she answered, with continued serenity; "because it is sometimes unpleasant for a young lady to walk about alone."

"And I dare say," was my next remark, "that Mr. Franklin is a very agreeable companion."

"He is considered to be a young gentleman of very courteous manners and intellectual conversation," replied Calanthe. "You will admit, Joseph, that he is exceedingly handsome: although, I believe, persons of your sex do not pay particular notice to your mutual good looks?"

"But I *have* observed that Mr. Franklin is very handsome," was my response, given with even a tinge of bitterness: "and it is evident that you think so likewise."

"To be sure I do! And why not?" exclaimed Calanthe, now bending her eyes upon me with a look of astonishment.

My own gaze sank beneath her's; and I walked on in silence by her side for a few moments, biting my lips. I now noticed that we had entered that very same lane where about a month back our explanations had taken place. I could not remember whether I myself had just been purposely leading the way into that lane; or whether Calanthe had done so, and I had accompanied her as I mechanically walked by her side. Nevertheless, certain it is that there we were; and the circumstance brought vividly and keenly back to my memory every detail of the scene which had occurred in this lane four weeks previously. Here, too, was the spot where the explanations had been given—the spot where she spoke of the immense sacrifices she had made on my account—the spot where I had beheld her ineffable anguish, and had endured my own—the spot where she lay drooping in my arms, and my kisses and tears were showered upon her cheeks. Good heavens! I thought to myself, but one short month back she had appeared to love me almost to madness; and now she had been coolly eulogizing the personal and intellectual qualities of another. I trembled from head to foot with an unnatural excitement: I was a prey to the demon of jealousy: the image of Annabel appeared to be receding and fading away into the mists of distance;—and unable to restrain my feelings, I stopped suddenly short, muttering in a hoarse voice, "Calanthe, you love Richard Franklin!"

"Wherefore do you think so?" she asked, a strange and scarcely comprehensible animation spreading over her countenance: yet methought at the instant it was a glow of pleasure at the mention of Franklin's name.

"Wherefore do I think so?" I exclaimed. "Can you deny it?"

"If it be so, what reason have I for denying it?" said Calanthe: "and if it be not, why should I be called upon to give you any assurance on the subject?"—but yet she spoke not angrily, though still with that singular animation of countenance.

"True!" I ejaculated. "I have no right to question you. And yet——"

"And yet what, Joseph?" she asked, still gazing upon me strangely.

"And yet I fancied," I went on to say rapidly—for my mind was full of excitement,—"that there was a friendship existing between us: I flattered myself that I was not altogether unworthy of your confidence——"

"Supposing that I had any confidence to impart," she interrupted me, softly and gently,—"what opportunity have we hitherto found for discourse since the last time we met here?"

"Ah! the last time we met here!" I exclaimed bitterly. "But it is true we have had no opportunity. Now, however, that it is obtained, you will perhaps treat me as a friend——a brother——"

"Oh certainly!" replied Calanthe. "What do you wish?"

"Your confidence," I quickly responded.

"But in what respect?" she asked: and methought there was a certain tremulousness in her voice—a strange flashing of the eyes—as well as the glow of that scarcely comprehensible animation still upon her countenance. "You ask for my confidence: tell me in what respect you require it?"

"I have already said that you love Richard Franklin: is it not so?"—and it was with a sort of shivering suspense that I awaited the answer.

"But tell me, Joseph," said Calanthe, still with her gaze fixed upon me,—"if I were to confess to you that I have not viewed Mr. Franklin with indifference—if I were to avow that his intentions had pleased me—and that the peculiarity of my position would not suffer me to refuse the offer of his hand,—if, moreover, I were to acknowledge that by the process of forcing myself to fancy I was contemplating *you* when really surveying

him, I had succeeded in transferring my affections from yourself to him,—should you not be rejoiced, as my friend and as my brother—for as such you wish me to regard you——"

"Rejoiced?" I echoed bitterly—and it was with a sort of rage that I stamped my foot: for at this moment Calanthe looked so transcendingly beautiful, with the glow upon her cheeks—the light beaming in her eyes—her glossy raven hair, deeper in its dark hue than even the black mourning bonnet that she wore—and the sable raiment setting off the symmetry of her charming shape to the utmost advantage,—that I felt half mad at the thought of her becoming another's.

"To be sure," she went on to observe, as if my emotions were totally unperceived by her: "as a friend and as a brother, you will be rejoiced to think that I may obtain for myself a better position than that which I now occupy. Besides, after all that has passed between you and me, it were better that we should separate as soon as possible——"

"You did not seem to think so a month back, Calanthe," I interrupted her in the thrilling yet tremulous accents of reproach,—"when we stood upon this very spot, and our kisses and our tears were mingled!"

"You are speaking to me strangely, Joseph," answered Lady Calanthe, with an air of extreme surprise. "What am I to think? what am I to imagine?"

"Oh! can you not understand me?" I exclaimed, reckless of what I was saying, and in a mood of desperation. "Do you not see, Calanthe, that I cannot endure the idea of your becoming another's?"

"Joseph," she said, "do not *you* love another? did you not tell me so upon this very spot?"

"Yes, yes—it is true——But I know not my own mind! My God! I am half distracted. Calanthe, answer me with the fullest candour! Do you indeed love Richard Franklin?"—and seizing both of her hands, I held each in a vice-like grasp, while gazing with the anguish of suspense into the dark depth of her eyes.

"What response would you have me give?" she murmured, trembling visibly. "If I say *yes*—that I do love him——"

"Then you will drive me frantic!" I ejaculated vehemently.

"And if I say *no*—I do not love him?" she inquired, in a still more tremulously murmuring voice.

"Then I shall be happy?"

"But do you love me, Joseph?"

"Yes—it must be love! I cannot part with you!"

"O joy!" she cried. "I do not love Richard Franklin! he is nothing to me! I love only you—*you*, as tenderly and fervidly as ever!"

She sank into my arms: I strained her to my breast—our kisses and our tears were again mingled: but this time they were tears of joy which gushed forth from our eyes. Alas, alas! Annabel was forgotten——no, not altogether forgotten: but her vanishing image grew dim to my mental view, as it seemed to look mournfully upon me from the mist into which it was subsiding, as the guardian angel of a man fades away in deepest melancholy when he commits the crime from which that good genius would fain have saved him. There was for an instant a pang of remorse in my heart: but I clasped Calanthe still closer and closer to my breast—and all my thoughts, all my feelings, all my senses, were soon absorbed in the ecstatic pleasure of this embrace.

"Tell me, Calanthe," I murmuringly said, as we walked along the lane together, my arm thrown round her waist,—"you have encouraged Richard Franklin somewhat, in order to make me jealous—was it not so? Ah! by that tell-tale blush upon your cheeks, I see that I have not erred in my conjecture!"

"Dearest Joseph, hear me," responded the young lady, in the most melting cadences of her rich musical voice. "I have loved you—and I love you still—with a passion, a fervour, and a devotion which would not permit me to abandon all hope. I felt assured——or at least, I buoyed myself up with the idea, that such a love as mine must ten thousand times outweigh that which any other could possibly experience for you; and I said to myself that so much love—such a love as no human heart had ever known before—could not possibly fail sooner or later to engender a reciprocal affection. Ah, Joseph! I could read your own feelings better than you yourself comprehended them. When we parted here a month back, it was not without a hope that I left you. Those kisses that you bestowed upon me—those tears which you shed upon my cheeks—were the same as prophetic whispers breathing in my ear and infusing comfort into my soul. Yes, Joseph—I love you as never woman loved before. I am thine: and I reck not for all the world, now that I can look upon you as mine!"

I was profoundly moved by Calanthe's melting language: how was it possible that I could be otherwise? Man has his own vanity and his own weakness, as well as woman: and was it not a flattering thing for me to contemplate the spectacle of this brilliant patrician lady, who by her beauty and her rank might have aspired to the proudest peer's espousal, cheerfully and gladly making the most tremendous sacrifices for my sake? I could not be indifferent to such reflections as these: and, alas! they were potent enough to stifle the remorse which my soul felt when I thought of the absent Annabel.

"Dearest Joseph," continued Calanthe, "you shall not again have occasion to feel angry at the mention of Mr. Franklin's name. Every proof which I can give you of my devoted love shall be afforded!"

Again we embraced—and then separated, with the mutual understanding that we were to compose our feelings as well as we could, and that our conduct at Oval Villa should continue as guarded as it had hitherto been. Calanthe hurried away, pausing however for a moment where the lane joined the road, to wave her white kerchief to me; and for the second time did I now linger in that narrow path to reflect upon what had occurred. I was like a man who, regaining his senses after a fit of intoxication, becomes alive to some stupendous folly or misdeed which he has committed; and for an instant I could have cried out aloud in the anguish of my heart as I thought of Annabel——Annabel, pure, confiding, and affectionate, who at that very moment was perhaps thinking of me,

while I was guilty of such base and flagrant perfidy towards her. But I dared not think of her; I dared not review my past misconduct. Again adopting the simile of the individual who regains the senses which have been rendered mad by intoxication, I called to my aid a sort of desperate recklessness,—accepting what was done as something that could not be recalled—resolving to surrender myself up to what I conceived my destiny, as a man in his despair surrenders his soul to Satan.

After lingering in the lane for about twenty minutes, I hurried back to the villa,—putting the image of Annabel as far away from my thoughts as possible, and fixing my reflections on the beauty, the words, and the caresses of Calanthe. For the remainder of that day I felt as if under the influence of a strong liquor which excited and bewildered the brain, without actually intoxicating, much less stupifying it: and my fellow-servants wondered to see me so elate and happy as they fancied I was. In the evening Mr. Franklin called as usual: but Calanthe kept her own chamber on the plea of headache—as I gathered from what I overheard the lady's-maid say to the cook. On the evening of the following day Mr. Franklin called again; and this time Calanthe was compelled to make her usual appearance in the drawing-room: but when I went thither for some purpose, I at once saw that she was seated near Mrs. Robinson on the sofa, while Richard Franklin, who looked vexed and uneasy, was placed at a distance. On the evening next after that, he called again; and on this occasion, when I went up to the drawing-room, I heard Calanthe speaking to him in so cold—indeed glacial a manner, that it ought to have convinced him he was perfectly indifferent to her. On the following day he called at about noon, and was for nearly an hour with Mrs. Robinson alone in the drawing-room. Then Calanthe was sent for from the apartment where she was wont to instruct the children; and Mrs. Robinson left her with Mr. Franklin. A quarter of an hour afterwards he quitted the house in a hurried manner. I conjectured all that had passed; and in the course of the evening, Calanthe managed to slip a billet into my hand. I sought an immediate opportunity of reading its contents. They were to the effect that Richard Franklin had obtained an interview with Mrs. Robinson, to inform her that he was desirous, with her permission, to make an offer of his hand to Calanthe—that the lady had afforded him the opportunity—and that Calanthe, while thanking him for the flattering compliment he thus paid her, begged to decline the honour. This incident tended to rivet the chains which Calanthe's fascinations had flung around me: and more than ever did I strive to subdue and crush the remorse that was in my soul on Annabel's account.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

INFATUATION AND ITS RESULTS.

It appeared as if my good genius had altogether deserted me, and that circumstances were destined so to combine themselves as to render me the victim of this infatuation to which I had yielded. For the very next day after Richard Franklin's proposal and rejection, Mrs. Robinson received a letter from her solicitor in London,—informing her that her presence was required in the metropolis, in connexion with certain affairs of her late husband's, which had only just been wound up. She hated trouble: she moreover disliked the idea of travelling in the depth of winter—for it was now verging towards Christmas; and it was therefore a source of much annoyance to her that she should have to leave her comfortable home in the Isle of Wight. It was however absolutely necessary to undertake the journey: but she decided upon leaving the children behind her, having every confidence in Miss Palmer's prudence and discretion. The lady's-maid was to accompany her; and accordingly, the day after the receipt of the letter she took her departure.

Frequent opportunities were now easily obtained for Calanthe to snatch stolen interviews with me, and without exciting the slightest suspicion on the part of the servants who remained behind, as well as without the least risk. A word I have already used in this chapter, most properly represents the state of my feelings: it was a positive infatuation. With the desperate recklessness of a man who having taken one false step, plunges madly on in the career to which it leads, I abandoned myself to that passion: or, to borrow another similitude from actual life, like the man who having passed the boundary of temperance, recklessly swallows glass after glass, did I yield myself up to the intoxicating influence of Calanthe's charms. We snatched half-hours in the drawing-room at different times of the day: the oftener we thus met, the more did we seem to feel the necessity for meeting again,—until at length we sought each other after the period for retiring to rest. But still we behaved with so much caution, that our proceedings were utterly unsuspected. The absence of Mrs. Robinson was prolonged by various circumstances for an entire month. She occasionally wrote to Calanthe, telling her that fresh delays had arisen in the settlement of her affairs; and that being once in London, she should remain there until they were brought to a complete termination. Thus, for four whole weeks were we enabled to snatch these opportunities of being together. And now I come to the most painful part of this episode in my life: for Calanthe loved with all the glow of a fervid temperament—I was a prey to an inebriating infatuation—and those frequent interviews did not long continue innocent!

Mrs. Robinson returned, having satisfactorily settled her affairs. We were once more compelled to be on our guard, and to relapse almost completely into that mode of life which we had adopted previous to her journey. The exchange of glances—occasionally of billets—was the extent of the risks we ran; and now it was that I began to awaken from the dream of impassioned infatuation in which I had been plunged. Day by day, and hour by hour, did my feeling in favour of Calanthe wear off, while that which I experienced towards Annabel regained strength. By night I wept bitterest tears, when I reflected on what I had done: I implored heaven to forgive me—I invoked the image of Annabel to smile forgiveness also! My contrition was most sincere: never did anchorite lacerate his body with more torturing stripes, than

I scourged my soul with keenest self-upbraidings. By this very process I grew calmer in my mind: I became comforted: I felt that I was making as much atonement as possible for the error into which I had been beguiled, and the perfidy of which I had been guilty towards Annabel. I contrasted the character of Calanthe with that of the sweet creature to whose image I once again turned as to that of my guardian-angel: and the result was transcendently in favour of the latter. I wondered how I could have fallen—wondered how I had ever succumbed to the spells which had been wrought upon me. But by degrees I began to comprehend that I had really never ceased to love Annabel, even while basking in the sunshine of Calanthe's bright eyes and receiving her caresses. I learnt to distinguish the immensity of that difference which exists between a passion and a sentiment,—the former arising from the grossness and frailty of our mortal natures—the latter being comprised of the sublimest essences of thought and feeling which were permitted to remain in the breast of man after his expulsion from the Garden of Eden. I now saw how it was that, while being devoted to Annabel, I had nevertheless been jealous of Calanthe, and had succumbed to the influence of that mad love which she experienced for me. I saw that a passion may be excited for even the unworthiest object: though, heaven knows, I do not mean this phrase to apply to Calanthe—for she possessed many admirable traits, much noble generosity of disposition: but love with her became a ruling idea—an infatuation—a frenzy. What I meant to express, was that a passion may be inspired by any female possessed of brilliant or winning charms which constitute the influencing power: but a sentiment can only be inspired by the purest and chastest of women—such an one as Annabel!

Although this great change was taking place within me, and the madness of passion was yielding to the better feelings of repentance,—though my heart, having passed through such an ordeal, was now cleansing itself of all the impurities which had adhered to it in its progress,—I did not immediately give Calanthe any reason to perceive that I was altered towards her. I should have considered it a downright baseness, and an act of brutal cowardice to inflict wanton injury upon one whose only fault was loving me too tenderly and too well. Thus, though I exchanged glances with her as heretofore, whenever we met and were unobserved,—yet did I begin seriously to deliberate how I should free myself from the sphere of her influence—how, in short, I could bring about a separation. My mind, after revolving many plans, settled upon one which seemed the most eligible for adoption: I determined upon doing something to get myself discharged from my present situation,—trusting to the policy to be thereafter carried out, to prevent Calanthe from following to whatsoever spot circumstances might lead me. But still I did not choose to do anything which should be actually damaging to my character; and it was rather difficult to provoke Mrs. Robinson's resentment by a trivial fault: for she was too languid in her nature to arouse herself to anger very easily. Indeed, she detested trouble so much as to pass over many a little incident on the part of the servants which the generality of masters and mistresses would have made the groundwork for a loud disturbance and wrathful scolding. I was therefore much perplexed how to carry out my scheme,—when a circumstance took place which relieved me from my embarrassment, and effected in a summary manner that separation which I was now so anxious to bring about.

One day Calanthe went into the town in order to make some purchases—for she did all Mrs. Robinson's shopping: but she did not return so soon as on such occasions she was wont. Hour after hour went by,—till at length Mrs. Robinson rang the drawing-room bell to inquire if Miss Palmer had come back? A response was given in the negative: and she grew somewhat uneasy. It was about eleven o'clock in the forenoon when Calanthe had set out: it was now four in the afternoon—and she had not returned. Presently there was a ring at the front-door: and a person, having the appearance of an hotel-waiter, said to me in a low hurried manner, "Are you Joseph Wilmot?"

"I am," was my response: and I was smitten with a sudden fear that there was something wrong.

"You must come up to the —— Hotel as soon as you can," said the man, in the same hurried manner as before: then, having thrust a little billet into my hand, he hastened away.

My first impulse was to speed after him, and put some questions: but I instantaneously reflected that the note which I held in my hand would probably give me all requisite explanations; and I at once sought an opportunity of reading it. The contents ran as follow:—

"Dearest Joseph,

"My father and one of my brothers have me in their power. They have compelled me to confess all—except that which I dared not confess!—and I conjure you to save my honour. But I know you will! You are incapable of yielding to threats and intimidation, to make an avowal that would ruin me for ever. It is only by pretending a sudden indisposition and retiring to a chamber, that I am enabled to pen these few rapid lines,—which a kind-hearted maid has promised to give to the waiter who is about to be sent off to fetch you. Mrs. Robinson is to know nothing!

"Your afflicted, but ever loving,
"CALANTHE."

The style of penmanship but too well convinced me how great was the dreadful excitement endured by the unfortunate young lady. I myself was at first almost overwhelmed by the occurrence: but I speedily reflected that it might all be for the best—that the separation I had been studying to bring about, would now be effected—and that Calanthe would in all probability be restored to her home. As for confessing that which would indeed proclaim her frailty, I was incapable of doing so: I was even prepared to tell any falsehood, and with a most brazen effrontery too, rather than ruinously compromise one whose only fault was that she had loved me too tenderly and made such sacrifices on my account. I was just thinking of leaving the house on some excuse,—when the drawing-room bell again rang; and I hastened to obey the summons.

"Joseph," said Mrs. Robinson, "I am getting very uneasy indeed about Miss Palmer. It is now close upon half-past four o'clock; and she has been

absent ever since eleven. Some accident must have befallen her. So steady and well behaved a young lady——Yes, it must be an accident! it can be nothing else! Hasten into Ryde; and make inquiries. Stay!—I will tell you the shops at which she had to call."

Mrs. Robinson enumerated three or four; and I lost no time in taking my departure. I hurried along at a very quick pace—but still not so fast as to enable me to outstrip my somewhat disagreeable thoughts: for though in one sense I was not sorry—for the reasons already set forth—that matters had come to this crisis, yet it was no very pleasant thing to contemplate the prospect of encountering a father and brother who were certain to consider themselves terribly outraged through me. Nevertheless, I summoned all my courage to my aid; and my mind was fully made up to shield Calanthe's honour in the point where it was so vitally concerned. The half-mile from the house to the town was accomplished in a few minutes; and a few minutes more brought me to the hotel. The instant I entered, I encountered that very same waiter who had been sent with the message to Oval Villa; and he at once bade me follow him.

My heart palpitated violently as I ascended the stairs: a door was thrown open—and I entered a room, around which I threw a glance of lightning swiftness to see if Calanthe were there. I certainly did not expect to behold her: nor was she present. The door closed behind me; and at that instant I felt for *her* sake, nerved with a degree of fortitude which even surprised myself. Before me were her father and brother. Lord Mandeville, though far advanced in years, had a tall, stout, and erect form: his countenance, though florid, was care-worn—its expression naturally proud and haughty. His son was about two years older than Calanthe, and very much like his sister—with dark hair and

eyes—a classic profile—slender and symmetrical shape. The father seemed more afflicted than stern—the son more sternly severe than afflicted. No doubt he felt much: but it was evident that a feeling of pride as well as of the liveliest indignation, prevented him from betraying his sorrow more than he could help. They both surveyed me with an earnest attention the instant I made my appearance; and I could not help thinking at the moment of the similitude of this scene to that which had taken place some time back at Cheltenham. There was however this grand and material difference—that in the mansion of the unknown noblemen at Cheltenham, I was innocently accused; whereas here I was but too guilty!

"And you are Joseph Wilmot!" said Calanthe's brother, he being the first to break silence: and he averted his looks with an expression of illimitable scorn, as much as to imply how boundless was his wonder that his sister could have bestowed her affections on a youth in a menial garb.

"You do not know who we are, young man?" said the old nobleman: "because we are passing under feigned names here—and therefore the waiter who fetched you, could have told you nothing."

"True! The waiter has told me nothing," I said, "beyond that I was wanted here:"—for if I had admitted my knowledge of those in whose presence I stood, it might have led to the discovery that Calanthe had sent that secretly written billet.

"But does your conscience suggest nothing?" inquired the old nobleman, his voice quivering with emotions: then suddenly regaining his firmness, he added with an access of hauteur, "I am the Earl of Mandeville; and this is one of my sons—Lord Hubert Dundas."

I bowed as if in becoming acknowledgment of these introductions; and though there was now another interval of silence for a few moments—during which both the noblemen again surveyed me with an earnest scrutiny—I did not lose my presence of mind, nor fall into confusion. I felt how necessary it was to preserve my self-possession, in order to pass through the coming ordeal without the risk of betraying Lady Calanthe.

"Now that you know who we are—if you did not really suspect it before," said Lord Hubert, breaking silence in his turn, "you can probably guess why you have been sent for. By heaven, sirrah! it would take but little to make me wreak such a vengeance upon you that you should carry the marks thereof to your grave."

"My lord," I answered, feeling that this was the best opportunity to say something which should at once ease their minds on a particular point,—and I must confess that I spoke and looked with so matchless an effrontery that I afterwards thought of it in amazement,—"I am unable to reproach myself with anything which should deserve such an outrageous menace on your part."

"If this be really true," said the old nobleman, quivering with nervous excitement, "we could forgive you much of all that has passed!"

"My lord, it *is* true!" I rejoined in the same firmness of tone as before, and my looks not quailing beneath his own.

"Come hither, Joseph Wilmot—draw near me," said the Earl of Mandeville. "There!" he added, as he placed me so that the light of the candles should fall full upon my countenance: "now repeat what you have said—that you have spoken the truth, and that my infatuated daughter can look her parent in the face without blushing!"

"If, my lord, Lady Calanthe Dundas has already done so," I answered firmly and resolutely, "it is that innocence sustained her. Now hear me, my lord!" I went on to exclaim more rapidly, for I feared to be any longer subjected to the ordeal to which my countenance was put beneath the keen searching looks fixed upon me by both father and son. "That I have been the object of your daughter's love, I do not attempt to deny: that we—perhaps in a strange infatuation—looked forward to a time when our hands might be joined in marriage——"

"Marriage with such as you!" ejaculated Lord Hubert scornfully.

"Silence!" said the Earl of Mandeville: "the youth speaks fairly enough. We have sent for him, and he has a right to be heard. But tell me, Joseph Wilmot—do you really, in your serious moments, expect that such a wild idea can ever be realized?"

"No, my lord!—frankly speaking, I do not," was my response, "after the incidents which have now occurred."

The Earl of Mandeville's countenance brightened up visibly, and he said, "You appear to be a young man of intelligence. Your own good sense is therefore sufficient to make you aware of the terrible impropriety of which my daughter has been guilty. I believe you——God knows I believe you, when you assure me that her honour is untarnished! Good heavens, it were impossible to imagine the contrary! No, no—I believe you! But see what she has done. Her home has been abandoned:—for weeks and weeks her family has been plunged into the most dreadful apprehensions on her account; and it was only because our suspicions were directed by antecedent circumstances into the right channel, that we were enabled to obtain a clue which has at last brought us to the place where she lived concealed under another name. Indeed it was only yesterday we ascertained that on quitting her home, she took a lodging in some street in Camden Town,—where she received letters bearing the Ryde post-mark. Her brother and myself hastened hither—we met her in the street——"

"What is the use, father, of giving the lad all these details?" ejaculated Lord Hubert impatiently.

"I have my motives," responded the Earl, gently but firmly. "In a word, young man, nothing as yet is known prejudicial to my daughter's character. The world believes that she is again on a visit to her sister in Devonshire: the few to whom the mystery of her disappearance is really known, will not make it the subject of scandal. Now then, I appeal to you—I implore you as the father of that infatuated girl—I ask you as one who will forgive you all the past—to lend your aid in saving her from a fatal exposure!"

"Cheerfully, my lord, shall that aid be given!" I exclaimed; "and as you speak to me in these terms, I should be a wretch and a villain not to second your views to the best of my power."

"The young man has his proper feelings, Hubert," said the Earl of Mandeville, flinging a look upon his son: then again addressing himself to me, he went on to observe, "You can do

much!—indeed you can do everything! Silence is all that is required of you. No, not all: there are other favours—for I will call them favours—which I ask at your hands. But in the first place, a solemn—a sacred—and an inviolable silence with regard to the past! I do not think you can be an empty boaster——"

"Heaven forbid, my lord!" I ejaculated; "and the best proof is, that not a soul at Oval Villa has ever heard me drop a single syllable calculated to betray aught prejudicial to Lady Calanthe."

"Your words are stamped with truth," said the Earl of Mandeville, his countenance still farther brightening up with this new relief afforded to his mind. "The secret, therefore, that in Miss Matilda Palmer a peer's daughter was disguised, is totally unsuspected at Oval Villa. Let it remain so: and this is the first favour I solicit at your hands. My daughter will presently write a note to Mrs. Robinson——"

"I should observe, my lord, that Mrs. Robinson sent me up into the town to make inquiries concerning Lady Calanthe's absence; and thus was I enabled so speedily to answer the summons brought me by the waiter."

"Then you must return, Joseph Wilmot," continued the Earl, "and give the assurance that your inquiries have been vain. My daughter will, as I ere now said, write a note couched in a certain strain, to Mrs. Robinson, accounting for this sudden and abrupt withdrawal from her service. The contents of that note will doubtless reach your ears; and you will not utter a single word to disprove them. May I calculate on your good faith thus far?"

"You may, my lord," I answered confidently: for now I was indeed speaking the truth, and had no need to call up to my aid an effrontery and a dissimulation, which in my heart I abhorred.

"The next favour which I have to ask at your hands," continued the Earl, "is that you will never again make any attempt to see my daughter."

"I call God to witness the sincerity with which I give your lordship this most solemn and sacred pledge! May evils ten thousand times worse than Egyptian plagues, fall upon me," I exclaimed, "if I break this oath!"

"Enough!" said the Earl, now addressing me with even an air of kindness, "you are making as much reparation as lies in your power:"—and I felt convinced at the moment that his eyes were so far opened to the real truth of past transactions, that he began to suspect his daughter had run after me much more than I had after her. "But now, Joseph," he went on to say, "I have a last favour—the greatest of all perhaps—to solicit at your hands. It is that you will, as soon as convenient, quit the service of Mrs. Robinson and seek employment elsewhere. I do not attempt to disguise my object. There is frankness on your side: there shall be equal candour on mine. In a word, I seek to guard against any future display of my daughter's infatuation: I am desirous to break off all correspondence between you—that you shall become, as it were, lost to her; and in process of time the affection with which you have inspired her, may calm down. I know that I am asking much, when I request you to leave a situation in which perhaps you are happy, and where you probably have a kind mistress. But I have the means of providing you with another. It is far—very far away: but I can guarantee that you shall be comfortable there—and you must permit me not merely to bear all the expenses of your removal, but likewise to bestow upon you a proof of my gratitude."

Here Lord Hubert started, as if he thought his father was making use of terms far too humble and condescending for a menial in a page's livery.

"Yes—I use the word gratitude," continued the Earl emphatically: "and depend upon it, Joseph, that I *shall* feel grateful if you grant me all I have solicited at your hands."

"I will do so, my lord," was my response. "But I beg most positively though respectfully to decline the acceptance of anything which might be accounted as a bribe:"—and as I thus spoke I flung a proud look upon Lord Hubert, to make him aware that though I wore a menial's garb, yet that I was as susceptible of proper and elevated feelings as he himself.

"Well, Joseph," continued the Earl, "I shall say nothing more on this point. The kind treatment you are certain to experience at the new place to which I shall recommend you, will prove that I am not unmindful of your interests. In a few days you shall receive a letter from me containing farther particulars: but once more you faithfully pledge yourself to fulfil all I have asked?"

"I faithfully pledge myself, my lord," was my readily given reply.

"We have now no more to say," resumed the Earl of Mandeville. "Go back to Mrs. Robinson; and I must beg of you so far to descend to an untruth—which will be venial under the circumstances—as to assure her that your inquiries for Miss Palmer have been vain. She will not be kept long in suspense: a messenger with the note to which I have already alluded, will be speedily on your track. And now farewell."

I bowed and quitted the room, well pleased at having passed through the dreaded ordeal in a manner so little disagreeable to my feelings, and having been compelled to outrage truth as little as might be under the circumstances. I issued forth from the hotel, and hastened homeward. I was even in good spirits: I had heard enough to convince me that Calanthe would be restored to the bosom of her family, and that precautions had been taken from the very outset to prevent her reputation from being seriously compromised by her disappearance from home. On my own account, I was rejoiced that the separation I had been longing to bring about was at length effected: and fervently—Oh! how fervently, did I vow that never again would I be seduced away from my allegiance to the charming and dearly beloved Annabel.

On reaching Oval Villa, I at once informed Mrs. Robinson that I could learn no tidings of Miss Palmer; and my mistress was very much concerned on that young lady's account. The domestics too were equally alarmed and surprised; and all sorts of speculations naturally arose to account for her absence—but not one at all detrimental to the high opinion they entertained of the governess's moral rectitude. The inmates of the villa were not kept very long in suspense: for a note presently arrived, addressed to Mrs. Robinson. I at once recognised Calanthe's writing, though it still

exhibited the nervous trepidation of excited feelings in which it was penned; and I took it up to my mistress. Its contents, as I presently learnt from the lady's-maid, were to the following effect:—that shortly after the death of her aunt (a tale that was of course still adhered to, as it could not now be denied, on account of the mourning garb) Miss Matilda Palmer had unfortunately quarrelled with her relations, but through no fault of her own—that considering herself ill-used by them, she had resolved to earn her own livelihood—and thence her answer to Mrs. Robinson's advertisement. The letter farther went on to explain how Miss Matilda Palmer's relations had at length found out where she was—how they had come over to Ryde to seek her—how they had fallen in with her while she was in the midst of her shopping—how they had acknowledged all their former ill-treatment and unkindness—how they insisted that she should return with them at once to the comfortable home which they would henceforth afford her—and how they would not consent to part with her again for fear she might, through a lingering resentment, refuse to return to their guardianship. In this way, and by this venial tissue of falsehoods—through which however there was a certain under-current of truth in some respects — did Lady Calanthe, writing as Miss Matilda Palmer, excuse herself to Mrs. Robinson for leaving her so abruptly, and for not even going back to Oval Villa to bid her farewell. She however thanked Mrs. Robinson for all the kindness experienced at her hands—and besought her not to think ill of her, nor deem her ungrateful for quitting her in so precipitate a manner. As for her clothes, and whatsoever money there might be in her box, she desired that these should be divided amongst the female servants; and she wound up this somewhat lengthy letter with the most sincerely expressed wishes for Mrs. Robinson's health and happiness.

I have before said that Mrs. Robinson was a good, easy, credulous kind of person, who liked trouble as little as possible, and seldom gave way to anger, on account of the effort which it costs. She thus readily believed every word contained in the letter: she was entirely disarmed, by its tone and expression, of any rancour or feeling of annoyance: indeed she expressed her deep regret that circumstances had not favoured her with an opportunity of bidding Miss Palmer good bye. No one in the house suspected there was anything wrong in connexion with the matter. It was known to the servants that Miss Palmer had refused Richard Franklin's offer of marriage; and therefore a young lady who had declined so eligible a match merely on the conscientious ground that her heart could not be bestowed along with her hand, was above any suspicion of imprudence in respect to this sudden withdrawal from Oval Villa. In a short time another advertisement for a governess was inserted in the newspapers: but Mrs. Robinson was not suited before I left a month afterwards.

Ere closing this chapter I must observe that Lord Maudeville's promise to me was faithfully kept. About ten days after the scene at the hotel, I received the following letter, which was secured with a plain seal and to the contents of which no signature was appended. I however knew full well from whom it came, as those contents were a sufficient indication of its authorship:—

"February 12th, 1839.

"A situation is provided for Joseph Wilmot in the household of Mr. Vennachar, of Inch Methglin, in Perthshire. Joseph Wilmot must first proceed to London—thence repair to Edinburgh—thence to Perth—whence he will obtain a conveyance for Inch Methglin, with which every one in that part of the world is well acquainted. Mr. Vennachar has been communicated with upon this subject; and from the recommendations he has received, will be well pleased to take Joseph Wilmot into his service at thirty guineas a year: Mr. Vennachar has moreover through the writer of this, remitted the sum of twenty pounds to defray Joseph Wilmot's travelling expenses. Mr. Vennachar will therefore be expecting Joseph Wilmot in about three weeks from this date."

The letter, which bore the Enfield post-mark, contained an order from a Perth banker on a London one, for the sum specified in the communication itself. I had a very great mind to return the money-order to Mr. Vennachar, with a respectful letter to the effect that it was usual for a servant to pay his own travelling expenses when going to a new place: for I felt well assured that the Earl of Mandeville himself had caused the amount to be sent me; and I felt extremely repugnant to take anything which might savour of a bribe from this nobleman. But when I reflected that such a proceeding would be calculated to give Mr. Vennachar an unfavourable opinion of my character, and make him think I was of too proud and independent a spirit to be adapted for a servant,—when, too, I bethought me that the expenses of so long a journey would be very great,—I determined upon making use of the remittance. I was sufficiently well pleased with the prospect of visiting Scotland,—of which country I had read a great deal; and my curiosity in respect to the wild scenery of the Highlands was excited. But there was one feature in the plan laid out for me to pursue, which I did not so much relish. This was the necessity of having to revisit London,—not merely for the purpose of passing through it on my way to Scotland, but to obtain the money from the banker's. If there were a chance of seeing Annabel, I felt that I could cheerfully run every risk: this pleasure was however scarcely to be hoped for; and I did not dare communicate with her—much less call at the house in Great Russell Street. But there was the danger of falling in with Lanover; and I confess that I still stood in considerable dread of that man. It is true that I was now nearly eighteen years of age—that with the growth of my form my mind had likewise expanded—that I had already received a tolerable amount of experience in the ways of the world—and that I was not therefore quite so much in dread of Mr. Lanover as some time back I had been. But still I did fear him sufficiently to render me particularly cautious how I threw myself in his way. I was no coward; and if he had been an open foe, I would have boldly met him face to face. But he was a dark designing one—capable of executing his purposes either by insidious treachery or else by a bravo-like iniquity; and therefore I shunned him in the same way that I should have avoided the nest of a reptile or the lair of a wild beast. Besides, I was so peculiarly situated with respect

to this man that I felt the necessity of keeping entirely to myself the danger under which I lay at his hands. I could not appeal to the law against him, because he was Annabel's father; and though he should inflict upon me a mortal wound, I must even in my very death-agonies forbear from revealing the name of my assassin, because not for worlds would I stamp Annabel herself with ignominy by sending her father to the scaffold!

Thus was I situated in respect to Mr. Lanover,—no longer fearing him as the terrible ogre-like being he first appeared to be—but regarding him as a most dangerous enemy, who for some darkly mysterious and unaccountable object had vowed to take my life. Prudence therefore prompted me to avoid an encounter with such a man, if possible: and hence was it that I was little pleased at the prospect of passing some hours in London. However, I felt ashamed of myself on account of these fears: I already considered myself a man (as indeed I was in stature, having grown tall, though still remaining of slender figure); and I thought that it was unworthy of me to harbour such apprehensions. Therefore I resolved to follow out the exact itinerary described in the Earl of Mandeville's letter.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

AN ENCOUNTER WITH OLD ACQUAINTANCES.

It was in the beginning of March that I took leave of my mistress and fellow-servants at Oval Villa, to set out upon my travels. I crossed in the steam-boat from Ryde to Portsmouth, and took the afternoon coach to London,—arriving in Gracechurch Street at a late hour in the evening. I slept at the *Cross Keys*, where the coach stopped; and after breakfast on the following morning, proceeded to Lombard Street, in the immediate neighbourhood, to obtain the money for my cheque. This business being finished, I returned to the *Cross Keys* to make inquiries relative to the coaches on the northern roads; and I was informed that I had better proceed to the *Bull and Mouth* in Aldersgate Street, where I could obtain more accurate intelligence and likewise book my place according to the hour and circumstances which would best suit me. Thither I accordingly bent my way; and having to pass the General Post Office, which I had never seen before, I stopped to contemplate the building. At that very instant a gentleman and lady, arm-in-arm, were descending the steps: they were advancing slowly,—the former reading aloud a letter which they had doubtless just received, and the latter listening to its contents. The instant I caught a glimpse of those countenances, I recognised them: the gentleman was the Rev. Henry Howard of Charlton—the lady was Edith Delmar.

With an ejaculation of joy at thus beholding her whom I had ever remembered with so much gratitude, I hastened forward to pay my respects. Mr. Howard evidently did not recollect me at all; and Edith gazed upon me for some seconds as if she were by no means certain that I was the individual whom nevertheless she fancied me to be. It was upwards of two years and a half since she had seen me; and in the meantime I had sprung up from the mere lad of a little past fifteen to the young man of nearly eighteen. It is true that since I left Delmar Manor I had seen *her* at Charlton Church in Devonshire: but she had not observed *me* on that occasion; and thus was I sufficiently altered to prevent her from being altogether certain that in him who now stood before her she beheld her deceased father's page.

"Surely you must be Joseph Wilmot?" she said, at length breaking silence.

"I am, Miss Delmar," was my response; "and I hope you will pardon the liberty I took in accosting you: but I could not help availing myself of the opportunity to express the gratitude which I ever experience for the kindness of past times."

"It is not Miss Delmar whom you are addressing," said the clergyman, with a glance of proud admiration at his beautiful companion: "it is Mrs. Howard."

I bowed in congratulatory acknowledgment of this notification; while a soft blush came up to Edith's lovely countenance;—and after a few moments' pause she observed, "It is very good of you, Joseph, to remember whatsoever little kindness you received at the Manor:"—and then she stopped short, while tears came into her eyes; for this allusion to that particular time had evidently conjured up with vivid force the image of her murdered sire.

"May I ask," I said, "after Mr. and Mrs. Mulgrave?"

"We have not seen them latterly," responded the Rev. Mr. Howard—while a shade came over his countenance; and as I instinctively glanced towards Edith, I perceived that the sadness which had ere now overspread her own features, suddenly deepened.

There was a pause; and I felt somewhat awkward,—perceiving that, though unwillingly, I had touched upon delicate ground. I now observed both Mr. and Mrs. Howard more attentively than at first. They were neither any longer dressed in black,—the period for wearing mourning garments having expired several months back: and though they were apparelled with gentility and neatness, yet there was a certain visible economy in their costume—an indescribable something which seemed to indicate that their circumstances were merely competent, if not actually limited—but certainly very far from being affluent. Nevertheless, Mr. Howard, handsome and well-mannered as he was, looked unmistakably the gentleman; and what Edith had lost in respect to elegance of apparel since I had first seen her at Delmar Manor, she had gained, if possible, in the beauty of her person. She was now verging towards twenty-one, and was expanding into a splendid womanhood. Not that she had lost any of the exquisite symmetry nor lithe elasticity of her shape: her well-modelled proportions had merely developed themselves into richer contours. She had the same loveliness of complexion: but the buoyant spirit of artless eighteen was not now dancing in the sunny blue eyes;—there was a certain settled pensiveness in her look—a serene resignation, which to an ordinary observer would have appeared the sedate dignity belonging to the marriage state—but which I too well knew had a deeper cause: namely, the effect which the fearful tragedy at Delmar Manor

had left upon her mind. Nevertheless, she was most interestingly beautiful; and Henry Howard might well be proud of his charming wife,—as indeed she also might be of her handsome husband.

"I need not ask, Joseph," said Edith, at length breaking that pause which was awkward and disagreeable for all three of us, after my evidently infelicitous allusion to her sister Clara and Mr. Mulgrave,—"I need not ask whether you yourself are prospering:"—for I was well dressed—of course in plain clothes, being at the time out of service; or more correctly speaking, not having as yet entered on my new situation.

"I thank you, madam," was my answer; "I have little reason to complain of any struggles with the world. I eat the bread of mine own industry."

"And are you still, Joseph, living with your uncle?" she inquired.

"What? Mr. Lanover! that dreadful man!" I ejaculated. "No—heaven forbid! I remained but a few weeks with him——"

"He did not, then, fulfil his promises," said Edith, "and give you a comfortable home?"

"Oh, madam, if you knew all!" I involuntarily cried. "But no!"—I instantaneously added, recollecting that for Annabel's sake there must be a seal upon my lips: then in the hurry and confusion of my thoughts, and with a hasty desire to change the discourse, I was awkward and incautious enough to return to that very topic which constituted such delicate ground to tread upon; and I said, "I presume you are on a visit to the Manor?—for I know, sir," I added, "that your home is properly at Charlton in Devonshire."

"It is," answered Mr. Howard gravely: "but we are not on a visit to Delmar Manor, as you suppose."

"I once, sir, had the pleasure of hearing you preach at Charlton," I observed. "It was a considerable time back—and I was then in the service of Lord Ravenshill."

"Indeed, Joseph!" ejaculated Mrs. Howard. "You were in the service of that nobleman who was ruined?"

"Yes, madam. And on the particular Sunday to which I allude, I saw you at the church: but when the service was over, I was delicate in approaching you. I called some time afterwards to pay my respects, and express that sense of gratitude of which I have just now given you the assurance: but you had left the parsonage. I was profoundly grieved to hear that you had been ill and suffering. I am rejoiced now to see that your health is restored."

"It is very good and grateful of you," said Mr. Howard,—who during this conversation had fully recollected who I was,—"to express yourself in such terms:"—then he added solemnly, "We all have our trials in this world, Joseph Wilmot; and it is our duty to bear them with resignation. You manifest a genuine and respectful interest in Mrs. Howard; and I cannot refrain from observing in her presence that she has borne up against the manifold calamities which have overtaken her, with a becoming fortitude."

"Oh, dear Henry!" murmured Mrs. Howard, with tears starting into her eyes—and it was evident that she could not at the instant control this little outburst of emotion: "it is not the loss of fortune which I deplore at present: it is the unkindness of those who——"

"Loss of fortune, madam!" I exclaimed, struck with these words. "Pardon me—deem me not impertinent! Humble an individual though I am, I experience, from a sense of gratitude, a deep interest in all that concerns you;—and until this moment I had hoped,—nay, I had felt confident—that you were possessed of riches. For I knew that your deceased father—my ever lamented benefactor—had amply provided for you, his well-beloved daughter!"

Both Mr. and Mrs. Howard gazed upon me with so singular an expression of countenance, that I did not at the first moment perceive it was in sheer wonderment: I feared lest I had spoken too familiarly, and that in the unguarded excitement of my feelings, I had overstepped the line which separated me in my humble sphere from their more elevated social position. But I was presently undeceived as to this apprehension: for Mr. Howard exclaimed, "What mean you, Joseph? You knew that the late Mr. Delmar had made particular dispositions in respect to his property? How could you know that?"

"If I have said anything improper," I began, timidly and hesitatingly, "I am truly sorry——"

"No, Joseph—nothing improper," Mrs. Howard hastened to interject. "We both appreciate your good feeling——"

"Yes," immediately added her husband: "pray understand us in that light! But you have just given utterance to words which have naturally amazed us. Whence was your authority derived for that statement?"

"I will answer with frankness," I at once said. "It chanced that I overheard——But do not think I was an intentional listener——No, it was far otherwise——I was engaged in the museum; and the discourse which thus reached my ears, took place in the library adjoining."

"Between whom?" asked Mr. Howard hurriedly.

"Between my lamented benefactor and Mr. Mulgrave," was my response.

"And the nature of that conversation, Joseph?" continued the clergyman inquiringly.

"I do not recollect it all now, sir," I rejoined: "but I distinctly remember that Mr. Delmar informed Mr. Mulgrave—and he spoke emphatically and positively—that according to a solemn pledge which he had given to his deceased lady, when she was on her death-bed, he had made a will equally dividing all his property between Mrs. Mulgrave and yourself, madam:"—and I addressed these last words to Edith, down whose cheeks the tears were again trickling, as the tenour of the discourse continued to rivet her attention upon that mournful and terrible time which deprived her of her father.

"Do you know, Joseph Wilmot," said Mr. Howard, looking exceedingly serious, "that you have accidentally been led to mention something which, if not actually important, is at least very remarkable? But good heavens, Edith—dearest Edith! are you ill?"

The young lady indeed appeared as if she were seized with a sudden indisposition; a deadly pallor had come over her—she seemed as if she were

about to faint; and Mr. Howard hastily called to a cab-driver who was passing at the moment with his vehicle.

"I am better now, dearest Henry," murmured Edith in tremulous tones: "but so many sad and frightful recollections have been conjured up——"

"Yes, dearest—it is natural that you should be thus affected," exclaimed her husband: and he sustained her to the cab which had just drawn up at the edge of the pavement.

"Good bye, Joseph," he said, addressing me in a kind voice: "we both of us wish you well. You possess a good and grateful heart; and you will prosper."

Edith likewise bade me "good bye" in a friendly manner: the cab drove away—and I stood watching it until it was lost amidst the crowd of vehicles in the neighbourhood of St. Paul's Churchyard. Heaving a profound sigh as I thought of the horrible death of my deceased benefactor, and as I reflected that it had left upon Edith's mind an impression which would evidently never wear off altogether, though with the lapse of time it might be tempered down,—I turned to pursue my walk towards the *Bull and Mouth:* when I started and staggered back as if I had suddenly beholden a wild beast or a monstrous reptile about to spring at me—for there, only three yards distant, stood the horrible humpback, Mr. Lanover!

His appearance was exactly the same as when I had beheld him last: his harsh iron-gray hair did not seem to have tended another shade towards whiteness: his shaggy brows overhung those eyes which had an expression partly of the weasel and partly of the snake. He was apparelled in complete black—his usual style: but his hat was circled with crape—no doubt in mourning for Violet. His shoes had the strings tied in large bows: his immense hands looked larger still with the loose black kid gloves that he wore. At the moment when my eyes fell upon him, his looks were fixed upon me with that cold searching gaze which was so penetrating and at the same time had the hideous fascination of the reptile. Thus some moments elapsed, during which he continued to survey me—while I was riveted to the spot under the influence of even a far greater amount of terror than I had previously anticipated I should experience, when ere my visit to London I calculated the chances of falling in with Mr. Lanover.

"Well, Joseph," he said, his looks and manner all of a moment softening down as much as it was possible for them to undergo such an alteration,—"so you are in London again? Come—shake hands. You know I am your uncle; and though you have been a very disobedient nephew to me, I am inclined to forget the past."

It was upon the tip of my tongue to ejaculate that *I* could not possibly forget it—when it suddenly struck me that if I betrayed my knowledge of his murderous intentions at the time I fled from his house, it would be making him aware that Annabel must have listened to what was then going on and had communicated them to me. Therefore I at once checked—or rather withheld the retort I was about to make; and mechanically I gave him my hand. He shook it with what to any stranger who observed us, would have seemed a degree of friendly warmth: but the mere contact of that hand, gloved though it were—and gloved as mine also was—sent a cold shudder quivering through my entire frame. I almost fancied that he meant to keep his hold upon me, and that he would drag me off: but as I swept my looks around, and beheld the throngs of passengers passing in every direction—when I felt, too, that this scene occurred in the broad daylight, and that a single ejaculation from my lips would bring numbers to my succour—I suddenly regained my fortitude, and was ashamed that a young man of my age should even for a moment have yielded to so mortal a terror in respect to that individual. Nevertheless, it was not astonishing—considering all I knew of him—his diabolical capacity for mischief—his heartless unscrupulous disposition—his truly fiend-like character,—added to the loathsome repulsiveness of his person,—that I should have been thus horrified by the sudden apparition of the hideous humpback before my eyes.

"You have grown a fine tall lad, Joseph," he went on to observe: "you are a very handsome youth too, on my honour!—the handsomest youth that ever I saw in my life! I hope you cherish no ill feeling towards me? If the past must be alluded to, recollect that you gave me very serious provocation—you struck me, you know—on that day when I confined you to your chamber. But tell me what made you run away?"—and now his eyes were again fixed upon me with a scrutiny so penetrating that it seemed as if the reptile-light which hung in their depths had become sharp as needles.

"I considered myself ill-treated," was my answer, now given with a certain degree of boldness; "and it was natural I should escape from a dwelling where I had to endure so much."

"Endure so much, Joseph!" responded Mr. Lanover with a remarkable mildness of voice and a sudden softening of his looks: "you are wrong to speak in this manner. You know very well that up to that particular day you were treated by me with the utmost kindness. But however, we will not refer to the past:"—and methought that he looked relieved, as if he had acquired the certainty that I knew much less of his murderous designs on that eventful night than he had hitherto imagined. "Let us walk along the street a little, and converse together. I think you were talking just now to Mr. and Mrs. Howard—were you not?"—and again he looked hard at me.

"I was," I replied, sauntering along gently by his side in the direction of Aldersgate Street.

"Well, and what were they saying to you? chatting in a very familiar way, I have no doubt?—for they are good easy kind of people, and give themselves no airs."

"They spoke to me with considerable kindness," I rejoined.

"You give me such curt answers, my dear Joseph," said Mr. Lanover, "that I cannot help thinking you still experience a secret rancour against me. Why, you foolish boy! you little know that all along I meant to be the very best friend you had in the world, if you would only have permitted me. Of course everybody has his failings: perhaps mine consist of certain infirmities of temper—and you ought to make allowances. Ah, Joseph! when you were living with me, I used to build up such castles in the air—I was

wont to picture to myself that when you were of a proper age, you might become even more nearly related to me than now you are."

I gazed upon him in bewildered astonishment. Was it possible that I understood his allusion aright?—and the bare thought thereof made my countenance glow with the animation of joy and hope. I forgot at the instant that if such had indeed been his intent, it was a somewhat strange thing he should have suddenly made up his mind to murder me on that night when I fled from his house.

"Yes, Joseph," he went on to say, speaking in a mournful voice, "it was my earnest wish that in process of time you should become my son-in-law—that you should wed my daughter Annabel——Ah! she is as much improved as you are: she has grown up to be such a lovely creature—I am quite proud of her, poor child!"

I knew not what to say: I was trembling all over with a feverish suspense—hope mingled with apprehension — but the former predominating somewhat. I was too much agitated and excited for deliberate reflection; and I walked mechanically on by Mr. Lanover's side.

"Do you ever think of Annabel?" he asked, suddenly fixing his looks upon me: and I felt the tell-tale blush rising up to my countenance. "Let me see," he went on to observe in a musing manner: "it is upwards of two years and a half since you saw Annabel last:"—so that he was utterly ignorant, or at least affected to be so, that during the interval his daughter and I had met alike at Exeter and at Salisbury. "Two years and a half is a long time: it has done wonders for you, and also for her. She is a lovely creature; and as her father, I repeat that I am proud of her."

Again his looks were turned upon me; and still was I so confused and agitated—bewildered and excited, by the singular and unexpected turn which the discourse had taken—that I knew not how to answer a single word.

"You have not forgotten Annabel, then, Joseph?" Mr. Lanover went on to say. "Perhaps you would like to see her again?"

I started—stopped suddenly short—threw upon him a look of joyous hope—but instantaneously averted my eyes again with a revulsion of feeling as horrible as it was abrupt. For at that instant came vividly back to my mind the memory of those dark projects from which I had formerly escaped; and I was seized with a misgiving on account of him who was now speaking with so much apparent fairness and kindness.

"Understand me, Joseph," continued Mr. Lanover: "I do not seek to exercise the slightest control over your proceedings. I am sorry I ever coerced you: and certainly shall not attempt to do it again. I need not ask if your cirumstances are comfortable: your appearance indicates that they are. Well, my boy, I am rejoiced for your sake. But if you would like to see Annabel and her mother, you have my free permission."

Once more did the animation of pleasure arise upon my countenance; and Mr. Lanover's gaze caught that glowing suffusion as he again turned his looks upon me.

"Alas!" he went on to observe in a very melancholy tone of voice, "I can scarcely offer you a home again, even if you were disposed to accept it; and I dare not any longer cherish the hope that you might become Annabel's husband. For we are poor now, Joseph—very poor indeed! Adversity has overtaken us; and you are no doubt—judging by your appearance—much better off than we are."

"Good heavens, Mr. Lanover! is this possible?" I ejaculated, smitten with indescribable anguish at the thought that my adored Annabel and her excellent mother might be suffering privations.

"So possible, my dear nephew," responded Mr. Lanover, "that it is only too true:"—and averting his countenance, he passed the sleeve of his coat across his eyes as if to wipe away tears. "I have had a hard struggle with the world—sometimes up, sometimes down; and now I am down again—and if it were not that Annabel sits from morning till night over her needle——"

"Poor Annabel!" I murmured, profoundly shocked and afflicted at what I thus heard.

"Yes—it is indeed a sad thing," continued Mr. Lanover, "that such a young and beautiful creature should now be doomed to an existence of drudgery and toil—that she should perhaps pine and fade away——"

"No, no!" I exclaimed wildly, forgetting that this was in the midst of the crowded street: "never! never! It is I who will toil for her! Oh, Mr. Lanover! I have indeed thought often and often of Annabel—I have never ceased to think of her! The friendship I conceived for her at your house, has ripened into love——I worship—I adore her!"

"Ah, my dear Joseph," said the humpback, who appeared to be deeply affected, "how happy am I to receive these assurances from your lips! But no—you shall not come and see Annabel: the spectacle of our present impoverished home would cut you to the quick——"

"Then do you no longer live in Great Russell Street?" I inquired with feverish excitement.

"No: our dwelling was broken up—arrears of rent were due—the landlord seized everything; and now we are reduced to the humblest lodging—a couple of rooms, meanly furnished, and in a poor neighbourhood."

My eyes were almost blinded with my tears as I listened to these words; and forgetting all the terrible past in respect to the humpback's conduct towards me—having only before my eyes the heart-rending present as he had just depicted it to me—I murmured, "Oh, suffer me to accompany you to your abode! suffer me to render what assistance may be in my power!"—and then I experienced a sudden thrill of ineffable joy at the thought of having in my purse the means of proffering most substantial succour.

"You shall come if you will, Joseph," answered Mr. Lanover, seeming to hesitate: "but I think you had better not. My poor wife is on her death-bed—Alas! I am afraid that I have not been altogether as good a husband towards her as I ought—and Annabel will perhaps be ashamed in our altered circumstances to meet you."

"Annabel ashamed?" I cried, "no, no! I am not so complete a stranger to the excellence of her disposition as to entertain that fear. Besides, it is my duty, as it is also in my power, to afford some solace."

"Well then, Joseph, if you persist you shall accompany me. This way:"—and as he spoke, Mr. Lanover crossed the street to the opposite side, I following him close. He ascended three or four steps which led up into a sort of open court, called Westmoreland Buildings; and as he now quickened his pace, he said, "You see, Joseph, it is as I told you—a poor neighbourhood to which we have been reduced. This way! I am sure that Annabel will be overjoyed to see you. It is very kind of you—it touches me deeply—it makes me regret more than ever that there should have been a time when you experienced harsh treatment at my hands. Here—follow me."

We had reached the end of the dingy avenue constituting Westmoreland Buildings—we had turned to the right—then we had turned as abruptly to the left; and another turn, also to the left, took us under the arched entrance of a second court. On the wall under this arch was a slip of a board on which the words "Albion Buildings" were painted; and the first glimpse that I caught of the houses ahead, impressed me with an afflicting idea of their poverty-stricken appearance. I had not the slightest alarm on my own account: all my thoughts were absorbed in the excited but melancholy contemplation of the image of Annabel bending over her work, toiling from morning till night to earn bread for herself and parents. In a few moments Mr. Lanover stopped at a house on the right hand: he knocked at the door—it was opened by an elderly woman, very meanly dressed, and whom I took to be the landlady of the premises.

"This is my nephew," said Mr. Lanover, pausing for a moment to address these words to the woman: "he is a good youth, and is anxious to see his aunt and cousin. Ah! you know, Mrs.

Hartley, how poor Mrs. Lanover has been suffering—and how that sweet daughter of mine has worked!"

"I do indeed, sir," responded the female, taking up the corner of her apron and applying it to her eyes.

"Come, Joseph," said Mr. Lanover: "it is but a poor place to which I am bringing you."

"No matter! no matter!" I exclaimed, somewhat impatiently: for I longed so ardently—Oh! so ardently, to embrace Annabel; and I felt that I *might* embrace her the instant we should meet, after all that her father had been saying to me.

He led the way up a narrow dark staircase: he halted not on the first landing—he ascended to the second: and as I followed him close, I could not help thinking to myself that it must be indeed a frightful change for poor Mrs. Lanover and Annabel to have removed from the comfortable well-furnished house in Great Russell Street, to this dark noisome den, situated in a wretched court and in a fetid atmosphere.

"Walk in, Joseph," said Mr. Lanover, as he threw open a door; and mechanically I hurried on, filled with the burning hope that the next instant I should fold Annabel in my arms.

But scarcely did I cross the threshold, when the vile humpback pushed me forward with such sudden and tremendous violence that I fell headlong; and the door closed behind me with a loud din.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

TERRORS AND DANGERS.

I STARTED up to my feet, struck with the conviction that the foulest treachery had made me its victim: and in a frenzy of mingled rage and terror I rushed to the door. It was fastened on the other side. Vainly I tore at it—vainly too did I dash myself with all my power against it: it remained immoveable. Good heavens, how insensate had been my conduct! how childishly credulous had I proved! To suffer myself to be beguiled by the insidious representations of that villanous humpback—to be moved by his crocodile tears—to have believed that the mournfulness of his tone was sincere, and that when he had seemed affected the emotion was genuine——Oh, idiot—fool—lunatic that I was!

I glanced around the room in which I was thus held captive. It was furnished in a mean and sordid manner: there was a bed in one corner—a small round table in the middle—five or six chairs scattered about—a bason and ewer on a trunk—a piece of ragged carpet on the floor—and a few articles of male apparel, such as boots, a shabby pair of pantaloons, an old waistcoat, a somewhat battered hat, and a dirty shirt, lying here and there. The place wore an appearance neither of cleanliness nor of comfort; and not for an instant dared I indulge in the hope—setting aside Mr. Lanover's conduct in making me his prisoner—that this was really the abode of himself and family. But, Ah! a thought struck me. Though the door was closed against me, and though it yielded not to my desperate efforts to force it open, —there was the window—and I might cry out for succour. I rushed to it:—the room was situated at the back of the house, and this window looked into a yard surrounded on the three other sides by the dead walls of some contiguous buildings. Nevertheless I felt assured that my voice, if raised to the loudest pitch, would be heard in some of these adjacent premises; and with all the excitement of desperation I was about to throw up the window—when the door burst open, and in rushed Mr. Lanover, followed by Thomas Taddy and Bill Blackbeard.

I here pause for a moment in the progress of my narrative, to observe that Taddy—thin and lank as ever—was dressed in a sort of shabby genteel manner. His complexion seemed more sallow than when last I beheld him: his sandy white hair had been suffered to grow longer, and hung in ragged patches over his coat collar: his small sharp piercing gray eyes appeared to twinkle with a fiendish malignity the instant their looks encountered mine. As for Bill Blackbeard—he had, if possible, a more ruffianly aspect than when I caught a glimpse of his countenance in the coach-house at Myrtle Lodge. He had on loose corduroy breeches and gaiters—a shabby cutaway green coat with brass buttons—a waistcoat of considerable length—and a faded blue neckcloth, with white spots—so that he evidently studied to give himself a groom-like air: but the impression which his aspect was best calculated to make, was that of a low kind of hostler, out of place, and in a decayed and dilapidated condition. He had coal black hair and piercing dark eyes: his face was pale, and pitted with the small-pox: he had naturally a strong bristling beard—whence no doubt his nickname was derived; and as it was now of at least a couple of days' growth, it added to the natural ferocity and villany of his looks.

When these three individuals burst in upon me in the manner described, I was seized with the thought that my life was not worth a minute's purchase unless I defended it with all my power and with all my strength. Armed therefore with the courage of desperation, I made a bound to the grate—snatched up a fire-iron in each hand—and crying out at the same time loudly for help, made a rush to pass by my three foes and clear the threshold. But the door was closed in an instant. With the fury of wild beasts did Taddy and Bill Blackbeard spring upon me: each received a desperate blow from the weapons which I wielded—the vigorous reception they thus met only maddened them to fury—the next instant I was disarmed and hurled upon the floor, while Taddy's hand grasped my throat with such violence to prevent me from crying out, that I was nearly strangled, and I must have grown black in the face. The hideous humpback, dropping upon his knees, took his handkerchief and bound it so tightly over my mouth as effectually to choke my utterance; and it was not till this was done that the wretch Taddy withdrew his gripe from my throat.

"Now he is silenced, fast enough!" exclaimed this individual. "Let's away with him."

I struggled desperately, as he and Blackbeard raised me up between them: whereupon the latter dealt me a terrific blow on the side—and with a fearful imprecation, bade me keep quiet, or perhaps

he would give me half-a-dozen inches of cold steel. This frightful menace had not however the effect of rendering me tractable: I was too much excited with the horrible fears which tortured my mind, to surrender up my young life without every possible effort to defend it: for the agonizing conviction was strong within me that Lanover and his accomplices were about to bear me away to some place where they meant to murder me. I therefore struggled with all my might and main: the handkerchief became loosened over my mouth—and I sent forth a terrific cry for assistance. Then the ruffian Blackbeard dealt me with his clenched fist a furious blow on the side of the head, which deprived me of my senses.

When I slowly came back to consciousness—and as the numbness of my hitherto suspended faculties was gradually and gradually yielding to the return of the vital power—I became aware that I was lying on the damp ground, enveloped in utter darkness. My head felt dull and giddy with the effects of the tremendous blow I had received: it seemed as if I were awaking slowly out of a slumber that had been troubled by painful and hideous dreams: but I could not long shut out from my conviction the appalling reality. Where was I? I raised myself to a sitting posture and strained my eyes in the hope of penetrating the darkness which entombed me: but it was black and impervious as that which fell upon Egypt as a plague: it was veritably a darkness that could be felt. The idea—the hideous idea stole into my mind that I was in some subterranean dungeon: and the blood stagnated in my veins at the thought. I stretched out my arms: one of my hands encountered the rough masonry of a wall: I groped about me and ascertained sufficient to convince me that I *was* in an underground cellar. So dark was the place whence it opened,—area, kitchen, or passage, or whatever the locality might be,—that not even the faintest, feeblest glimmering of day—no, not so much as the thinnest thread of light penetrated through key-hole or crevice in the door. But, Ah! the thought smote me that perhaps it was night! Perhaps I had remained stunned and insensible in that place for many long hours. I began to deliberate. No: several circumstances gradually led to the conviction that I had *not* been long there. If I had lain a considerable time on that damp ground, my limbs would have been stiff and aching: whereas the only pains I felt were in the side of my body and on my temple, from the effects of Blackbeard's brutal usage. Again, if I had been there many hours, I should experience a faintness through want of food: but such was not the case. Suddenly I recollected that though I could not see my watch, I might yet feel the exact position of the hands, and thus ascertain the time. But my watch was gone. I felt in my pockets: my purse containing all my money—every farthing I possessed in the world—was likewise gone.

Oh! fool that I was, I thought to myself, to care about the loss of watch and purse, when perhaps it was my life that was in a short time to be taken. For what other purpose could I have been immured in this horrible cellar? Besides, did I not know that Lanover and Taddy had once before purposed to assassinate me?—and doubtless the same motive which *then* influenced them, was influencing them *now*. Oh mysterious and unaccountable motive! How was it possible that the life of so obscure and humble a being as myself, was of such importance as an obstacle in the pathway of any one, that it would be worth while to commit a horrible crime to extinguish it! Ah! and this young life of mine, too, was so precious to me—I had so much to live for——Annabel, beloved Annabel!——was I doomed never to behold thee more?

But it would fill volumes to record the anguished reflections which swept through my mind for the first hour after I came to my senses in that cellar. This very fever of the imagination however exhausted itself at length: the tremendous excitement which was thus sustained for a time, wore itself out—and a certain degree of calmness ensued. I now began to deliberate with myself in a more collected and rational manner. If the intention of Mr. Lanover and his two unscrupulous agents were really to make away with me, why had not the fatal blow been stricken when I was first brought down in a state of unconsciousness to my present place of captivity? wherefore should I have been left to regain my senses, and thus be in a position to offer at least some little resistance to my murderous assailants when the fatal moment should arrive? The longer I thus meditated, the more certain did it appear to me that it was not my life which was now sought—but that I was reserved for some other fate. And if so, what fate? Was it to be an eternal captivity? Ah! if I were to remain in this horrible dungeon, death would soon come to relieve me of my sufferings, and to save my persecutors any farther trouble with regard to me.

The idea that I might now be in a place whence I might possibly never go forth alive, renewed all the horrible anguish of my mind; and I cried out in the loudest, most piercing, penetrating tones for mercy from my persecutors, and for help from whomsoever could afford it. But the horrible conviction soon forced itself upon my mind that the walls of my prison-place beat back the accents of anguish which thrilled from my lips;—and exhausted with my vain exertions, I sank down on the damp ground in the stupor of despair.

Presently I heard a key grating in the lock; and I sprang up in a singular state of wild hope and frantic terror blended and conjoined—a hope that I was about to be set at liberty, and terror that the moment of foul murder was now at hand. As the huge door slowly opened, the feeble light of a candle threw its sickly beams into the place; and Mrs. Hartley, the woman of the house, made her appearance, with Taddy and Bill Blackbeard close behind her. She held the candle in one hand—a plate of bread and cold meat in the other; and she said in an abrupt manner, "There is something for you to eat."

And this was the woman who had ere now affected to wipe her eyes at Mr. Lanover's allusions to his wife and his daughter! The vile hypocrite! Nevertheless I threw myself at her feet and implored her to liberate me: I addressed likewise the most passionate entreaties to the two men, who evidently came as an escort to protect her:—but my prayers were useless. The plate of food and a jug of water were set down upon the ground—the door closed again—the key grated in the lock—

and all was still once more,—all save the convulsing sobs which came up half-suffocating into my throat!

By degrees however I grew comparatively calm again: for I now felt convinced that my life was to be spared—or at least I clung desperately to this hope. The light had shown me that, as I had suspected, I was indeed in a narrow, vaulted, noisome cellar. The quick frenzied look which I had flung around to obtain an idea of the actual state of my prison-place, had moreover revealed to me a grating in one of the side-walls,—no doubt communicating with an adjacent cellar, and affording a passage for the air. Ah! if I could only remove that grating, it would afford an aperture large enough for me to pass myself through into the next place; and if the door of this next place should happen to be unfastened, I might escape. Escape!—there was a wild and frenzied joy in the idea. I felt the grating with my hands: the bars were thick, but covered with rust. I felt them more carefully still: they were firmly set in the solid masonry. I tore at them—I placed both my feet against the wall, and threw myself back while pulling with all my power at those bars—but in vain: I might as well have endeavoured to tear down the masonry itself with my nails. Again I sank exhausted upon the damp earth.

Hours passed on—I grew hungry—but nevertheless could not eat: my stomach loathed the food which had been left me. Again and again did I deliberate upon everything that had taken place, in order to deduce thence, if possible, some clue to what my ultimate fate might be. But all conjectures were vain; and there were moments when my brain seemed to turn in the bewilderment of its distracting thoughts. It however appeared to me certain that all Mr. Lanover's stories of vicissitudes and poverty were but wicked inventions in order to excite my sympathy, and thereby lead me to this house, where he knew that there were agents and opportunities for accomplishing whatsoever purpose he might have in view. Ah! as I recollected how he had turned his looks upon me when he spoke of his daughter Annabel, I felt assured he was sounding me first of all to see whether I thought of her with affection; and on perceiving that I did, he had found it easy to continue in a strain that irresistibly engaged my sympathies. And now I recollected too that he wore a good suit of clothes, and that there was nothing poverty-stricken in his appearance—though these circumstances had escaped me at the time, in the excitement and affliction of my thoughts at the tale he narrated. Therefore I came to the conclusion that this tale of adversity and penury was a mere wicked falsehood; and it was a solace for me,—even in the depth of that horrible place, and amidst the frightful uncertainty into which I was plunged in respect to my own fate,—to entertain the idea that, after all, neither Annabel nor her mother were suffering privations.

Some hours had again elapsed after the visit of Mrs. Hartley and her two escorting ruffians,—when this visit was renewed, in the same manner, with the additional circumstance that the woman now threw into the cellar a couple of blankets, laconically bidding me make myself as warm as I could for the night. I renewed my entreaties that mercy should be shown me—but all in vain. The woman, however, after whispering for a moment with Taddy, offered to leave me the light if I chose; and Bill Blackbeard observed, with a brutal chuckle, that it would serve to scare the rats away. The mention of the hideous danger in which I stood with regard to vermin of that sort, sent the blood cold to my heart; and with grateful avidity I accepted the offer of the candle. The door was closed again: I was once more alone.

I now forced myself to eat a mouthful of bread; and being much exhausted in mind and body, I enveloped myself in the blankets and endeavoured to compose myself to sleep. I calculated that the candle might last about five hours,—as in addition to that which was burning, there happened to be another piece lying in the tray of the candle-stick; and I thought I had better make the most of the time that I possessed a light, to refresh myself with slumber, as I should not dare to close my eyes in the dark after the horrible allusion made by Bill Blackbeard. Physical and mental exhaustion soon wrapped me in a profound repose, which lasted for several hours; for when I awoke, the candle was just flickering in its socket. I hastened to light the remaining piece; and feeling still wearied and able to sleep, lay down again. When I awoke for the second time, that other piece of candle was on the point of extinction; and so I resolved to sleep no more. Nor did I need additional repose: I was recruited in body—but my mind——Ah! that was now again given up to anguished, torturing, bewildering reflections!

After the lapse of a considerable time—at least three hours, as near as I could calculate—Mrs. Hartley made her appearance, this time followed only by Taddy; but he pointed a pistol so significantly over her shoulder that I shrank with a cry of terror into a corner at the extremity of the cellar, where I fell on my knees imploring mercy.

"You silly young fool you!" ejaculated Taddy; "I am not going to do you any harm. This pretty little barker is only just to convince you that if you like to keep your head without a bullet in the middle of it, you will do well to be on your best behaviour."

The woman deposited another supply of food on the ground; and she again offered to leave me the candle which she carried. With a real gratitude did I accept the proposal: for only those who have ever been captive in the dark, can form an idea of how welcome is the companionship of a light. Hour and hours passed on, interrupted only by the renewed visit of the woman with a fresh supply of food and another candle. This time Taddy likewise accompanied her: but he did not appear to think it necessary to display his pistol.

After they were gone, I began to revolve in my head a scheme which, wild as it at first appeared, rapidly assumed the aspect of practicability: for under such desperate circumstances the imagination clutches at the insanest hopes.

"When this woman comes again," I said to myself, "she will no doubt be accompanied by Taddy: for the man Blackbeard seems to think it unnecessary that he should form part of the escort. The first glance will show me, when the door opens, whether Taddy has his pistol or not. If he has not, I will make one tremendous bound forward: the woman will be dashed aside, or per-

haps hurled down—a blow dealt with all my force, will strike Taddy from my path—and then perhaps I may escape!"

This project, desperately mad as it may seem, acquired such consistency in my mind that I resolved to attempt it; and therefore anxiously and eagerly did I await the next sound of the key grating in the lock. Oh, how long, how wearisome were the hours!—methought that whole years were comprised therein! At length the signal expected with so much suspense and so much impatience, fell upon my ear. The candle was still burning: I stood up and measured the distance necessary for taking the contemplated spring. The door opened: the woman appeared, with a light in one hand and a small tray in the other. I glanced over her shoulder to see if Taddy had his pistol: but he was not there at all. In the twinkling of an eye I should have bounded at her,—when she said, "Hush—silence—not a word! I am your friend!"

Ah! this assurance suddenly changed my mind in a moment: those syllables struck upon my ear with the joyousness of promised succour and speedy liberation!

"Hush, I say!" she immediately added: "those men are close at hand—they must not overhear us. My poor young man, I pity you! You see I have done the best I could for you. They wanted me to give you bread and water only: but I insisted on adding meat. They wanted to make you sleep on the cold ground: but I brought you blankets. I gave you the light too—at which they had not the face to grumble. Keep up your spirits! In a couple of hours I will steal down and let you out. It is now eight in the evening: a little after ten I shall be able to manage it."

"Oh!" I murmured, tears of joy trickling down my cheeks, and my entire frame trembling with ecstatic emotions; "how can I ever repay you——"

"Hush—not another word!" interrupted Mrs. Hartley, looking most kindly upon me—so that I suddenly thought she was altogether a different being from what I previously conceived her to be. "Here! I have brought you a glass of wine. Drink it—drink it quick—it will keep up your spirits."

She presented the tray, on which there was a plate of food and a large glass filled with Port wine. I lifted the glass, and poured the contents down my throat. What immediately followed, I can scarcely remember: though methinks I have a dim recollection of the door closing instantaneously, and the woman departing without leaving me either the tray or the candle. But certain it is that I sank down—not in a complete state of inebriation,—but into a profound stupor. There was confusion in my ideas for a few moments; and then consciousness abandoned me.

It presently seemed to me that I was inside some vehicle: for there was in my ears the rumbling of wheels and the tread of horses' hoofs—but all so vague and indistinct that methought it was a dream. Then the idea gradually stole into my mind that I was not alone in that vehicle—but that two persons were on the seat opposite to that on which I lay in this strange state between stupor and a glimmering of consciousness. I remember that I made a desperate effort to raise myself up—that I did succeed in lifting my head somewhat—that it felt heavy as lead and had a terrible aching pain. Methinks too that I caught a glimpse of the lights of street-lamps, as for a moment I opened my eyes: but the next instant they closed again—for the lids were as heavy as if weights were upon them, keeping them down. There was now an interval of complete stupor, unbroken by a single glimmering of the vital sense,—until my next notion was that I was being lifted in the arms of men. Then I suddenly acquired a more perfect gleam of consciousness than I had as yet experienced. I opened my eyes—darkness prevailed at the spot now reached—the wind blew fresh and cold. I was in the arms of two individuals whom I knew to be Taddy and Blackbeard: for the darkness was not so complete as to prevent me from discerning their countenances. But this gleam of consciousness lasted only for a few instants: a third person, whom I saw to be the vile hump-back, suddenly stood by my side—a bottle was applied to my lips—a portion of its contents was forced down my throat—and I at once sank into a stupor again.

When consciousness slowly returned — and, heavens! how slowly and how painfully it did come back,—I gradually awoke to the knowledge of most extraordinary sensations. It appeared as if the place in which I was, and the nature of which I was utterly at a loss to understand, was moving up and down—now with gradual heavings, then with quick pitchings and abrupt tossings. I said to myself that it was my disordered brain which produced these sensations. For some minutes I lay motionless as far as any voluntary movement on my own part was concerned; I had not the energy nor the power to extend an arm nor stretch a limb. I was only half recovering from the stupor into which I had been thrown: my energies were still half dead—and my sensations, instead of being keen and vivid, were dull, heavy, and languid. My powers of perception were therefore so slow that I could not for some time comprehend where I was, nor what these heavings and tossings meant. At last a shock more severe than the former ones, made me stretch forth my arms: and they encountered wood-work within a foot of my countenance. An awful feeling came upon me; and more deliberately still did I feel about me. Yes—planks were close above!—planks on my right, planks on my left—a board at my head, a board at my feet!——Just heaven! was I in my coffin? had I been buried alive?

The thought—half wild, half appalling—sent a thrill of crucifying agony through my frame, but numbed and dismayed my soul. I opened my eyes, which hitherto had remained heavily closed; and a dim light gleamed upon them. It was swinging backward and forward, so that it made my brain swim round as if I had been suddenly plunged into a whirlpool. At first I thought that even this light must be a delusion; and a thousand horrible ideas began sweeping through my mind, about corpse-lights, and gaseous flames which hover around the dead. My soul was still under the influence of complete dismay, though my brain was thus whirling in wildest confusion. Presently subdued groans reached my ears, and sent fresh thrills of horror through my frame. My reasoning powers were however awakening. One by one

was I relieved from the hideous, frightful apprehensions which had taken possession of me: but as I began to comprehend my position, and where I was, those fears were succeeded by others of a more bewildering, if of a less terrific description. I was not buried alive—I was not in my coffin—it was no gaseous illumination from the dead which swung before my eyes—and those were no groans from the depth of a sepulchre which had reached my ears. I was on board a ship—in one of the narrow, low, circumscribed berths of a cabin: a lantern, suspended to the ceiling, swung to the tossings of the ship; and a fellow-passenger, in another berth, was moaning either in terror or in illness. Thus, in some sense my soul experienced an infinite relief: but in another it became a prey to a torturing bewilderment, as I asked myself to what part of the world I was bound—in whose power I was—and to what treatment I was to be subjected?

While I thus lay reflecting, I became aware that the weather was most tempestuous. The wind was sweeping, and howling, and gushing, and moaning—the vessel was pitching and tossing—the waves were dashing over the deck. I could hear the waters mingling their sounds with those of the wind. Then, too, there was the creaking of the timbers—the straining of the ship as if the planks were about to part asunder, or the entire mass break in halves and consign us all to the deep. I longed to question some one,—to ask what ship it was—its size—its capacity to contend against the growing storm—and whither it was bound? I peeped forth from my berth, holding however in such a manner as to prevent myself from being tossed completely out of it; and I was enabled to take a more accurate survey of the cabin than I had yet done. It contained twelve of these berths; and so far as I could judge, most, if not all of them were occupied. The heat of the place was intense; and it had a fetid odour. The floor was strown with garments, which the heaving and the tossing of the vessel had evidently cast pell-mell together: but I was lying in my berth with my clothes on. I lay down again, and continued my reflections. It was evident that I had been thrown into a state of stupor by the wine which the perfidious woman at the house in Albion Buildings had given me; and in that state I had been borne to the wharf or dock, where, as I now remembered, a fresh draught—also a stupifying one—had been poured down my throat; and therefore in a state of unconsciousness was I placed on board this vessel. But I knew not whether minutes or hours had elapsed from the instant I was thus conveyed on board, until that when I regained my senses.

While I was thus thinking to myself, and collecting as well as I could my reminiscences of all that had preceded my forced embarkation, I heard one of the passengers call out to another by name.

"Well, Tomsett, how do you like this?" said the individual who thus spoke.

"Not at all!" was the answer given. "If this is a sample of what we're to expect during a voyage of six or seven months, it's not a very pleasant one. I wish I hadn't took to emigrating—that I do!"

Good heavens, here was indeed a light that had burst in upon me! A voyage of six or seven months!—a voyage to some far, far distant place—a voyage to the Antipodes!

"Where do you think we are now?" inquired another speaker, from a berth under mine: it was also a male voice, and the accents were those of a person suffering much from either illness or terror.

"We must be near the North Foreland," answered another individual. "It's a good two hours and a half since that sailor who came down told us we were at the Nore; and running before the wind like this, we must have got to the Foreland. Besides, that's the reason we're pitching and tossing so. There's always a tremendous sea round the Foreland, when the wind blows like this."

"What do you call the Foreland?" asked another person, evidently not so wise upon the subject as the individual who had been speaking.

"Why, the Foreland," rejoined the latter, "is a jutting point of the Isle of Thanet, on the north-east coast—when you've passed Margate a good bit and are turning round towards Ramsgate. You're then getting into the open sea, so to speak."

"We must have had a quick passage from Blackwall," observed the man who had first of all spoken. "Why, we have come a matter of ninety miles or so. It was ten o'clock when the ship weighed anchor; and it ought now to be seven in the morning—time for getting up."

"Oh, I never shall be able to get up!" moaned another passenger from another berth. "As for breakfast, I couldn't eat a morsel: I've been so dreadfully sick!"

"That's the very reason," rejoined another, "why you ought to take food as soon as you can. But I wonder whether that young fellow who was brought in last of all, has recovered himself yet? He seemed, poor chap, quite overcome."

"Why, you see," said another person, speaking in a low voice, as if he thought it possible I might be awake and overhear what he was saying,—"he had drunk more than his young head could well carry. But it's excusable, you know, when taking leave of one's friends to go to such an outlandish place as New South Wales. His uncle—who by the bye was a queer-looking man—the hump-back, I mean——But I say, youngster! are you awake there?"

Knowing that the question was addressed to me, I was just on the point of answering, when it suddenly occurred to me that if I showed that I was awake, the conversation on this particular topic would doubtless at once cease; and, as the reader may suppose, it had become vitally interesting to me. I accordingly remained silent—but listening with breathless suspense for the renewal of the discourse.

"Well, it's evident the youngster hasn't slept off the fumes of the liquor yet," continued the last speaker. "My heavens! there was a toss the ship gave!"—and for a few moments there was silence in the cabin, broken only by the moans of some of the passengers who were ill. "But as I was observing," the man went on to say, "that uncle of the youngster's seemed greatly concerned about him, and recommended him to our care. So I suppose we must have a look after him—more particularly as the poor lad is slightly

touched in the brain, and has got the fancy in his head that his relations are his mortal enemies."

"Well, but being a little touched," observed another passenger, "don't you think it was rather too bad for his uncle to let him drink himself into a state of complete unconsciousness?"

"Why, I dare say," responded the former speaker, "that the uncle didn't know the glass he gave him would have such an effect. Indeed, he said as much when he brought him on board. Heavens, what a gale! It's blowing great guns now, as the sailors say. And what a stifling heat! Ah! I dare say it's all pleasant enough for the chief cabin passengers; but for us poor devils of emigrants that have to go in the steerage——"

Here the man's speech was cut short by another tremendous lurch which the ship gave; and I was seized with such a wild terror—for I thought we were going to the bottom—that I sprang out of the berth.

"Hallo, youngster! is that you?" ejaculated the same voice that had last been speaking. "So it's startled you up—has it? Well, how do you feel this morning? Slept off the wine, or brandy-and-water—or whatever it was—eh?"

"Yes—thank you," I answered, scarcely knowing what I said, as I clung to the ledge of the berth from which I had just emerged: for the motion of the vessel would have otherwise rendered it impossible for me to keep my feet. "I have a bad headache—but I dare say it will soon pass. I suppose I may go upon deck if I choose?"

"Oh, to be sure you may!" was the response. "And I should think," added the speaker, with a coarse significant laugh, "the fresh air would do you good: for if anything can blow away a headache after a boozing-bout, this wind would."

The heat and stench of the steerage-cabin were intolerable; and I longed to escape thence. It seemed as if I were in my coffin. Moreover, my feelings were in such a perturbed, agitated condition, that I was anxious to speak to the captain—represent to him that I was an unwilling passenger—and insist upon being put ashore. The conversation I had overheard, revealed to me the diabolical arts with which Mr. Lanover had sought to account to my fellow-passengers for the state of stupor in which I had been brought aboard—as well as to prepare them for whatsoever declarations I might make in respect to my presence amongst them. He had evidently made them believe I was tipsy—indeed, in a most helpless and brutalized state of intoxication; that I was not altogether right in my mind—and that I looked upon my relatives as my enemies. But I saw that it was useless to take the trouble of undeceiving those persons upon these several points: they could not assist me: it was to the captain of the ship that I must address myself—and there ought to be no delay in taking this step.

I accordingly ascended the ladder and reached another deck. There the atmosphere, though hot, was less stifling and foul than in the steerage-cabin: but the port-holes were all closed, and the hatchways were covered up. I now saw enough on this deck which I had reached, to convince me that it was a large ship in which I had been embarked. The wind was increasing into a gale: the dashing of the waves upon the deck overhead, was heard with fearful plainness,—the sounds mingling with the rattling of cordage and the quick trampling of the sailors' feet. I heard likewise voices shouting through the stormy air—orders being given in a voice that vibrated upon the sweeping gale, and were responded to with the loud "Aye, aye, sir!" of the mariners. For a few minutes my situation had so much of wild and exciting novelty in it, as actually to absorb some portion of the bitterness of my feelings: and besides, I thought to myself that if I gave the fullest explanations to the captain, he would not dare detain me on board, no matter what might have been the nature of the assurances, representations, and bribes that had emanated from Mr. Lanover. But still, amidst all this whirl of perturbed emotions, excited feelings, and varied reflections, continuously arose the question—wherefore was I thus treated by that detestable humpback? how was it that he was so deeply interested either in taking my life, or in sending me to the nethermost regions of the earth? No possible conjecture could answer these queries.

Availing myself of a moment when the ship was comparatively still, though lying very much on one side, I ascended another ladder; and just at that moment, the hatchway at the head of it was opened to the distance of about a foot and a half.

"Hallo, youngster!" said a sailor, who was about to descend. "You had better not come up here—you won't keep your legs long, I can tell you."

"But I am stifled below," I exclaimed, having to raise my voice to its highest pitch in order that my words might reach the man's ears amidst the din caused by the sweeping of the wind, the rattling of the cordage, and the numerous other sounds which made up the sum of that almost deafening and terrific roar. "Besides, I want to speak to the captain."

"Oh, well—come along then!" quickly rejoined the sailor. "But make up your mind for a good ducking. Here! give us your hand:"—and in a moment he whirled me upon the deck.

A scene that was terrific, but at the same time full of awe-inspiring astoundment, burst upon my view. The sailor made me clutch hold of an iron pin attached to a mast close by which I had emerged,—he instantaneously disappearing down the ladder, and closing the hatchway after him. The ship appeared to be immense—much larger than I had possibly conceived, even when ere now judging it to be of no mean size. The three masts towered high aloft: only a few sails were set—and these were bellying with the wind that swept furiously over the water. And the sea itself—heavens, what a spectacle! To my idea, the phrase of "the waves rolling mountains high," which I had often encountered in books and in newspapers, now seemed to be far from hyperbolic; and those billows were everywhere covered with foam, as if the vessel were labouring in an enormous cauldron the contents of which surged and boiled around. On the right there was land at no very great distance: but on the left and straight ahead no land was to be seen—nothing but the wide open sea—and this sea lashed up into fury by the violence of the wind. The sailors were hurrying about in every direction; and this circumstance at first enhanced my alarm: for me-

thought it was expressive of the most imminent danger, against which they were preparing as best they could.

But as I clung to the foot of the mast—and in a strange state of mingled wonder, awe, terror, and bewilderment, gazed upon all that was passing—I gradually became aware that those sailors looked quite cool and unconcerned; and that they were merely performing their duties with a characteristic alacrity, and not with the air of men who fancied that every moment might be their last. A loud sonorous voice shouted forth some orders; and the cheerful "Aye, aye, sir!" with which the responses were given, as if in chorus, by the half-dozen seamen who at once began springing up the rigging to perform the particular duty just commanded, inspired my soul with confidence. I looked at the point whence those orders had been issued—and beheld a stout, red-faced, good-humoured-looking man, standing on an elevated place called "the poop," and carrying a speaking-trumpet in his hand. Close by, was the wheel—at which two men were working; and every moment the individual with the speaking-trumpet looked towards them to issue some command. I judged that he must be the captain; and now I began to look about for the best means of making my way towards him

It was at the foot of the main-mast that I was clinging to one of the iron pins around which the end of a rope was fastened. The ship was pitching and heaving in such a way that I could not possibly have kept my legs without some support. Every minute, too, a torrent of spray flew over the deck: sometimes a wave dashed completely upon it, striking the ship so as to send the shock vibrating from end to end. The beams creaked—the masts seemed to groan as they bent to the gale—the cordage rattled—the roar of the waves mingled with the varied sounds of the wind: all was calculated to amaze, excite, and bewilder one who gazed upon this scene and heard that din for the first time!

I began to comprehend, after having remained some minutes in my position at the main-mast, that there were certain intervals when the ship was steadier than at others. I watched for one of these; and availing myself of it, rushed from the mast to the bulwark. At the same instant a wave dashed over the deck, and drenched me to the skin. For this however I cared not, as the effect was not a sensation of cold: indeed my whole frame was tingling with a feverish excitement. Clinging to the bulwarks, I passed along until I reached the poop; and in a few moments fixed my grasp upon a rope near where the captain stood.

"You musn't stay here, youngster!" he said. "You had better go below. We shall have rougher weather yet:"—and then he roared out something about taking in another reef of the fore-topsail.

"Aye, aye, sir!" were the cheery sounds sent oscillating through the gale from the lips of the sailors: and in the twinkling of an eye half-a-dozen of them were sitting astride on one of the yards.

"Do pray let me remain here, sir, for a little while!" I said to the captain. "I can't bear being below—and I wish to speak to you."

"Well, well, my lad," he responded, somewhat gruffly; "stay if you like. But take care to hold fast—or you'll get a mischief:"—and then he issued fresh orders, so that for the next two or three minutes his attention was completely diverted from me.

Clinging to the rope which was fastened to a belaying-pin at the foot of the mizen-mast, I surveyed the captain with earnest and anxious attention, in order to gather from his countenance the amount of hope in which I dared indulge that he would yield to my representations and put me ashore. From a distance he had struck me, as I have already said, to be a good-humoured man: but I now saw that the redness and roundness of his face were only indicative of robust and vigorous health, and that there was something stern and severely decisive in his looks. Then, too, the horrible thought occurred to me that most probably the ship would proceed straight on its voyage, and not touch at any English port which lay in its course. Calling my geographical knowledge to my aid, I remembered that when Ramsgate should once be passed, Deal and Dover were the only places that lay near, and that it was by no means likely a delay would ensue at either of those points. I looked towards the land: the ship was making a curve in its course so as to clear the high cliffs whereon stood some building which appeared to be a lighthouse—so that I felt assured this must be the North Foreland of which the emigrant-passengers had spoken in the steerage cabin.

"Captain," I said, availing myself of another moment when he had ceased to issue orders and had his eyes again turned upon me, "you must let me go ashore! I have been brought on board against my will—it was a foul treachery—I was drugged and stupified!" and my voice rose into accents of frenzied appeal, amidst the sweeping fury of the gale and the roaring of the sea.

"Hold your tongue, lad!" exclaimed the Captain; "I have no time to listen to your nonsense now. Your uncle put me up to what you are: but don't give yourself airs on board my ship. You are in my care; and please God we reach Port Jackson—that's in New South Wales, you know—you'll be handed over to your relations there."

"Relations there?" I ejaculated wildly. "I have none! It is all a part of the atrocious conspiracy——"

"Hold fast!" thundered the Captain: and at the instant a wave broke over the poop with such violence that I was thrown down at the foot of the mizen-mast;—but though suffocated, and for a few moments seized with a sensation of drowning, I clung fast—yes, desperately fast—to the belaying-pins.

"Now, youngster," said the Captain, in a stern voice, "you go below directly—or you'll get washed off as sure as you're born. We shall have worse weather presently."

"Aye, aye—that we shall!" observed one of the men at the wheel, both of whom, as well as the captain and myself, had the appearance of half-drowned rats—only that the mariners displayed a total indifference to their drenched condition: whereas I now felt sadly uncomfortable, though not particularly cold.

"Come, do you hear? Be off down to the cabin!" reiterated the captain. "Go along with you at once!"—and then his voice sent his commands pealing and thundering through the speaking-trumpet: for, as the gale was now increasing to a hurricane, more sail was to be taken in.

"No!" I exclaimed, with a resoluteness arising from utter despair. "I will *not* leave this spot! I am an unwilling passenger——"

"And if you were ten thousand times an unwilling passenger," interrupted the captain, stamping his foot with impatience, "you would have to remain on board at least for the present. Why, how do you think I could put you ashore, even if I wished? The ship can't run into port; and as for dropping an anchor till we get into the Downs at least, such a thing can't be done. We shall have to bring to in the Downs: and *then* I can hear what you have got to say."

These words imparted comfort to my soul: for I knew perfectly well that the Downs consisted of a safe anchorage between Deal and the Goodwin Sands—and I comprehended that it was the captain's purpose to make a stay there till the violence of the storm should have abated. He had moreover promised to listen to me; and I clung to the idea that I should be enabled to satisfy him of the villanous treachery of which it had been sought to make me the victim. Unwilling, therefore, to anger him, I availed myself of the first opportunity, when the ship was comparatively steady, to glide from the mast to the bulwarks, with the purpose of regaining the hatchway leading to below. It was however some time before I could make any farther progress: for the fury of the wind increased—the billows grew more mountainous—the ship tossed and pitched more violently—and the waves dashed at shorter intervals than hitherto over the deck. In proportion as the strength of the storm

increased, so did the alacrity of the sailors put forth fresh developments,—while the commands of the captain grew more frequent. But they were uttered with calmness and self-possession, and were obeyed in the same spirit: for there was no unnatural excitement in the rapidity with which they were executed.

The hatchway lay between the poop and the mainmast; and in the course of a few minutes I might have reached it if I had chosen: but I trembled at the thought of going below. I was alarmed at the increasing violence of the tempest; and there appeared to me some chances of safety and escape, in case of the worst, if I remained on deck—whereas inevitable death would await those who were cooped up in the cabins. There was so much bustle prevalent now, that no one seemed to mind me; and making my way therefore to the mainmast, I got before it,—so that the captain could no longer observe me from the point where he stood. There I sat down upon the deck, holding fast with both hands to a rope. I was not ill; but my fears increased—and I experienced all the keenness of a desperate tenacity to life. Images of the past swept through my brain: I had something to live for, persecuted though I had been: and it was my persecutor's daughter for whose sake I thus hoped, and yearned, and craved, and prayed to live!

Never can I forget the awful horrors of the scene, which was rapidly putting forth all its most tremendous effects around me. The dark clouds overhead were moving with as much rapidity as if heaven itself were one vast panorama of gloom and murkiness, laden with the storm: the sea was raging and roaring—and the foam was as white as the wing of the gulls which swept over the billows. The hurricane tore along in wild and terrific gusts: the ship—that immense ship—was tossed about like a cork. Sometimes from the eminence of the waves the land on the right, consisting of chalky cliffs crowned with a dark soil, was plainly visible: then down went the vessel into the trough of the sea, and nothing but the huge hills of water was visible on either side!

In pursuance of the captain's commands, more sail was taken in; and the topgallant-masts were struck. Anon one of the sailors came and insisted that I should go below,—adding, with an oath, that none of the other passengers had been allowed to come on deck, and that the hatchways were battened down. But I besought him to let me remain where I was; and as at the instant his duties required him elsewhere, he left me to myself. I should observe that on that part of the deck which lay between the main and the foremast, there were two boats filled with cattle and sheep; and the poor animals sent forth plaintive sounds, as they were knocked violently against each other by every successive movement of the labouring vessel. There were likewise a number of hen-coops filled with fowls; and I observed that many of those feathered beings were in a dying state,—doubtless half-drowned by the continuous breaking of the billows over them.

Ramsgate had been for some while left on the right hand; and I knew that we were nearing the Downs,—when all of a sudden there was a cry of a leak; and every possible effort was made to rig the pumps with the utmost expedition. To the sailors, who were constantly hurrying past me, I put the horrified question whether there were any danger?—but I could get no answer. Presently however I was sternly commanded once more to get down below: but in the mingled desperation and whirl of my thoughts, it struck me that if I made myself useful, I might be permitted to remain on deck. I accordingly flew to one of the pumps, and helped to work with a spirit and an energy which called forth a few expressions of approval on the part of the mariners. It was in the midst of this self-imposed labour—and when well nigh exhausted—that I experienced a sudden shock which hurled me flat down upon the deck; and the next instant a tremendous wave, breaking over the ship, hurried me along with it in the midst of total darkness. Swift as only thoughts can traverse the mind when scenes like this give them their most fearful impulse, did the anguished, horrible idea strike me that I was being borne away into the deep,—when my hands came in contact with something which I clutched and clung to with a desperate tenacity. All in a moment the darkness in which the billow had engulfed me, yielded to the daylight again: I was on the surface of the water—but, O horror! away from the ship, and clinging to a hen-coop, which was the object that had encountered my hands and which they had so convulsively grasped.

It would be impossible to describe the infinite despair which seized upon my soul—and yet a despair which made me cling to that hen-coop as the last straw of hope which separated me from death. The sea was breaking as if in madness over the ship. I comprehended it all in an instant!—it had struck upon the Goodwin Sands—those frightful quicksands into the dark depths of which myriads of vessels have gone down, and where treasures that would redeem millions of human beings from poverty and give them riches, have been engulfed. Oh! and the countless lives too that have been lost in those sands!——But it was horrible to think on! And there was I, lying across the frail but fortunately buoyant piece of woodwork that was now the only barrier against death!

The waves were hurrying me along with an incalculable speed: the spray beat over me. When in the trough of the billows, the blackness of destruction seemed to be closing hideously in upon me: but when upon the summit of some mountain-wave, I caught a glimpse of the doomed ship over which the furious waters were breaking. One mast was gone: the next time I looked, another had disappeared: the next time, the third no longer met my eye;—and over the ocean methought that the wildest screams of women and the frantic cries of drowning, despairing men, were wafted, high above the din of the tempest, to my ears. It might have been only fancy—but nevertheless it struck me with the conviction of an awful, horrible reality: and though years have passed since then, yet sometimes in the visions of the night do I hear those anguished voices striking upon my brain—and I cannot think that it was only imagination at the time of the shipwreck!

The tide was hurrying me along: I clung to the bars of the hen-coop as only a human being *can* cling when his life depends upon such desperate tenacity. But my strength was failing; it

seemed to me as if life were ebbing away—a numbness was coming upon me—the varied sounds of the storm lost each its peculiar distinctness—and all became jumbled in one confused, bewildering, stunning roar. I recollect that amidst the increasing confusion of my thoughts, there was one image—and one image only—which remained perfect to my mental view; and that was the image of Annabel. But even this was separate as it were from hope: for hope was dead within me—or indeed, I had lost the power of reflecting sufficiently to judge of my exact position. All my faculties were benumbed and dying: one spark of life alone remained—and the light which it shed, reflected the beauteous image of her whom I adored.

Suddenly I was startled as it were from this palsy of the senses, by the sound of a human voice. All in an instant life sprang up within me again; and as I was borne to the summit of a billow, I beheld a boat at a little distance. It had one small sail set; and methought that a man who stood up in the stern, held a kerchief, or something of the sort, as if to assure me that succour was at hand. To be brief, in less than another minute I was safe in that boat; and so strong was the revulsion of feeling within me—so wondrous appeared the transition from ineffable peril to the consciousness of security—that I fainted.

When I came to myself, the boat was alongside of a large two-mast ship; and I was soon on the deck of this vessel. The honest weatherbeaten countenances which bent over me, were full of kindness, and expressive of congratulation at my marvellous escape: but when the voices of those mariners addressed me, it was in a strange tongue which I could not understand. Nevertheless, with my looks did I endeavour to express some portion of the boundless gratitude which filled my soul; and at the same time I breathed a prayer to heaven in thanksgiving for this wondrous deliverance. I was borne down into the captain's cabin: my dripping clothes were stripped off me—clean linen was provided—I was put to bed—and cordials were administered. Utterly worn out in mind and in body, I speedily sank through sheer exhaustion into a profound sleep, which lasted for several hours. I awoke comparatively refreshed: food was given to me; and being enabled to partake of it, I felt stronger.

The captain understood a little English, and could speak it sufficiently, though with broken accents, to make me comprehend him. He gave me to understand that it was a Dutch brig which had thus taken me on board, and that it was bound for Rotterdam. I trembled to inquire relative to the ship in which I had sailed from Blackwall: but my looks doubtless expressed a fearful curiosity—an awful interest—mingled with a profound dread to hear the worst. For the kind-hearted Dutch captain, with tears in his eyes, gave me to understand that it had gone to pieces before his boats could get near enough to render any assistance—that not a soul had been picked up—and that it was not a mere matter to apprehend, but was a positive unmistakable certainty that every being on board the ill-fated vessel had perished,—myself being the only survivor of the catastrophe. Though the unfortunate creatures were all strangers to me, I nevertheless wept the tears of bitterest affliction at this intelligence: and again did I thank heaven with fervour for having spared me.

CHAPTER XL.

SCOTLAND.

I DID not think it necessary to explain to the Dutch captain any details of those circumstances under which I had found myself on board the vessel that was lost. The reader is well aware that I had particular motives for sparing Mr. Lanover as much as possible, no matter how bitter and rancorous his persecution against me might be: for I was willing to endure any martyrdom, and able to stifle any feelings of resentment, for the sake of Annabel. I therefore merely gave the captain to understand that I was an emigrant on board that ship; and that now my most anxious wish was to get back to England with the least possible delay. He of course supposed that I had lost everything which I might have had on board with me; and I did not choose to confess that I was really ignorant whether I had anything on board to lose. But still I felt tolerably well assured that Mr. Lanover had not failed to supply a sea-chest, with the requisite outfit, in order to give a colour to the pretences under which he had put me on board and placed me under the lost captain's care. The Dutch skipper, who was a warm-hearted man, bade me keep up my spirits; for that on arriving at Rotterdam, something should be done for me to enable me to get to England;—and again did I thank him for his goodness towards me.

To be brief, Rotterdam was reached in due time, and without any farther adventure deserving particular notice. On our arrival, the captain took me to his own home, where I had the pleasure of witnessing the joyous meeting between himself and his family, consisting of a buxom wife and four or five children, who were all delighted at his return: for he had been absent three years, his ship having been on a voyage to Java. He insisted that I should remain with him a few days, so as thoroughly to recruit my strength: I could not possibly refuse the generous invitation; and I was treated with the utmost hospitality and kindness. After the captain had got over the press of business and all the details of the bustle attendant upon his arrival in port, he had some little leisure to question me more closely than he had hitherto done, in respect to my circumstances, wishes, and prospects. I then explained to him that I had friends in Scotland, whom I was desirous of joining, and with whom I should find a home: for I was of course resolved to go to my situation at Inch Methglin. The captain, upon hearing that Scotland and not England was in reality my destination, at once informed me that he had a friend commanding a trading-vessel which was about to sail for Dundee, and on board of which he could procure me a free passage, and welcome. I joyfully accepted the proposition; and the captain not merely bought me everything requisite in the shape of changes of raiment, but even insisted that

I should take as much money as would bear me comfortably to my destination after my arrival at Dundee. I assented, on condition that I should be suffered to regard it merely as a loan; and the captain, shaking me warmly by the hand, bade me treat the affair just as I thought fit.

Before I left Rotterdam, I wrote a letter to the landlord of the *Cross Keys* in Gracechurch Street, London, simply requesting that my box might be forwarded by the most suitable means of conveyance to Mr. Vennachar's, of Inch Methglin, Perthshire; and that if he would enclose thither the amount of the little bill in which I was indebted to him, it should be remitted with prompt punctuality. I gave no explanations to account for my sudden disappearance from the hotel: I did not choose to invent a falsehood—and I could not enter into any details of the real truth. Having taken a kind and grateful leave of the captain and his family, I embarked on board the Dutch schooner; and after a pleasant voyage, reached Dundee. I was treated with the utmost kindness on board that schooner, the captain of which would not consent to receive a single farthing either for my passage or for my board during the transit. It was about six o'clock in the evening when I reached Dundee; and there was no conveyance to take me to Perth until the following morning. I accordingly took up my temporary quarters at the nearest tavern to the port; and as by the time I finished the refreshments I ordered, it was too dark to see anything of the town, I went to bed at an early hour.

Not, however, being immediately able to sleep, I reflected upon all that had happened to me within the last few days. These few days had developed some of the most startling episodes in my eventful history. I had been the inmate of a dungeon—I had been treacherously placed on board an emigrant-vessel—I had suffered shipwreck—my life had been preserved almost by a miracle; and as a pleasing set-off against such fearful calamities, I had experienced the utmost hospitality and kindness from strangers. I was now in Scotland; and in the course of the following day should, if no fresh misfortune intervened, be in the situation which the Earl of Mandeville had procured for me. The longer I thought of Lanover's conduct, the less was I enabled to form a conjecture as to the motives of his bitter and relentless persecution against me. I asked myself a thousand times, whether he could really be my uncle—and whether he had some interest in getting rid of me, so as to enjoy any property which might legally and rightfully belong to me? But then I reflected that this was scarcely possible: for he had only to keep me in a state of continued ignorance in respect to the existence of such property, in order to continue in its enjoyment. But if he were not my uncle—if he were not even my guardian—and if there were no such property involved in the matter, what earthly reason could he have for his conduct? to what other persons in the world was my existence in life or my presence in England an obstacle or a stumbling-block? The reader can well understand how bewildered I must have been as all these reflections swept through my mind.

But now, as my attention fixed itself more than it had as yet done since the shipwreck, upon my own peculiar circumstances, it occurred to me that the very fact of that shipwreck might serve me materially. Mr. Lanover would of course hear of it: the report would be that not a single soul was saved to tell the tale: he would think me dead, and I should be spared any farther molestation at his hands—unless indeed chance should reveal to his knowledge that I was still in the land of the living. But, Ah! a hideous, ghastly thought now flashed to my mind. Annabel might also hear that I was no more: she might grieve for me for a time—a holy resignation would supervene—her soul would possibly recover its natural tone—and fancying that I had ceased to exist, she might listen to the overtures of another suitor for her hand! These thoughts filled me with despair, as I saw the utter impossibility of making her acquainted with the circumstances of my marvellous rescue. But as I grew calmer, I reflected that Mr. Lanover was by no means likely to make any mention of my name at all, in the hearing of his wife and daughter. The longer I meditated on this point, the deeper grew my conviction that he would preserve a strict silence, for fear of affording the slightest clue to the discovery of the fact that he had been instrumental in placing me on board that ill-fated ship. He would content himself with the belief that I had gone down to a watery grave along with the other victims of the tremendous disaster; and whatever his purposes in getting rid of me might be, he would hug the idea that accident had fully served them. With these thoughts I tranquillized myself to a certain extent: but still there remained in the depth of my soul the bitter reflection that with Mr. Lanover as my mortal foe—should he come to learn that I was still alive—my prospect of ever being united to Annabel was, if possible, more than ever remote.

Sleep at length stole upon me in the midst of my reflections; and I slumbered on till morning. Having finished my breakfast, I took my seat in the vehicle which was to convey me to Perth,—where I arrived at about noon. The coach stopped at an office whence other vehicles started for different parts; and entering the place, I addressed myself to a book-keeper, inquiring how far it was to Inch Methglin? and how soon a conveyance would be leaving for that point?

"Inch Methglin," was the response, "is about thirty-five miles—English measure—from Perth. There is only one conveyance every day, that goes near it: and it starts at eleven in the forenoon. You are therefore too late."

"Too late!" I exclaimed, in a tone of vexation: for I felt that I had already been sufficiently delayed in presenting myself to Mr. Vennachar. "Then can I book a place for to-morrow?"

"No," rejoined the clerk: "for the day after, if you like—but every place for to-morrow is taken. I do believe," he added, turning to a comrade behind the desk, "that two conveyances would pay on that road."

"And I wish there were two," said a voice, speaking near me, and in a somewhat grumbling tone: "for then one would stand a better chance of getting on without these stoppages."

I looked in the direction whence the voice came—and perceived a short, stout gentleman, of middle age—with a round, red, good-natured face, and

a brown wig. He had the air of a person who was fond of good living and had a great idea of personal comfort; and though he spoke in that half-surly voice, it seemed impossible, to judge by his looks, that he could be really ill-tempered or savage.

"And so you want to go to Inch Methglin, young gentleman?" he said to me. "Well, I am as awkwardly situated as you are: for I am anxious to go a part of the same road, and therefore by the same conveyance. But it will never do for me to wait till the day after to-morrow!"

"Mr. Duncansby," said the clerk, addressing himself to this gentleman, whom he appeared to know well, "you are aware I would go a step out of my way to suit your convenience—a gentleman of your standing—a scrivener and writer to the signet, and all that——"

"Well, well," observed Mr. Duncansby, with a good-humoured laugh, "never mind all the titles and distinctions: they don't seem to be of much avail to further one upon his road. As for staying here, kicking my heels and drinking whisky in Perth until the day after to-morrow, it is out of the question. It is but a flying visit I have to make to Carrondale; and I can't afford to dawdle on the way."

"Perhaps you and this young gentleman might club together," suggested the clerk, "for a post-chaise; and we will put you on one as cheap as we can manage it."

"A capital hint!" exclaimed Mr. Duncansby, rubbing his hands; and his good-humoured countenance wrinkled in its fatness as it expanded into a smile. "What say you, young gentleman? Recollect, you would spend more in staying at a tavern in Perth till the day after to-morrow, than you would in your share of the cost of a chaise. I am not going so far as you by a dozen miles or so: but I don't mind saying that I will be the half of the expense."

A very few moments' reflection was sufficient to convince me that the proposition was an eligible one, not merely on the score of speed in arriving at my destination, but also on that of economy: and I accordingly gave my assent. I had however a great mind to drop a hint to Mr. Duncansby—whom I had learnt to be a lawyer and a man of some consequence, from all that the clerk had said—that I was only a humble menial, going to a situation: for he addressed me as a young gentleman, and I feared lest he might be offended if he should subsequently discover that, in order to be his travelling-companion, I had allowed him to remain in ignorance of my real position. But then I reflected that there was little chance we should ever meet again, when once we separated; and so I concluded that it was not worth while to incur the risk of upsetting the arrangements by any such disclosure A post-chaise was soon in readiness; and in a short time I found myself seated side by side with Mr. Duncansby in the vehicle.

I have already said he was a good-natured man: I speedily discovered that he was a talkative one; and that he had far more inclination to give free scope to his own garrulous propensities, than to put inquisitive questions to me. He was evidently well acquainted with all the district through which we had to travel; and for the first few miles he named every gentleman's seat which appeared within view, giving me the birth, parentage, and personal history of their respective occupants. There was however no ill-nature nor love of scandal-bearing in his descriptions—but a jovial, honest, good-humoured way of telling his stories, which he interspersed with anecdotes of his own experiences in life, and with a few jests which were of so harmless a character that for the life of me I could not see the point of them, but which nevertheless elicited the heartiest peals of laughter from his own lips. Presently he drew forth a small case-bottle, which he handed to me,—intimating that it contained brandy-and-water, but so weak that a child might drink it. I declined the proffered refreshment: whereupon he could not avoid bestowing a look of approval upon me; and then he took a long draught, giving a deep-drawn sigh of pleasure as he consigned the bottle back again to his pocket.

"And so you are going to Inch Methglin, are you?" he resumed. "Have you ever been there before? No, never? Well, you will be quite delighted: it is one of the most charming spots in the Highlands. I know almost everybody of any consequence in these districts: for, you see, I act as scrivener to most of the landed gentry: but it does just happen that I am not acquainted with Mr. Vennachar——or, I beg his pardon, the Chief of Inch Methglin, as he styles himself, and as everybody about him must style him, under pain of severest displeasure."

"Is he such a very great man?" I inquired.

"God bless you, young gentleman!" exclaimed Mr. Duncansby, "he is the chief of a clan. Have you never been in Scotland before? No, never? Well, you musn't go running away with the idea that the chief of a clan means the general of a Highland regiment, or a grim warrior surrounded by hordes of kilted and tartaned mountaineers. Nothing of the sort. Those days are gone by. A clan now consists of all the relations, even to the fortieth or fiftieth cousin, who can possibly be included within the family circle."

"Good heavens!" I exclaimed in astonishment: "do all these relations live with Mr. Vennachar?"

"With the Chief of Inch Methglin, you mean," rejoined Duncansby. "Recollect, and speak of Mr. Vennachar in this way—or you will give offence. A word to the wise, you know, is not thrown away. Or you may call him Inch Methglin, for brevity's sake. Indeed, you will never hear the name of Vennachar mentioned at all—or very rarely. It will be 'Inch Methglin says this;' or 'Inch Methglin does that;' or 'Inch Methglin commands so-and-so.' And, by the bye, when Inch Methglin *does* command anything, he will be obeyed, I can promise you that. I know him well by repute, and also by sight—but not to speak to. However, in answer to the question you put, I must inform you that you have as yet no idea of what a clan is. It is something more nominal than otherwise—but yet it does exist as a fact; and I will presently tell you how. As for all the relations living at Inch Methglin, there is nothing of the sort. A good many of them inhabit houses, more or less large, in the neighbourhood; and they themselves are more or less well off—some few however being poor, but still religiously included in the clan. When there is a great feasting at Inch

Methglin, then all the clan assembles: or when there's a wedding, the clan meets to rejoice—and when there's a death, the clan assembles to mourn. Bridals and funerals have immense processions; and there is the clan again. God bless you! there is not a member of the clan but is as proud of the Chief and as jealous of his honour as he himself can possibly be."

"Is he a haughty, stern, overbearing man?" I inquired, rendered somewhat uneasy by this description of the great personage into whose service I was about to enter.

"Haughty he is—but only with a certain degree of haughtiness," responded Duncansby;—"the pride of chieftainship, of wealth, and of the great consideration which he enjoys. But stern and overbearing, in the positive acceptance of those terms, he is not. He has the repute of being a warm-hearted generous man, whose good actions far outweigh his evil ones—if there be any of the latter at all. Indeed, on this last-named point there is nothing I know of to his disparagement—unless it be the violence of the hatred cherished by him against a rival clan. But this rather belongs to times past."

"Then the feud is doubtless made up?" I observed, anxious to learn as much as I could gather relative to Mr. Vennachar's character.

"Not so," rejoined Mr. Duncansby. "The animosity has been traditionary: it commenced in far back ages, and lost nothing of its rancour by this transmission from generation to generation. Scotch feuds, young gentleman, are of this character; and no feud was ever more bitter—not even that of the Macdonalds of Glencoe and the Campbells of Argyle—than the one between Inch Methglin and Carrondale."

"I think, sir," I remarked, "that I heard you mention the name of Carrondale just now, at the coach-office?"

"Yes: the village which gives its name to the estate—or to which the estate gave its name—for I am sure I cannot tell you which, though heaven knows I have pored often and long enough over the mouldering archives and dusty parchments connected with the property——But, as I was saying, the village of Carrondale is my destination. You must know, young gentleman, that I am a scrivener and writer to the signet—or what you would term in your native country, a lawyer and solicitor. Well, I have been attorney to the Carrondale estate—as my father was before me, and my grandfather before him; and that perhaps is one of the reasons why I do not know Mr. Vennachar of Inch Methglin."

"What! is it possible," I exclaimed, again somewhat disgusted—or rather, alarmed at the character of my new master, "that he carries his animosity against the Carrondale clan so far as to include within its scope whomsoever——But, Ah!" I ejaculated, as a thought struck me, "perhaps you yourself are a member of the Carrondales?"

"Indeed, but I am not," responded Mr. Duncansby. "I am a Lowlander, and have no clanship adhesion at all. The truth is, young gentleman, the Carrondale clan may be said to have ceased to exist: for the estates are all within the strong gripe of the law, and the Chief is nowhere to be found. This has been the case for some years; and thus is it that the extinction of the clan, so to speak, has removed the cause of Inch Methglin's animosity, there being nothing left to entertain any animosity against. It is an old story, and a frequent one with these Highland chiefs. The late Sir Alexander Carrondale died some twenty years ago, leaving his son—an only child—the present Sir Alexander, a beggar, or nearly so—at least, dependent upon a few friends who did their best for him."

"Then you *do* know, sir," I observed, "that the unfortunate heir to the late baronet is alive?—for you speak of him as the *present* Sir Alexander Carrondale, though you just now remarked that he is not to be found."

"Indeed, you are uncommonly sharp, young gentleman!" ejaculated Mr. Duncansby, with a good-humoured chuckle. "Perhaps you are articled to an attorney? No! Well, you ought to be; for you have caught up a lawyer who flatters himself that he is as shrewd as here and there one. Come, I don't mind telling you—since I have gone so far, and you are so sharp—that the present Sir Alexander Carrondale *is* alive; and what's more, I know where he is. But I am the only man in the universe, besides himself, who has this knowledge. I mustn't say any more. He has his own good reasons for being abroad in the world under another name. Pride, for instance—true Highland pride—which will not allow him to bear the family name and distinction with his beggared fortunes!"

"How sad," I observed, "to reflect that the extravagances of a father have perhaps ruined a son."

"It is just that," responded Mr. Duncansby; "though the grandfather may have helped to do it—and perhaps the great-grandfather commenced the work of ruin. But we are still fighting a hard battle in the law-courts: it has been going on for nearly twenty years——"

"And is perhaps interminable?" I remarked.

"Well, not quite," returned Mr. Duncansby. "The fact is, I maintain, on behalf of the present Sir Alexander, that the estates were so strictly entailed that his father and grandfather had no right to do what they did do—namely, give certain powers to the mortgagees who advanced enormous sums of money upon the property. When the late Baronet died, these mortagees all pounced upon the estates: whereupon we went to law. Now do you understand? I am endeavouring to get back the estates for the rightful heir; while the mortgagees are defending their claims. The matter has been before the courts twenty times in as many years: but no decision has yet been given. It is to come on again this year; and perhaps judgment will at last be rendered."

"And on which side do you think the decision will be given?" I inquired—immediately adding, "if the question be not impertinent?"

"Why, young gentleman," exclaimed Mr. Duncansby, with a laugh, "you are not so sharp after all as I took you to be. If I did not hope I was playing a game which had at least equal chances in my favour, I should not persevere in it. All the costs—and they are not a trifle—are as yet out of my pocket; and it would be a grievous loss of money in the long run if I were to fail. So you see, I live on in hope, both for myself and Sir Alexander Carrondale."

And it was doubtless to cheer his spirits anew and sustain this hope, that the worthy writer to the signet drew forth his case-bottle once more and took a long draught, winding it up with another sigh of pleasure.

"But if," I remarked, considerably interested in the turn which the conversation had taken, and the romantic family incidents which it developed, —"if your side should be successful, the mortgagees, or persons who lent the money, will lose everything?"

"Not so," rejoined Mr. Duncansby. "The present Sir Alexander Carrondale is a gentleman of the highest honour and most scrupulous integrity; and God forbid that I should counsel him to follow any other dictates than those which receive their impulse from such feelings. He wishes the mortgagees to have their due—and so do I: but *only* their due. There are wheels within wheels. In the first place, the money-lenders took the most rascally advantage—the term is strong, but it is merited—of the late Sir Alexander's necessities, and forced him to accept loans on the most usurious terms. Indeed, the terms were fabulously vile,—three or four hundred per cent. being in some instances exacted. Sir Alexander was a man who had not the moral courage to stop short at a particular point—but went recklessly on, raising money how he could, in order, as he thought, to keep up appearances. The misfortune was, young gentleman, that in these matters he never consulted me; and I did not know the worst until it was too late to stop the tide of ruin which set in portentously overwhelming. Well then, you will agree with me that if these scoundrels of usurers get back their capital with a reasonable rate of interest, they will be no real losers, and the present Sir Alexander Carrondale will have done them no injury."

"Certainly!" I exclaimed: "you have so far interested me in this peculiar case, that I should be sorry to learn that the usurers triumphed in the long run."

"It is just that," observed Mr. Duncansby. "Well, in the second place, as the estates were at once thrown into the law-courts, a receiver was appointed; and all the rents have been duly collected by him for nearly twenty years. The accumulation is immense: but still, allowing for the depreciation of the property without a supervising head, this mass of money would only just pay the legitimate and proper demands of the usurers, together with the law-costs. So you see that if Sir Alexander can get back his own, he will have his estates free of all incumbrance—but nothing more. That is however a great thing, and would yield him at once some eight or ten thousand a year—a revenue which in the course of time might be easily doubled."

"But why," I asked, in astonishment, "do not the mortgagees consent to take the money and surrender up the estates, since they might be paid in full?"

"Yes—in full of their legitimate demands," interrupted Mr. Duncansby,—"but not of what they usuriously claim. Why don't they do so and so? Ah! it is very easy to ask. But why do men go to law? and why do they persevere in law for years and years at a ruinous cost? My dear young gentleman, if it were not for the avarice of human nature, the business of us lawyers would be but a bad one. These fellows hope that they will be enabled to grasp both money and estates; and, in good sooth, it is a stake worth playing for. I don't know—speaking as a lawyer—that they are badly advised on the other side: but this of course is putting the morality of the thing out of the question—and I am sorry to say that law and morality do not always go arm-in-arm together. Ah! now while I think of it, we have been for the last half-hour upon the soil of Carrondale. We are traversing the estate now. Far as the eye can reach all around, these are the lands of Carrondale. But only fancy what an enterprising, spirited, intelligent landlord might do! All those glens, where you see miserable shielings at distant intervals, might be far more closely interspersed with smiling cottages: those wastes, so thinly peopled, might be far more thickly populated. Those mountains which frown in heather, might be reclaimed and covered with verdure. Behold this dreary moor on which we are now entering: it is a waste—why should it not be covered with plantations? Look around! Where are the smiling villages that ought to meet the eye? where the neat rural church? where the school-house in the vicinage? Nothing of all these! The village of Carrondale itself, which will shortly now be reached, is merely an assemblage of beggarly huts and dilapidated cabins—the inhabitants steeped to the lips in poverty—the children running about bare-legged and in rags. Such are the fatal consequences of a princely estate—as this once was, and might become again—being thrown into the law-courts. Ah! young gentleman, it is true that I may profit by the litigation: but the long interval of havoc and ruin which I have witnessed cuts me to the very soul!"

The lawyer had grown eloquent in the course of his speech; and he now exhibited so much deep and generous feeling that I experienced a great admiration for his character. Seldom, if ever before, had I met any one who in the course of a brief couple of hours had developed, though quite unconsciously and unostentatiously, so many kindly traits as Mr. Duncansby; and I thought to myself that if he might be taken as a true type of the Scotch character, it must certainly be a most estimable one.

There was now a short pause—the first which the worthy lawyer had suffered to take place since we started from Perth: for it was not even filled up with a recurrence to the brandy-flask. An expression of grave melancholy was upon his honest countenance; and he reflected deeply. But all of a sudden his looks brightened up, as he said, "Well, let us hope that, after all, this estate may be improved—and *that* too in the hands of its rightful owner. Here I must leave you:"—and as he spoke, the chaise drew up to the door of a little wretched-looking public-house, in the midst of a straggling hamlet of an appearance as miserable as he had described it: for this was the village of Carrondale.

"In bidding you good bye, sir," I observed, "permit me to thank you for the courtesy—and I may say the confidence with which you have treated me——"

"God bless you, young gentleman!" interrupted

Mr. Duncansby, shaking me very warmly by the hand: "if I hadn't seen something good, and honest, and straightforward in your countenance, I should not have chatted to you as I have done. But look yonder!" he went on to say, lowering his voice to a mysterious whisper—at the same time pointing to an eminence about a mile from the village, and on the summit of which a portion of a building was visible, the remainder being hidden by a grove of embowering trees, the loftiest and the finest (so far as I could judge from that distance) which I had as yet seen on the vast estate of Carrondale. "That is the family mansion, going to rack and ruin along with all the rest," continued Mr. Duncansby. "Instead of being crowded with guests and domestics, it is occupied now only by an aged couple, who have the care of it—such care as two pair of hands can bestow in a mansion vast enough to give employment to fifty! Those rascals of usurers wanted to get a decree to cut down that splendid timber: but I beat them in that, young gentleman—I beat them in that!" —and the worthy lawyer chuckled with infinite satisfaction.

"Let us hope therefore," I answered, "that the victory you achieved in this instance, may be taken as a favourable omen for the issue of the conflict of litigation."

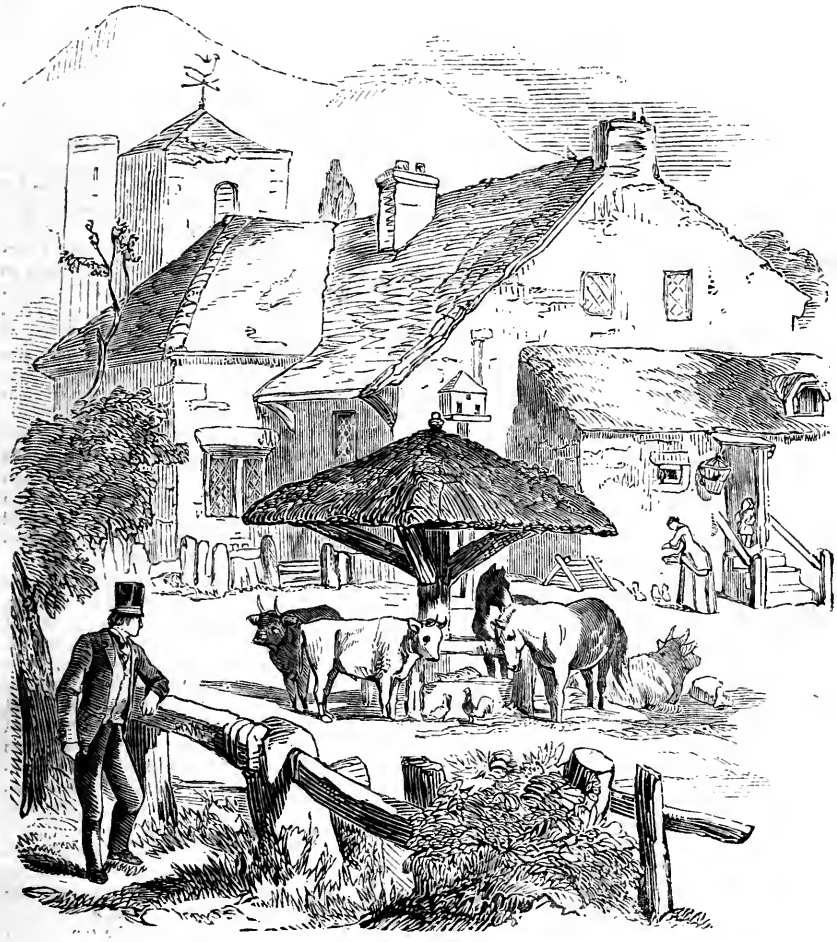
"Well thought of, young gentleman!" ejaculated Mr. Duncansby, again shaking my hand warmly. "By the bye, if you will halt here and take such pot-luck with me as the *Carrondale Arms* can afford, you are heartily welcome. No! you are in haste to get on? Well, if you chance to visit Edinburgh, just take the trouble to inquire for David Duncansby, writer to the signet, and I shall be glad to see you."

Another warm shake of the hand: and while the horses were being changed, Mr. Duncansby spoke aside to the off-going postilion and the one who was succeeding him. His purse too was drawn out; and it was tolerably evident that both the men had good reason to be satisfied with the lawyer's bounty: for they touched their hats and bowed in a manner indicative that such was the fact. He came up to the window of the chaise again; and said hurriedly, "You need not trouble yourself, young gentleman, about any costs for this vehicle. May be I have taken a great liberty: but having my purse in hand, I thought that one payment would save the bother of halving expenses and making two separate disbursements: so that you are not to be offended. And now good bye."

He did not wait for any remonstrance to which I might have given utterance—but disappeared inside the little public-house; and in a few moments the chaise continued its way. It had not proceeded many more miles, when I began to observe an increasing improvement in the aspect of the country through which I was now passing. There was less of heather and more of verdure upon the mountains: neat-looking cottages stood upon grassy knolls and by the side of gushing streamlets: numerous flocks and herds, tended by happy-looking shepherds, gave an air of life to the fern-clad glens: the tender hues of green upon nature's bosom were no longer confined to small patches scattered here and there, but extended over a considerable space, affording a pleasing relief to the rich monotony of colour presented by the glowing heather. During a temporary halt at a public-house in a pretty little village, I inquired whose estate we were now threading; and I learnt that I was upon the domain of Inch Methglin.

The chaise proceeded; and in due course drew near to my destination. Let the reader picture to himself a large loch, or lake, about two miles broad—but the length of which was not discernible within my range of view,—the still blue waters reflecting, as in a mirror, the varied scenery which skirted the shores, and in which the sublime and beautiful, the grand and the picturesque, were admirably blended. The gray rocks and the verdant meadows—the thick copsewood and the darker fir-groves—all interspersed with little hamlets, or isolated dwellings—a church-tower rearing its ivy-crowned head in one spot, a comfortable farm-homestead appearing in another—and, as the principal feature of the scene, a stately-looking castellated mansion on an eminence in the very midst of the lake itself—let the reader picture to himself all this, and he may form some idea of the first impression which the approach to Inch Methglin made upon my mind. But I must go still farther into particulars. I have said that the lake was about two miles broad at the widest part whence I now beheld it: I must add that from the opposite shore, a peninsula—of almost a circular form, and joined to the shore itself by a narrow neck, or isthmus—jutted more than half-way across the lake: so that between the extremity of this peninsula and the shore on which the chaise halted, there was scarcely a distance of three quarters of a mile. The diameter of the peninsula itself might be about a mile; the isthmus consequently was a quarter of a mile in length. Upon an eminence in the middle of the peninsula,—or the Inch, as it was called, and which gave part of its name to the dwelling—stood the castellated mansion itself. Built partly of brick and partly of stone, the immense edifice evidently belonged to several distinct ages, and displayed as many different styles of architecture. It is true that little care had been taken, in the work of reparations or additions, at various times made, to harmonize the whole: but as I was by no means inclined, even if I had sufficient taste in the matter, to be hypercritical,—the effect of the vast structure, with its main building—its wings—a gloomy-looking tower here, and a range of modern drawing-room windows there—a deep-frowning gateway in one place, and a light elegant portico with a flight of steps in another—huge gables surmounting one portion, battlements crowning another, and a flat, corniced roof, such as you might see in a London West End mansion, finishing off a third,—the effect of all this, I say, was at once grand, striking, and pleasing to my view.

The chaise had halted, as I have observed, on the shore of the lake, in the immediate vicinage of a neat little house looking like the porter's lodge on an English estate. A small jetty projected into the water; and to this jetty five or six boats of different sizes were moored. A decently dressed, well-fed, happy-looking, athletic man came forth from the house; and was about to ask me some question, when he stopped short and appeared to hesitate. I immediately comprehended what was passing in his mind: he had evidently been instructed to look out for the new servant



who was expected: but my appearance (for I was well dressed, albeit in a suit made by a Rotterdam tailor) seemed to forbid the idea in the ferryman's fancy that I *could* be the one who was thus awaited. I therefore lost no time in stating who I was: and he gave me a civil welcome. I endeavoured to force upon the postilion such a gratuity as I thought he deserved: but he vowed that he could not take a single baubee —for that Mr. Duncansby had not only paid him well, but had threatened to visit him with his future displeasure if he received anything at my hands. He thanked me all the same; and slashing his horses, drove towards the village of Methglin—a sweet picturesque little place at about a quarter of a mile distant, on the same shore of the lake as that where I was standing.

The ferryman—a dependant of Mr. Vennachar's, just as a gate-porter at the entrance of an English estate is to the owner thereof,—loosened the smallest of the boats, put my trunk into it, and when I was seated therein, began to row me across to the peninsula. It was a lovely afternoon in the middle of March—or rather verging towards evening, that I thus found myself for the first time upon a Highland loch. The sun was still shining bright over the western hills; and but a few clouds cast their broad shadows on the sides of the mountains, or were reproduced in fantastic shapes in the depths of the clear water. The air had nothing of that bleakness which I had expected to experience in the Highlands at this still somewhat early season of the year; but it was fraught with a bracing, healthy freshness. As the boat drew nearer to the shore of the Inch—as I shall henceforth call the peninsula—the spacious building on the summit stood out in still grander and bolder relief against the blue sky. The trees were just beginning to put forth their verdure in some parts —but in others they yet retained their wintry ap-

pearance: yet was there nothing cheerless in the assemblage of their skeleton boughs; while the numbers of evergreens, amassed or interspersed in every direction, and the large sloping grass-plat in front of the edifice, together with the green surface of the orchard-grounds, afforded a sufficiency of verdure to render the scene most agreeable to the eye. The boat touched at another jetty, exactly facing the one where I had embarked: and here there was another picturesque little house, precisely resembling that on the opposite side. At least a dozen boats were moored beneath wooden coverings supported on piles rising out of the water; and several of these vessels were stately barges, evidently to be rowed each by at least a dozen persons. I landed at this jetty; and with my box on my shoulder, bent my way to the mansion,—the front entrance of which was something more than a quarter of a mile from the ferry-house where I had just debarked.

CHAPTER XLI.

INCH METHGLIN.

The front door under the modern-looking portico, was shut; and I did not like to make my first summons there. I accordingly passed on in search of the way round to the domestics' offices. In a few minutes I reached the Gothic gateway already alluded to; and a wicket in one of the two massive folding-doors, stood open. A porter in a handsome livery, at once came out, and asked me if I were the young man who was expected. On receiving an affirmative response, he kindly bade me welcome; and conducted me into a vast and lofty hall, decorated with countless emblems and trophies of warfare and of the chase. Banners and shields—claymores and targets—broadswords and branching antlers—the heads of stags and of boars—dirks and sporrans, were everywhere suspended to the walls. A fine-looking man, at least six feet two inches in height—dressed in the full Highland costume, with a perfect cloud of black plumage surmounting his bonnet, and floating over on his left shoulder—was seated on a bench, doing something to a set of bagpipes; and this individual I presently learnt to be the Chief's piper.

The porter paused for a few moments in the midst of the hall—glanced slowly around in solemn admiration of the trophies gathered there—and then bent his eyes upon me, with the evident purpose of ascertaining what effect the spectacle produced upon my mind. I made some observation of a flattering nature: the porter smiled in a half dignified, half kind manner: he evidently identified himself to a certain extent with the pride of the family to whose household he belonged—and he was therefore pleased at the idea that I was duly impressed with all that was before my eyes. He led me on, through corridors and passages, into the servants' hall,—which looked upon a spacious court-yard at the back of the mansion; and by the size of the table in this apartment, I at once calculated that it must be meant for the accommodation of at least thirty dependants. Some ten or a dozen servants, male and female, were grouped there in conversation; and when the porter introduced me, I was received with a friendliness which at once made me feel quite at home. A footman ascended to the drawing-room, to inform Mr. Vennachar that I had come; and in a few minutes I was desired to go up and speak to my new master. The footman led me across the court-yard, into a vestibule in the back part of the building—thence through a passage to a large hall, with marble floor and pillars, entirely in the modern style, and which communicated with the portico already mentioned. We ascended a wide and magnificent staircase—reached a landing, whence corridors led off to the different parts of the building, and whence the drawing-room itself opened. This drawing-room was spacious and handsomely furnished: but still amongst the ornaments, might be seen several which indicated the Chief's predilection for emblems of bygone times, even while suffering himself to be carried on by the stream of modern tastes and refinements. There were statuettes of bronze, representing tartan-clad Highlanders, under glass-covers; and even the or-molu timepieces on the mantels of the two fire-places, represented warriors similarly apparelled. I had almost expected to find the chief himself dressed in the full-plumed Highland costume; and I was therefore rather surprised to behold a gentleman whose apparel was precisely that which he would have worn if a resident in the British metropolis.

Mr. Vennachar was about sixty years of age: but so well did he carry his years—so upright was his fine tall form, so florid his complexion, so well preserved his teeth, and so bright his dark eyes—that he could have easily passed for fifty. His hair, which had evidently once been dark, had only changed half-way towards the whiteness of old age: that is to say, it was of an iron-gray—and there was not the slightest appearance of baldness on the crown. His profile was haughtily handsome: his looks expressed the consciousness of distinction and riches, mingled with generosity and high-mindedness. The pride, too, which that countenance denoted was blended with the intelligence that sat upon his wide open forehead. His demeanour was stately, yet not overbearing: it was full of dignity, tempered with a well-bred urbanity of manner. He spoke in the tone of one who all his life had been accustomed to command and to be obeyed—but yet neither with sternness nor severity, much less with a despotic attempt to overawe or browbeat. His condescension was mingled with kindness; and when he addressed me, it was with the air of one who felt himself to be infinitely my superior, but who nevertheless did not intend to shame or humiliate me with the consciousness of my own inferiority. He spoke, in short, as if, though a superior, he also considered himself in the light of a paternal protector from the very moment I entered his service; and that though *his* place was the drawing-room and *mine* the servants'-hall, yet that he took a pride in rendering his domestics as happy, as contented, and as comfortable as possible. Such was the estimate which in a very few minutes I formed of the Chief of Inch Methglin; and my subsequent experience of his character led to little or no alteration in my opinion.

But before I continue my narrative, I must particularly speak of those whom I found in the

drawing-room with the Chief: for he was not alone there. Three other persons were with him: his son—his niece—and a queer-looking old gentleman, who was called the Dominie.

First, then, of the son—who bore the Christian name of Lennox. He was as much a counterpart of the father as youth can possibly be of age. Not more than three-and-twenty, Lennox Vennachar was one of the finest young men I had ever seen in my life. Nearly six feet high, with a form of noble masculine development, and yet proportioned to the most admirable symmetry,—he was a perfect model of his sex. His fine features, cast in the same mould as those of his sire, had precisely the same expression—hauteur mingling with generosity, pride attempered by a natural magnanimity of soul. His hair was of raven darkness, curling naturally, and parted above a high broad forehead. His eyes were also dark—expressive and full of fire. His glossy black whiskers, meeting under his chin, were so shaped as to leave his countenance a complete oval, when viewed from the front: his teeth, somewhat large, were of ivory whiteness; while his complexion, with its rich brown tint upon the cheeks, showed that he was no mere drawing-room lounger, but was attached to the manly sports which the boats on the neighbouring lake, and the opportunities for the chase in the glens or on the moors and mountains of his father's princely domain, everywhere afforded.

But what pen can describe the ravishing beauty of the young creature of eighteen, by whose side Lennox Vennachar sat upon a sofa? This was Emmeline Vennachar, the chieftain's niece—and consequently the young gentleman's cousin. Of all the fair flowers of the earth, to my eyes Annabel was the loveliest; but assuredly Emmeline came next in the array of beauty. Her complexion was so delicately fair—so exquisitely transparent, that even *there*, in the Highlands—where the winters are so bleak and the summers so embrowning—it still retained its purity unimpaired. The virgin whiteness of the camelia outvied not that complexion,—save where the tint of the rose delicately shaded the cheeks until dying off into the surrounding pearly fairness of the skin. Her eyes were of a deep blue—large and liquid, and wearing a somewhat thoughtful but serene expression. But this expression suited well with the nobleness of intellect which was stamped upon the high open alabaster brow. That glory of intelligence,—a diadem which Nature only bestows upon her elect,—imparted nothing masculine to the countenance, but merely a feminine dignity,—which in its turn was subdued by the softness and ingenuousness of the whole face. Her hair was of dark brown, with the richest natural gloss upon it, and falling in tresses on either side of that beauteous countenance,—those tresses resting upon shoulders white as snow, or floating upon a bust which though full, was in perfect keeping with the other proportions of her form. Her lips were of a vivid scarlet, with a dewy moisture upon them; and between those coral lines might be obtained glimpses of teeth of a dazzling polish, like rows of pearls, and faultlessly even. The eyes were fringed by long ebon lashes, which made those orbs of deep blue seem even darker than they were;—and the brows, also dark, but delicately pencilled, overarched the eyes in so admirable a manner as to complete the perfection of those features. I should add to this portraiture, that the features themselves, though presenting a classic regularity of profile, nevertheless had that Madonna-like roundness and softness which the old masters have delineated in their pictures; and it was this exquisite feminine delicacy—this even girlish ingenuousness which those features expressed—that, if not counteracting, at least subdued the noble dignity which sat upon the expanse of the brow. When surveying her, it was at first only the more tender characteristics of her loveliness that would rivet attention: it was not till afterwards, and when she was oftener seen, that the natural power of the intellect might be fully discerned, as it was stamped on the fine forehead. When viewed in front, the face was a full one, owing to the plumpness of the cheeks; and yet with that pearly transparency of complexion, and the delicate tint of the rose, it was impossible to associate the idea of a buxom beauty with the soft pleasing charms of that countenance. She was above the middle height of woman—admirably formed—with a shape which, already full, gave promise of richness of proportions. Yet this slight tendency to *embonpoint* was carried off, as it were, by the elegant lightness and exquisite grace of her movements, the swan-like curvature of the neck, and the statuesque manner in which the head was poised thereon. Altogether she was the loveliest creature, next to Annabel, that I had ever seen; and there was so much goodness, so much kindness, so much gentleness in her looks, that it was impossible not to feel interested in Emmeline Vennachar.

It is necessary I should observe that this young lady had been an orphan since her earliest infancy. Indeed, it cannot be said that she had ever known her parents: for her mother died a few months after her birth; and her father, who was a General-officer, had sailed for the East Indies when she was still in her cradle. In that oriental clime he had met his death, in one of the expeditions which were undertaken against the native princes,—leaving his infant daughter to the charge of his brother, the Chief of Inch Methglin, and with a small fortune of some few thousand pounds. Emmeline had therefore been reared by her relatives: and kindly had they performed the task. The Chief had a horror of schools, either for boys or girls; and a governess had therefore been entrusted with the education of Miss Vennachar, until the pupil reached the age of sixteen. She had not however remained all her life at the mansion in the midst of the lake: she had visited Edinburgh and other Scotch cities and towns with her relations; and after her education was terminated, had passed upwards of a year in the Caledonian capital. There, by mingling in the very best society, her manners and her tastes had acquired that polish which they could not well have otherwise obtained amidst the somewhat ruder and less refined society which she found in the Highlands.

The third person to whom I have alluded as being in the drawing-room at the time I made my first bow to my new master, was Dominie Clackmannan. He was some two or three years older than the Chief—that is to say, on the shady side of sixty; but in his own way he wore his years as well as Inch Methglin himself. A most

curious wig, of so many shades lighter than brown that it very nearly approached a flaxen tint—and so ill-constructed that it looked like an assemblage of matted tow—protected his head. He had not the slightest appearance of a whisker: his countenance was broad and round, and so fat that the double chin, by completely overlapping his low white cravat, gave him the appearance of wearing none at all. He was short and exceedingly stout—waddling in his gait, and at all times having the appearance as if rendered unsteady by strong liquor. This was not however the fact: for though exceedingly addicted to good eating, he was temperate enough in his drinking. He was an easy, simple-minded, good-natured man—utterly ignorant of the world at large—and so unsuspicious of others, that when he heard of any one whom he knew doing anything to provoke his Chief's ire, he would sit wondering with an air of grave stupidity upon the matter for hours together. His look was indeed always that of a sort of stolid seriousness: he had no conversation, properly so called: but he frequently threw in short, lazily uttered, ejaculatory comments on what was being said in his presence; and these were for the most part to imply assent to whatsoever fell from the lips of the Chief. And yet Mr. Clackmannan was no toadying, fawning, lickspittle parasite: he was quite independent after his own fashion, and believed himself a necessary adjunct to the family circle at Inch Methglin—as the reader will presently see. I should further observe, in respect to his conversation—if such it could, by any stretch of fancy, be called—that he had a habit of commencing anecdotes, but was never in all his life known to finish one. He either lost the thread, and stopped short of his own accord—or else was interrupted by others striking into the discourse. He was never fond of any reading save the classics or other school-books; and latterly he did not read at all—but dozed away his life in a sort of dormouse kind of ease and comfort. That is to say, he lounged in an arm-chair by the fire-side in winter, or upon a bench near the water's edge in the summer—save when seated at table, and *then* he could display a most unmistakable vitality as a good trencherman. His invariable costume was a black suit,—consisting of a square-tailed dress coat, a waistcoat with capacious pockets—one to contain his snuff-box, and the other his tobacco-box, for he was fond of smoking—knee-breeches and gaiters; so that he had a sort of clerical or scholastic appearance. There was a huge silver watch in his fob, whence depended a gold chain with an incalculable number of seals and keys.

I should now observe that Mr. Vennachar had been married twice. The issue of his first matrimonial venture was Lennox, his heir, and whom I have already described. The mother of Lennox died soon after his birth. Years passed, during which the Chief remained single—until at length he contracted a second marriage, the fruit of which were two more sons. But shortly after the second was born, Inch Methglin had again become a widower. At the time I entered his service the two young gentlemen, who were called Ivor and Lochiel, had respectively attained the ages of twelve and ten. Dominie Clackmannan was first introduced to the mansion of Inch Methglin as preceptor for the *then* youthful Lennox. The tutor, though far from a bright genius, was perfectly well capable of teaching the classics, history, mathematics, and geography; and these constituted the sum-total of the education which Inch Methglin deemed necessary for the son of a Highland Chief to acquire. When that education was perfected,—if perfection it might be termed, which was sufficiently circumscribed in the branches it embraced,—the Chief would not part with Dominie Clackmannan, but retained him at the mansion to render him useful in the instruction of Ivor and Lochiel. For a few years the worthy Dominie managed to rub on with the two boys: but latterly he had become so heavy, so sleepy, and so little capable of doing justice to the duties required at his hands, that Mr. Vennachar saw the necessity of placing him on the shelf and providing his sons with a younger and more capable preceptor. Thus was it that with true Highland hospitality Inch Methglin bade the Dominie remain for ever beneath his roof, and generously made the old man believe that so far from its being an act of charity he (the Chief) was performing, he had grown so attached and accustomed to him he could not possibly think of suffering him to depart. Dominie Clackmannan — whose perception, never of the keenest, had become blunted by the heaviness of good-living and the laziness of the life he led—took it for granted that the reasons assigned by Inch Methglin were the true ones: and he had therefore no compunction in remaining an inmate of the mansion, — having board and lodging for nothing, and an income of one hundred and fifty pounds a-year as pocket-money to boot. But then, in justice to Mr. Clackmannan, it must be observed that he was devotedly attached to the family amongst which he lived. He looked upon Inch Methglin as the greatest man on the face of the earth—upon Lennox as the handsomest, and the most dauntless in field sports—upon Emmeline as a being to whom Paris would have assigned the apple of discord, if she had been a competitrix with Juno, Minerva, and Venus—and upon the two boys as the most promising olive branches that ever could gladden a parent's eyes. And lastly, the worthy Dominie looked upon Inch Methglin's table as the best at which it could possibly be the good fortune of any human being to sit down.

All these circumstances which I have now related, were not, as a matter of course, known to me at the instant that I stood in the drawing-room at Inch Methglin for the first time: but I have thought it better to place them all on record here, so that they may be read in the same place with the personal descriptions themselves. The moment I made my appearance, Mr. Vennachar began to survey me with considerable attention, though with a certain air of loftiness—which was habitual with him. I had no doubt that, though as a matter of course the Earl of Mandeville had been careful not to mention a single syllable in respect to his daughter Calanthe's love for me, he had nevertheless recommended me most strongly to Mr. Vennachar's consideration. Indeed, the letter received by me at Ryde, had intimated this much. I therefore concluded that it was in consequence of these strong recommendations I immediately became an object of more interest in the eyes of the high and mighty Chief of Inch Methglin, than

I should otherwise have been if merely taken into his service in the ordinary way.

"I expected you some days sooner, young man," said Mr. Vennachar, breaking silence when his survey of me was ended.

"I regret, sir," was my response, "that I could not reach Inch Methglin before: but I can assure you, sir, that I made my way hither as speedily as circumstances would permit."

"Very good: I accept the explanation," said the Chief. "You are to act as body-servant towards Mr. Lennox:"—and he glanced in the direction where his son was seated. "I do not usually condescend to represent to my servants that if they conduct themselves well they will find themselves happy here—but that if on the other hand they give me cause of offence, they must put up with the consequences. In your case, however, I make an exception on account of the special recommendation I have received. I do not therefore mind telling you," added Inch Methglin, with a look which seemed to bid me comprehend and appreciate the immensity of his kind condescension, "that by your behaviour may you be your own best friend or worst enemy. Those who once enter this house, need never fear to leave it, save and except through their own conduct."

"It's just that," observed Dominie Clackmannan, as he slowly sat up in his chair to take a pinch of snuff.

"I hope and trust, sir," I ventured to observe, "that you will find me grateful for the kind assurances you are now giving me. I have excellent testimonials——" but then I stopped short; for I suddenly recollected that they, together with my other papers and letters, were all in the box which had not as yet arrived from London.

"I do not want to see your testimonials," said the Chief, waving his hand in a lofty manner. "One of my oldest and best friends has spoken a good word in your favour; and that is sufficient."

"It's just that," remarked the Dominie: and again rolling himself heavily round in the chair, he drew forth his snuff-box. "I remember a little anecdote——"

"It now only remains for you, Joseph," continued the Chief, "to show yourself worthy of the recommendation you have received, and of the confidence which I place in you."

"I think, father," observed Lennox, "that the lad will answer the purpose well enough; and as he is to be specially attached to my service, I have no doubt I shall be pleased with him—if his looks afford any criterion of his disposition."

"It's just that," interjected the Dominie: and there was another pinch of snuff. "The mind is swayed by personal appearance: which makes me bethink myself of an anecdote——"

The Chief here waved his hand for me to retire; and I accompanied the footman, who was waiting on the landing outside, back to the servants' hall. It was now a little past six in the evening; and dinner was being served up in the dining-room. On my way back to the domestics' offices, I met half-a-dozen footmen, each bearing a tray covered with dishes; and I thought to myself that a numerous company must be expected: but I presently found that it was nothing of the sort—that only the family circle were to partake of this dinner; and therefore the next conclusion to which I came, was that the Chief of Inch Methglin's table must indeed be sumptuously sustained. That the domestics fared proportionately well, I speedily had an opportunity of discovering: for at about nine o'clock the table in the servants' hall was spread for supper—places for nearly thirty were laid—and such a profusion of cold joints, game-pies, and all kinds of dainties, appeared upon the board, that even the good living which I had seen and partaken of in Lord Ravenshill's service, was absolute frugality in comparison with the present entertainment. The servants were sixteen in number, including myself; and in addition to these were the Chief's twelve barge-men, who all wore an uniform sailor-like dress, and were a dozen of as fine-looking men as the Highlands could possibly produce. The housekeeper sat at the head of the table: the butler at the foot. There was no separate table for the scullions and lower degree of servants; but all sat down to the same board—and the utmost good fellowship prevailed. In short, I retired to rest that night with very favourable impressions of my new place. My bedchamber was in the close vicinage of Mr. Lennox Vennachar's own apartment; and there was a bell hung in mine, so that I could be summoned thither at any moment he required my services.

My watch having been plundered from me by Mr. Lanover or his accomplices, I was afraid, on retiring to rest, that I might not know at what hour to rise in the morning: but I had not been long in my room, when I heard—what I had not noticed before—a clock on the outside of some part of the building, proclaiming the time; and I was thus relieved from my apprehension on the point mentioned. I rose at six o'clock; and from my window, which was at the back of the edifice, I enjoyed a most splendid view. From the eminence on which the castellated mansion stood, the eye might embrace a good half of the entire Inch; and I saw that the grounds were laid out in the most beautiful manner. The isthmus, connecting the peninsula with the main land, was not much wider than just sufficient to form a good carriage-road, which was continued through the grounds up to the back wall of the court-yard, whence it swept completely round the entire edifice—so that though equipages had to approach the mansion from the rear, they nevertheless could set down at the front entrance. The country on the mainland afforded evidences of a well-cultured estate; and even from that distance, the glimpses that were caught of villages and homesteads interspersed about, conveyed an impression of comfort and prosperity which made me sigh when I thought of the cheerless, wretched contrast afforded by the neglected, half-ruined estate of Carrondale. Far as the eye could reach, all around—and much farther too—did the estate of Inch Methglin extend; and I really could not be surprised if the proprietor of these vast tracts considered himself, and was considered, a person of no ordinary consequence, though only a plain *Mr.*, without the title of Lord or Baronet, or even Knight, appended to his name. But then he was a Chief—a Highland Chief—the head of a clan; and that doubtless in his estimation, as well as in that of all his relatives, retainers, and dependants, was one of the grandest distinctions on the face

of the earth: so that as he was thus a Chief, his estate was a domain, and his house was a castle.

I soon found that I had very little to do and plenty of leisure time on my hands. The services required of me by Mr. Lennox Vennachar, were more nominal than otherwise; and I was attached to him in the capacity of a body-servant as a sort of necessary appendage to one who was a chieftain's son, and who would in the course of time become a chieftain himself. In a word, my duties—such as they were—resembled those of a valet, although I was put into livery. I had to take care of my young master's clothes—attend him when he was dressing, but only just long enough to look out what he required; and beyond these avocations I had literally nothing at all to do. No waiting at table—no answering the front door—no summonses to obey, save those of Mr. Lennox, which were few and far between enough. Indeed, amongst such a number of servants there were several others who led almost as idle a life:—namely, the Chief's valet—Miss Emmeline's two lady's-maids (for her uncle insisted that she should have two, though she could not find employment enough for one)—the two hall-porters (for there was one to each hall, the baronial and the marble halls, as they were respectively called) and the magnificently plumed piper.

The Chief's valet,—who immediately constituted himself my associate on my arrival at Inch Methglin,—was a man of about forty, good-natured and talkative, very proud of his Chief, and very fond of making strangers acquainted with all the fine views and most attractive scenery upon the peninsula or in the neighbourhood of the lake. I should observe that of all the domestics, male and female, I was the only English one; but so far from this circumstance causing me to be viewed with an evil eye by a set of dependants who, being all of the same country, might have shown some exclusiveness,—I at once became a general favourite. The contrast of my comparatively quick-spoken English with their slow deliberate Scotch delivery, afforded them pleasure and amusement by its novelty; and as few of them had ever been out of the Highlands, and none of them at all in England, they were much interested in the descriptions I gave them of London and other parts of the southern kingdom. But to return to the valet, whose name was Cameron,—I was about to observe that on the day after my arrival, he took me to walk with him through the grounds. The whole of the Inch, about three miles in circumference, was laid out to as much advantage as the most admirable agricultural or horticultural skill could possibly display itself anywhere. Flower and kitchen gardens—orchards and paddocks—meadows and plantations, constituted a pleasing variety. The space occupied by the buildings themselves, was considerable: for the dimensions of the outhouses were in proportion to those of the mansion. There was a dairy, beautifully fitted up: the store-rooms were filled with provisions of all kinds: half-a-dozen carriages of different descriptions, from the lumbering family chariot down to the light phaeton, were ranged in the coach-house; and a dozen horses displayed their varieties of breed, of colour, and of size, in the well kept stables.

"You happened to arrive upon a day which, in one sense, formed an exception to the general routine of life at Inch Methglin," said Cameron, as we wandered along the shore of the Inch,—that shore where countless water-plants fringed the bank, and where a few of the earliest of the wild-flowers of Spring were already beginning to show themselves. "There was no company here yesterday: but at least five days out of the seven in every week, there are dinner-parties—and throughout the year there is a constant succession of visitors to stay some for a few days, others for a few weeks."

"Then you are by no means dull in the Highlands?" I observed. "But it were impossible to be dull," I immediately added, "in such a place, to which all the seasons of the year must give their own particular charms."

"Dull?" exclaimed Cameron: "who could be ever dull at Inch Methglin? The Chief is hospitality personified; and the castle is for the most part a scene of gaiety. Ah! there is Mr. Lennox, going to take a row in one of the boats. No—he has got his fishing-tackle with him; and he will amuse himself for hours in yon little creek which you may see on this side of the village."

"He is an exceedingly handsome young gentleman," I observed, following with my eyes the tall form of Lennox Vennachar as he passed along the fine sweeping avenue from the castle to the boat-house.

"Yes," returned Cameron; "the Chief may be proud of him as a son; and we are all proud of him as our future Chief. Don't you think, Joseph, that he and Miss Emmeline will make a splendid couple?"

"Are they engaged to each other?" I inquired.

"To be sure!" ejaculated Cameron, as if surprised I should not have already known that such was the case, although I had only been a few hours at Inch Methglin. "They were brought up together from their infancy—they were always intended for each other—and I suppose that we may soon expect to have the period for the bridal announced. The Chief loves Miss Emmeline as if she were his own daughter; and what is more, he is proud of her too—for the purest blood of the Vennachars rolls in her veins. You know that she is the daughter of the Chief's younger brother, who died in India. Did you ever see a more beautiful creature?"

"Scarcely," I answered, not choosing to speak more specifically on the point, and thus be led into explanations relative to Annabel.

"No—I should think not!" exclaimed Cameron, proudly. "But everything is grand, or noble, or beautiful in connexion with the Inch Methglins. The Chief himself is the greatest in the Highlands—his castle is the finest—his grounds the most charming—his domain the most princely. His son is the handsomest and the bravest—his niece the fairest of all the fair flowers of our country. Ah!" added the valet, with a sigh of prideful satisfaction, "it is a great thing to be in the household of Inch Methglin."

Though I considered Cameron's exultations to border upon the bombastic, or at least on the hyperbolic, in certain respects,—I did not choose to wound his feelings by any remark indicative of dissent; and at the moment I beheld something which enabled me to change the conversation.

One of the ferry-boats from the opposite shore, had just touched at the landing-place of the Inch; and a gentleman had ascended to the jetty, where he remained conversing with Lennox Vennachar for a few moments: then with a bow—which Lennox only acknowledged by a slight and methought somewhat haughty inclination of the head—this gentleman began passing rapidly along the avenue towards the castle. As I and Cameron were not more than a hundred yards off at the time, I was enabled to observe that the gentleman of whom I am speaking was quite as tall as Lennox himself, and appeared to be equally well-modelled in form: but still the interval was too great for me to distinguish his countenance.

"You were saying just now," I remarked, "that it is likely there would be company here to-day. Perhaps that is one of the expected visitors?"

"Oh, no!" responded Cameron, with a somewhat contemptuous, or at least indifferent air: "that is only Mr. Stuart, the young gentlemen's teacher. You see, the Dominie has been superannuated for the last year or two; and so this Mr. Stuart supplies his place. He comes every morning at about eleven o'clock, and stays till three or four. He is a nice young man enough—and the Chief is very kind and condescending to him: but after all he is only a teacher, you know."

I did not altogether like the way in which Cameron spoke of the preceptor. It was with a certain superciliousness, as if he regarded this gentleman as a being of immeasurable inferiority when compared with the Chief; and I could not help observing, "Doubtless Mr. Stuart is a very clever man?—and if so, high birth, rank, and riches may well unbend somewhat to the nobility of intellect. Besides, I see that Dominie Clackmannan is treated as a friend and equal by Inch Methglin."

"Ah! but the Dominie belongs to the Clackmannans of Clackmannanauchnish," at once exclaimed Cameron proudly; and I could scarcely repress a smile at the importance with which he gave deliberate utterance to that word, almost unpronounceable by my lips. "It is true," he went on to say, "that the Clackmannans of Clackmannanauchnish have for the most part fallen into poverty—and, by the bye, the Dominie is very good to his poor relations—but still they have got fine old blood in their veins: and so, you see, it's very different with the Dominie from what it is with Mr. Stuart. For if anybody asks who *is* Donald Stuart, the reply must be that he is *only* Donald Stuart; and I question whether he can lay claim to even so much as the smallest leaf of the paltriest family-tree that has any existence in the Highlands."

"Where does he live?" I asked, again anxious to turn the conversation into a somewhat different channel.

"*Lives?*" exclaimed Cameron. "He *lodges* in the village yonder:"—glancing towards the picturesque hamlet of Methglin on the opposite shore.

"Well, lodging and living at a place," I cried, with a smile, "are surely one and the same thing?"

"It's not just that," said Dominie Clackmannan, who came upon us, unperceived for the moment, from behind: and taking out his snuff-box, he went on to observe, with an air of solemn stupidity, "I remember once—it was in Glasgow, I think—no—indeed it was not just that—it was in old Dun-Edin—I was asked by my friend Saltcoats where I lived; and when I said I lodged with the Widow Glenbucket in the Grass-market——But I forget what remark Saltcoats made——I shall think of it another time:"—and then the Dominie strolled slowly and heavily away towards a bench upon the shore, where he sat down and seemed to fall into a sort of stolid reverie, looking very much like a ruminating ox gazing upon nothing.

"Yes," resumed Cameron, as we walked on together; "it will be a glorious day for everybody at Inch Methglin when Mr. Lennox conducts Miss Emmeline to the altar. Every one is proud of the Chief's son; and everybody loves the Chief's niece. You can judge for yourself whether she is not beautiful? *That* you have already admitted: but she is as good as she is charming. Scarcely a day passes, in the fine weather, that she does not perform some kind act. If she hears of illness in any cottage, there you may be sure she goes,—bestowing money and comforts, and ministering to the wants of the poor in a manner truly admirable. Or else she will visit the school-house, and spend an hour or two in helping to teach the young children their tasks."

"*This* description pleases me much," I observed, mentally contrasting it in a favourable manner with a few other things which my companion had dilated upon, and which did *not* please me by any means. "I presume Mr. Lennox and Miss Emmeline are much attached to each other?"

"How can they be otherwise?" exclaimed Cameron. "I have already told you they were brought up together from their infancy."

"The very reason," I remarked, "why perhaps they should not love each other otherwise than as brother and sister—cousins—or friends."

"Oh! but there is not the slightest doubt as to their love," rejoined Cameron quickly. "The Chief, when in a very good humour, has his joke about the approaching bridal; and then you should see Miss Emmeline start suddenly, and blush, or turn pale——Oh! yes," he repeated, with the emphasis of settled conviction, "there is no doubt that she loves Mr. Lennox as much as Mr. Lennox loves her. Everybody says so; and as a matter of course the marriage is regarded as one so natural and suitable, that no one has ever thought of asking whether it should *not* take place."

The reader may have seen from some portions of the preceding discourse, that the pride of birth which was cherished by the Chief of Inch Methglin, was made a subject of admiration and awe-felt respect on the part of his valet,—the same being the case with every other dependant of the household—with every one of his tenant-farmers, or tacksmen, as they were called—with every shopkeeper in the villages and hamlets—and with every labourer and hind upon his vast domain. Certainly, all this pride was harmless enough in the abstract: but yet methought it had its evils, inasmuch as it elevated one man high above his fellow-creatures, and converted all around him into a species of idolators. Still this very pride on Inch Methglin's part had its good effects on the other hand: for, being the lord and master of a

princely estate, it rendered him anxious to improve it to the utmost of his power—and by these improvements he ameliorated the condition of the labourers upon it. For I must observe to his credit, that his good fame as a landlord had never been tarnished by any of those heartless evictions which, by depopulating whole districts for the purpose of creating additional sheep-walks, have blackened the characters of so many of the great Scotch landowners.

Some days passed; and my box arrived from London, accompanied by a letter enclosing my bill; and as it only amounted to a trifle, the landlord of the *Cross Keys* had not hesitated to send my luggage and trust to my honour for the remittance of the amount. I did not however exactly know how to send it, and consulted Cameron upon the subject,—alleging some excuse for having left my bill unpaid and for having arrived at the castle with only a portion of my effects. He recommended me to go across to the village and see Inch Methglin's factor, who had occasional correspondence with persons in London, and who could doubtless make such a payment for me in that capital. I followed this advice—crossed the ferry—and for the first time entered the picturesque little village of Methglin. It did not contain above fifty or sixty houses: but these were all so neat and clean—so comfortable in appearance, with their whitewashed walls and their little gardens—and occupied by such a happy, healthy-looking, well-clad set of families—that the place formed a most pleasing contrast with the dilapidated village of Carrondale. Close by the church, with its ivy-covered tower—by far the oldest building in the place—was the neat school-house, a structure of quite modern erection. The minister's dwelling resembled a farm homestead,—with a straw-yard in which cows, pigs, and poultry presented the spectacle of "a happy family." At a short distance from the village, was the factor's abode—a substantial, well-built house, standing in the midst of a pretty garden: and thither I bent my way. I found its occupant to be a kind-hearted old gentleman, who cheerfully undertook to do what I required; and when this business was transacted, I sauntered through the village to reach the shore of the loch in order to gain the boat-house. It was about half-past three o'clock in the afternoon; and as I was approaching the jetty, I perceived Mr. Stuart just landing, his duties for the day being finished at the castle.

I may here observe that however superciliously severe Cameron's strictures had been upon Mr. Stuart's social position, it was utterly impossible to form otherwise than a favourable impression of his personal appearance,—equally impossible too, judging by his countenance, to estimate his disposition otherwise than as a good one. I have already said that he was as tall and as well-formed as Lennox Vennachar himself: he seemed to be about the same age too—and though not so strikingly and haughtily handsome, was nevertheless very good-looking. His features were more delicately chiselled: he had dark brown hair—and fine clear blue eyes, which had a certain manly frankness in their gaze, yet blended with an expression of melancholy, which at times deepened into sadness. Since the first time I had seen him close, I had no difficulty in penetrating the feelings of a mind, which—naturally generous, and perhaps imbued with lofty aspirations—had found itself chafed and wounded by a dependent position,—revolting against that very condescension which the proud Chief displayed, and which, however well and kindly meant it might be, could not do otherwise than perpetually sustain on Mr. Stuart's part the consciousness that he was regarded and treated as an inferior. He had been educated at the University of Glasgow: and having no fortune, and no interest with powerful friends, was compelled to devote his talents to the dry, as well as somewhat unthankful and certainly humiliating avocation of instructing the two sons of the proudest Chief in all the Highlands.

Such was Mr. Stuart, whom I now encountered as he was landing from the ferry-boat, between three and four o'clock of this particular afternoon of which I am writing. I had already noticed that the male domestics at Inch Methglin never touched their hats to him; and that they seemed to consider him scarcely so good as themselves—from the fact that he merely *lodged* in the village, while they had the supreme honour and prideful satisfaction of *living* within the walls of Inch Methglin itself. I however had studiously paid him the respect which I considered he deserved, on each occasion that we had happened to meet, during the few days of my sojourn at the castle. He now stopped as I gave him the usual salutation, and said to me in a kind voice—and he had such a pleasing smile too, displaying a set of the most brilliant teeth—"I understand you come from England. How do you like your present Highland home?"

"Very much, sir," I answered. "The scenery must be always striking; and will no doubt shortly be beautiful as the warm weather advances."

"You are fond of fine scenery?" he observed, contemplating me with a certain degree of interest: and then his eyes slowly wandered over the prospect presented by the Inch and the heights which formed the background on the main land.

"I can appreciate the beauties of nature, sir," I rejoined; "and I had no idea until I beheld this fair scene, that the Highlands contained anything so charming. Judging from some of Walter Scott's poetry, I had expected to find the aspect of Scotland universally 'stern and wild.'"

"Ah!" exclaimed Donald Stuart, now gazing upon me in surprise: "you have read Scott's Poems?"

"Every line—every word, sir—and more than once!" I answered. "I could repeat the whole of that grand and thrilling description of the Battle of Flodden which is given in *Marmion;* and I should like some day to visit the field itself."

"You have been well educated?" said Mr. Stuart, whose interest increased into actual friendliness towards me. "Then, how came you——" but he stopped short, evidently smitten with the idea that he was about to ask a question which might possibly arouse painful reflections.

"How came I to be in a menial position, you were about to say, sir? Oh, I do not repine at my fate! I am content to eat the bread of my own industry; and I am thankful in being able to earn it."

"Truly so—yes, it is a proper feeling," said Mr. Stuart, in a slow and thoughtful manner: and

then, with a kind nod and a smile, he hurried away towards the village.

There was sadness in that smile; and I felt interested in this young gentleman. Indeed, from the very first moment that his name and position were mentioned to me—and even before I had seen him close enough to contemplate his frank, open, but somewhat melancholy countenance—I had experienced this interest on his behalf; simply from the fact that I found he was regarded with a feeling which very much approached contempt, by the household at Inch Methglin. Contempt! and wherefore? Not so much because he was poor and had to earn his own livelihood—as because he could not boast of a descent from some good family, and was unable to display a genealogical tree that would puzzle all the heralds in Christendom. And thus was it that the sleepy, stolid, heavy-looking old Dominie was considered as a fit companion for the Chief, and received courteous respect from all the domestics, because he belonged to the Clackmannans of Clackmannanauchnish; while the intelligent, high-minded, well-mannered Donald Stuart was looked upon as a nobody, because he had not the *prestige* of good birth to serve as a gloss for his dependent position. From what I had seen of the Scotch character, I liked it much in every respect save with regard to this Highland pride, which was at once so fantastic in itself and so unjust in its appreciations.

But to continue my narrative. I was about to enter the ferry-boat, when I suddenly recollected that I had purposed to kill two birds with one stone on the occasion of my visit to Methglin—and not merely to call upon the factor, but likewise to make a few trifling purchases which I needed. I knew that I should not be required at the castle till about six o'clock, when Mr. Lennox would dress for dinner; and as it was not yet

four, I retraced my way to the village. The little shop where the articles I required were sold, was near the school-house; and just as I was about to enter that shop, I perceived Miss Emmeline issuing forth from the seminary. I had already learnt that she was in the habit of visiting it frequently: and I should not therefore have considered the circumstance of her presence there as being of any particular moment, were it not that at the same instant I caught a glimpse of the form of a gentleman appearing at the corner of a diverging lane a little farther on, and then vanish as suddenly—this apparition and disappearance being so abrupt and swift, that I could not distinguish who the gentleman was, even if I knew him at all. But it was not altogether this circumstance which surprised me: it was that at the same instant I saw Miss Emmeline fling a rapid look around her—a look that was cast with the evident air of one who sought to avoid observation—or, in other words, to assure herself that the coast was clear: and then she proceeded in the same direction. She could not perceive me where I was standing: for the shop had a little portico of open trellis-work for creeping plants; and it was within this portico that I had stopped suddenly short on perceiving the young lady come forth from the school-house and the appearance of the gentleman at the corner of the lane.

I made my purchases; and as I retraced my way slowly to the ferry-house, I naturally reflected on what I had seen. Perhaps the gentleman was, after all, Lennox Vennachar? and perhaps it was in mere lovers' fun that he was hiding himself from his fair cousin? But if so, why that quick sweeping look which she had thrown around? Anxious to account for it in a satisfactory manner, I thought to myself that her natural maiden pride might possibly feel ashamed at the idea of the childish joviality in which youthful and happy lovers will indulge, being observed by the villagers. But still, as I entered the boat, there was a doubt hovering in my mind as to the accuracy of the explanations which I had laboured to conjure up,—not a doubt at all prejudicial to the reputation of Inch Methglin's niece—for I felt convinced that she was virtue itself; but a doubt without form and substance, undefined and shapeless——I knew not what.

"It's a beautiful afternoon," said the boathouse-keeper on the shore of the Inch, as I passed his door.

"Beautiful," I responded. "Spring is putting forth her charms, and arraying herself in her brightest hues."

"It's just that," said Dominie Clackmannan, who was lounging on a bench in front of the boat-house. "I remember that those were the very words I addressed to Widow Glenbucket, when she put on her new dress on the occasion of the Laird of Tintosquashdale dining with me. And she said——what was it that she said?——I can't think now—I shall remember another time."

And the worthy Dominie took a huge pinch of snuff; having done which, he began to ruminate with a countenance of stolid gravity upon that portion of his anecdote which he had forgotten.

CHAPTER XLII.

THE LOVERS.

Upwards of a month passed: it was now drawing towards the end of April—brighter and more cheerful grew the scenery—clearer and of a more sunny azure the waters. The plantations were clothed in verdure,—the tender green setting off their free and graceful growth. The water-plants spread themselves out on the pebbly bed of the loch, where in the shallow parts it was visible: the wild flowers grew profusely on the banks—the birds warbled in the trees—the hum of insects began.

I had now been nearly six weeks at Inch Methglin, and had every reason to be satisfied with my place. The little I had to do in shape of work left me ample time for reading; and I was permitted free access to the Chief's library. This was well stored with books; though very little indeed did he or his son Lennox profit thereby. With the exception of the newspapers, they never seemed to read at all: their lives were passed in entertaining company, feasting, gaiety, riding on horseback, water-parties, and other diversions. Indeed, the last month had beheld such a succession of visitors at the castle, that it was only on two or three occasions Miss Emmeline had found time in the afternoon to go across to the village for the purpose of visiting the school. As for the feasting, I never saw such lavish hospitality in all my life. Scarcely were the breakfast things cleared away, when preparations were made for luncheon; and this consisted of substantials as well as of dainties so varied and profuse, as to give it the appearance of a dinner. The dinner itself was a sumptuous banquet; and at eleven o'clock at night the supper-room was thrown open. Inch Methglin was fond of the pleasures of the table, and tolerably attached to the bottle—though he never drank to excess. Dominie Clackmannan was always ready for his meals; and on two or three occasions, when the arrival of fresh visitors necessitated the serving-up of two or three luncheons consecutively, the worthy man deemed himself in honour bound to keep company with the guests,—playing as good a knife and fork with a second and third meal in the middle of the day, as if he had not eaten a mouthful for many hours.

At length there came a temporary lull in the gaieties at Inch Methglin; and when the month of May opened, there was no one in addition to the family circle at the castle.

One afternoon Mr. Lennox desired me to go across to the village and procure him some fishing-hooks of a particular kind that he required, and which were obtainable there. This was a few minutes past three o'clock; and when I reached the ferry, I found Mr. Stuart just descending into the boat. It stopped to take me in; and with his wonted good-natured nod and affable smile, he said, "Now, Joseph, you begin to behold this Highland scenery in its perfection. In another month's time, when the tenderness of the verdure shall have deepened into brightness and luxuriance, and the heather glows with its richest hues on

the mountain-sides, you will be charmed and delighted."

"It is indeed, sir, a beautiful spot—or I may say a beautiful domain: for the attractions of scenery, the general air of prosperity and comfort, and the evidences of skilful culture, are not confined to the Inch and its neighbourhood, but extend all over the estate—at least as much as I saw of it when journeying hither."

"By which road did you come?" inquired Mr. Stuart.

"From Perth," was my response. "I passed through the estate of Carrondale. Ah, sir! I was shocked to behold——"

"Shocked indeed," said Mr. Stuart, stooping down to pick up his glove, which he had dropped in the boat. "I also have passed through that estate—and I also was shocked."

"Is it not very sad, sir," I asked, "to think that a property which might be rendered so productive——"

"It must be heartbreaking for the unfortunate owner," observed Mr. Stuart quickly,—"or rather for him who perhaps yet considers that he has a right to call himself its owner."

"And I sincerely hope," I exclaimed, "that Sir Alexander Carrondale will triumph over his enemies!"

"Enthusiast that you are!" exclaimed Mr. Stuart, gazing upon me with apparent astonishment. "But," he immediately added, with a smile, "how came you to learn enough of the circumstances to manifest such an interest in the affair?"

"By a singular adventure," I replied. "I travelled in a chaise with Mr. Duncansby, the lawyer——"

"Ah! indeed?" interjected Stuart, with an air of such seeming carelessness that methought he was wearied with the topic and that my conversation was growing tiresome.

I accordingly held my peace; and he did not put any farther question, but continued occupied with his own thoughts for the remaining two or three minutes which elapsed until the boat touched the jetty. Then he sprang on shore, wishing me "good afternoon" with his wonted urbanity; and he hurried on towards the village. But instead of entering it, he turned off to the left, so as to make the circuit of its outskirt; and I presumed that it was for the purpose of extending his walk on that lovely afternoon. I entered the village by the direct path—made the purchase for which I had been sent thither—and was about to retrace my way by the nearest path, which ran along the shore of the loch, when it occurred to me that as there was plenty of time to spare, and I knew Mr. Lennox did not want the fishing-hooks until the following morning, I would also extend my own walk by exploring the country a little beyond the village. The one straggling street was soon threaded—the school-house and the church were passed—and I turned into a lane diverging from the main road. I now remembered that it was at the corner of this very lane I had seen the gentleman appear and disappear in a somewhat singular manner, as narrated towards the close of the preceding chapter. The incident, which in the meantime had gone out of my memory, was now vividly recalled thereto; and while I was yet deliberating upon it, I beheld a lady and gentleman walking together some way a-head in that very lane which I had just entered. It was impossible to mistake them: they were Donald Stuart and Emmeline Vennachar.

I stopped suddenly short—not exactly overwhelmed with astonishment—but under the influence of the suddenness with which a ray of light flashed in unto my soul. I comprehended everything: Emmeline and the handsome young tutor loved each other! Was there any possibility of doubting it? None at all. For they had not met thus casually: of *this* I felt assured. Ah! it was Mr. Stuart, then, whom I had seen appear and disappear at the corner where the lane joined the road, a few weeks back! Of this I was now certain;—and then too, that look which Emmeline had cast around on the same occasion——aye, and on this occasion too, the circuitous route which Mr. Stuart had taken to gain the trysting place without having to pass through the village! But this was not all. If I still required confirmation of my conjecture that they were lovers, it was before my eyes. They were first walking slowly side by side—she not leaning upon his arm: but all of a sudden he caught her hand and carried it to his lips. I sprang under the shade of a tree: I did not choose to be seen by them: not for worlds would I have had them take me for a spy, nor willingly submit them to the humiliation of having to ask me to keep their secret. In my heart I had already vowed to keep it: for I liked Mr. Stuart, who was so urbane and affable, much better than Lennox Vennachar, who was so proud and haughty: and moreover, even without that predilection in favour of the former, I knew what love was—and I could sympathize, I could commiserate—but was incapable of betraying!

I waited in my place of concealment till a bend in the lane hid the lovers from my view; and then I rapidly retraced my way through the village to the ferry-house. I had learnt a secret which I firmly believed to be utterly unsuspected at Inch Methglin. But from the bottom of my soul did I pity those lovers, whose case I could not regard otherwise than as utterly hopeless,—or if hopeful so far as a runaway marriage might be concerned, only to have this happiness purchased at the expense of utter repudiation, casting-off, and estrangement on the part of Emmeline's haughty relatives. It was true that the young lady had a few thousand pounds: but Mr. Stuart had nothing except his talents—and these do not always secure for their possessor an adequate reward. And then, too, I reflected that Donald Stuart—so far as I could judge by the little I had seen of him—possessed too much goodness of heart and too sensitive a disposition, as well as too much manly pride (in distinction from the family pride of the Inch Methglins) to be capable of sacrificing all the young lady's prospects and alienating her from her family, as well as rendering himself dependent upon her own slender resources. From my very soul, therefore, did I pity them: for their love seemed to be hopeless.

The ferry-keeper at the boat-house was very fond of having a gossip with me about London and all the "fine sights," as he called them, which the English metropolis afforded; and he kept me a good half-hour in conversation before he offered to loosen a boat. At length I gave him to under-

stand I was in a hurry to cross over to the Inch; and almost immediately afterwards, Emmeline Vennachar came to the spot. The first glance which I threw upon her, as I respectfully made the usual salutation, showed me that she was pale—and that though her countenance in other respects was outwardly calm, yet that she was troubled with an inward, silent agitation. I did not make any movement to enter the boat which was to convey her across—I conceived it would be a liberty: but with her wonted affability, and in the sweet tones of her musical voice, she bade me follow her,—adding that it was unnecessary either for me to wait till the boat returned, or to give the ferryman the trouble of making two transits when one would serve.

"Have you been into the village?" she inquired, as the boat, pulled by the stalwart arms of the ferry-man, shot away from the jetty, on the placid bosom of the loch: and as she spoke, methought that I beheld a certain momentary expression of uneasiness flitting over her countenance..

"Yes, Miss," I answered, doing my best to prevent my own features from betraying aught to excite her suspicion that I knew her secret: "I have been to purchase some fishing-hooks for Mr. Lennox."

She seemed visibly relieved; and nothing more was said until the jetty of the Inch was reached. There the Chief and the Dominie were standing together,—the former surveying the fair scene around with the prideful satisfaction of one who knows that all he looks upon is his own—the latter gazing stolidly upon vacancy.

"Well, niece," said Inch Methglin, offering his arm to Emmeline, "I am glad that you have at last taken my advice in having one of our people to attend upon you on your visits to the school-house:"—for he evidently thought that I had been thus put into requisition for the young lady's service.

"Dear me, how awkward I am!" murmured Emmeline, as she dropped her handkerchief, and hastily stooped to pick it up, before I, though springing forward, could reach the spot where it fell.

I saw that her countenance was glowing with blushes; and it even appeared to me that she flung a sort of half-meaning look, of mingled deprecation and entreaty, as much as to express a hope or a wish that I would not undeceive Mr. Vennachar in respect to the conjecture that he had just expressed. Doubtless the poor young lady's heart was fluttering to a painful degree; and her thoughts were thrown into such confusion that she was not at the instant the complete mistress of herself.

"This is as it should be," continued her uncle. "I have told you over and over again, Emmeline, that it does not become the Chief of Inch Methglin's niece—and who some day will be the Chief of Inch Methglin's wife—to go gadding about by herself, even though on self-imposed missions of charity and benevolence. Charity and benevolence are all very well in their way——"

"It's just that," observed the Dominie, as he waddled along close at the heels of his patron.

"And it's all very well, too," proceeded Inch Methglin, "to visit the school-house and see that the matron does her duty——"

"It's just that," said the Dominie, taking out his snuff-box. "And now I bethink me, those are the very words I used to my friend Baillie Owlhead of the Gallowgate, Aberdeen, when I was staying with him——I forget when it was——I think it must have been——but I can't remember now. I shall know presently, and will tell you all about it."

"But the Chief of Inch Methglin's niece," continued Mr. Vennachar, taking no heed of the Dominie's interruption, "must remember that she *is* the niece of the Chief of Inch Methglin—and soon to become the wife of the future Chief of all this princely domain," he added, as he slowly stopped, and with the stateliest air looked as slowly all around him. "She must recollect, I say, that she has menials and minions to wait upon her; and if she do not choose to be followed by her maids, let her be attended by a footman or a page."

"It's just that," said the Dominie. "I told my friend Saltcoats, when he dined with me at Widow Glenbucket's in the Grass-market, Edinburgh——it was the same day, I recollect, that I was pitched over the head of a pony——no, his tail——no, I recollect it must have been his head, because I was sitting with my back towards his tail——I forget how it was, however: but I know that it *did* happen—and Saltcoats said——What was it that he said? I shall recollect presently."

"And therefore, Emmeline," continued the Chief, speaking in his wonted loud pompous manner, yet with a certain degree of kindness in his tone, "you have done well—and I commend you, my dear girl—for having bidden Joseph attend upon you on this occasion. Remember, Joseph," he added, again stopping, and turning round to look at me, "you are always to hold yourself in readiness to attend upon your young mistress, as you have done this afternoon."

Emmeline also turned her head—but it was not in a slow stately manner—it was hurriedly and anxiously: the glitter of uneasiness was in her magnificent blue eyes—the colour was coming and vanishing on her cheeks, like the dancing shadows cast by the waving boughs which overhang a sunlit stream;—and once more did it strike me that in the look which she flung upon me, there was something of a mingled entreaty which her feelings made her express in spite of herself, but the consciousness of which sent up a ruddier glow to her cheeks the next moment.

"I shall always be in readiness, sir," I answerered, "to pay implicit obedience to Miss Vennachar's orders."

The glimpse that I caught of Emmeline's vanishing countenance, as she quickly averted her head again, showed me that she was ineffably relieved by this response on my part: but she must doubtless have wondered why it was that I did not say out boldly at once, that I had *not* been in attendance upon her.

"I have been thinking, Inch Methglin," said Dominie Clackmannan, who very seldom indeed made a long speech—much less of his own accord initiated a subject; "indeed, I have been thinking for the last fifteen or sixteen years—or it may be more—perhaps less—that if you were to have a bridge built across the loch——"

"A bridge?" ejaculated the Chief, again stop-

ping short—but this time in startled wonderment; and his looks were bent with awful sternness upon the Dominie. "A bridge, did you say, Mr. Clackmannan?"

"It's just that," was the response: for the superannuated pedagogue was too obtuse to perceive that the Chief's ire was excited. "A bridge would be a very convenient thing: one could come and go when one liked, and not have all the trouble as well as the inconvenience of those boats. The other day——yes, it must have been the other day—it was when I was crossing to post a letter to my friend Baillie Owlhead of the Gallowgate, Aberdeen, that a sudden gust of wind blew all the snuff into my eyes——it must have been my eyes—it couldn't have been in my mouth——But I shall recollect presently."

"A bridge, did you say, Mr. Clackmannan?" repeated the Chief, in deeper and sterner accents. "And this proposition is addressed by a Clackmannan of Clackmannanauchnish to the Chief of Inch Methglin?"

"It's just that," replied the Dominie, still utterly unaware that he was giving the slightest offence: and he took a huge pinch of snuff.

"A bridge, sir," observed the Chief, with the air of one whose very pride had received an awful shock, "would be an innovation not to be tolerated in the Highlands. The whole clan, sir, would have a right to rise in rebellion against the author of such a tremendous encroachment. A bridge, Mr. Clackmannan! As well talk to me of a balloon! A bridge, sir, would do away with some of the most time-honoured appendages of the Inch. Indeed, it would cease to be an Inch! Take away boats and jetties—fling a bridge across—and it is a road, a veritable road which would be thus formed! Where, then, sir, would be the necessity for my state-barge and my twelve bargemen?"

"It's just that, Inch Methglin," persisted the stupid Dominie. "You would save all the expense and a great deal of trouble. I remember I told Widow Glenbucket when I lodged with her in the Grass-market, that if she bought tea and butter by the pound at a time, instead of the quarter-pound——I think I must have said the pound—it couldn't have been the ounce——"

"Expense, Mr. Clackmannan!" exclaimed the Chief, with an air of Royal scorn: "who cares for the expense? Not I, sir!" he added disdainfully. "The Chief of Inch Methglin cares nothing for expense!"—and as if he had already condescended to argue the point too far, he turned round, gave his arm again to his niece; and with an air as stately as if all Scotland, instead of a mere portion of it, belonged to him, he walked on in the grandeur of disdainful silence towards the castle.

"And yet I am thinking it's just the bridge that will improve the estate," resumed the Dominie, whose skull was inaccessible to all the evidences, marked though they were, of his Chief's annoyance. "A bridge, Inch Methglin, would have saved me that tumble in the loch I had the other day——fifteen years ago—when my snuff-box went in first and I went in after it. But no—it couldn't have been the fault of the ferry-boat either—because it was right at the other extremity of the Inch. It must have been when I was reading that long letter from the Laird of Tintosquashdale——But I forget now—I shall remember presently. About the bridge, however, Inch Methglin?"

But the Chief disdained a reply; and Dominie Clackmannan, regaling himself with a pinch of snuff, followed in stupid ruminating silence.

"Joseph, you understand and recollect," said the Chief, once more turning round as he reached the steps of the portico, and addressing me with the stately air of command which he was wont to adopt,—"you will hold yourself in readiness to attend upon Miss Vennachar, as you have done this afternoon."

"Certainly, sir," I answered: and then, as I glanced at the young lady, I caught an expression of uneasiness again flitting from her countenance and being as rapidly succeeded by one of surprise: for she must have been indeed astonished at the cool collected manner in which I thus heard myself spoken of as having been in attendance on her, whereas, as the reader is aware, we had merely crossed the ferry together.

"But about the bridge," said the persevering Dominie Clackmannan.

"The bridge, sir, shall never be built across my loch!" answered the Chief sternly. "I would sooner have to swim across, and make everybody about me swim too——"

"It's just that, Inch Methglin, which you couldn't do with *me*," interjected the Dominie: "for I am sure I should swim like—a—a stone. And that reminds me of what I one day said to the Widow Glenbucket when Sandie Macwheeble was present——"

But as I was now hurrying round to the back of the mansion, I caught no more of the worthy Dominie's anecdote. I could however have wagered my existence that it was not brought to a finish.

Several days passed; and Miss Emmeline did not again cross the ferry. Yet the weather continued beautiful: but I could easily fancy that the poor young lady was perplexed how to act. Perhaps her uncle had never spoken so positively before against her going out alone; and she did not dare disobey him. She confined her walks to the grounds on the Inch; and though within a circumference of three miles, she could very well have met Donald Stuart in some spot where their interview would have been unperceived, yet during a week which elapsed from the date of the scene last recorded, no such meeting took place. Sometimes in her rambles about the gardens and the orchards, she was accompanied by Lennox—but only for a short while at a time. They had been reared together from their childhood; and much as he might love her, there was no novelty for him in the society of the charming girl: for I am well assured that though he might have sense enough to comprehend her mental gifts and accomplishments, he had not sufficient intellectuality on his own part to appreciate or enjoy them. On two or three occasions during this week which thus elapsed, I passed Miss Vennachar in the grounds; and on each occasion it struck me that she looked as if she longed to speak—as if she had some question to put, but dared not give utterance to it. Methought likewise that there was a certain air of sadness about her,—not however such a sadness as her uncle and cousin were likely to perceive—much less the obtuse old Dominie,—but a

sadness which was nevertheless visible to any one who understood what the heart's true love was, when cheered not by hope. And I understood it!

One afternoon, at the expiration of the week, I was summoned to the drawing-room, where Miss Vennachar and the Chief were seated—and where the Dominie was dozing in the recess of an open window.

"Miss Vennachar," said the Chief, "has occasion to visit Methglin; and you will proceed in attendance upon her. There is a parcel of new school-books which came from Perth yesterday: you will take it with you."

I bowed and retired. On inquiry of the intendant, I received the parcel of school-books—and waited in the hall till Miss Vennachar descended. I followed her to the ferry: we entered the boat; and in her wonted affable manner—for *she* had no undue pride—she spoke of the beauty of the weather and the loveliness of the scenery. As I answered her, methought she gazed upon me with that same kind of half-inclination to put some question which I had before noticed when I occasionally met her in the grounds: but if so, the question itself died unspoken upon her lips. That she was uneasy and restless—sad almost to downright unhappiness—I had no difficulty in perceiving: but then I knew her secret—and this afforded a clue to that interpretation of her looks which could not have been so read without that knowledge.

We landed—we passed on towards the village, I following at a proper distance with the parcel of books under my arm. I looked back, and beheld another boat crossing from the Inch: I recognised in it the person of the handsome young preceptor. Emmeline also glanced back, and in the same direction too: but her countenance was quickly averted again—and her pace was hurried, as if in nervous trepidation. Poor girl! I could well understand what was passing in her mind. If she had been alone she could have met her lover: but she was followed by one of whom perhaps she did not think it possible to disembarrass herself, even if she would condescend to make the attempt.

We neared the school-house: one of the girls, who was hurrying thither at the moment, received the books from me, and hastened on in advance. Then, with a proper salutation, and with a voice as calm as my looks, I said, "If you please, Miss, at what hour is it your command that I should be at the ferry-house to attend you in the boat?"

Emmeline could not conceal her amazement at being thus addressed; and the colour mantled vividly upon her cheeks—for it must have naturally struck her at the moment that I knew she *had* a reason for wishing to be disembarrassed of me. Then she turned as suddenly pale, and trembled visibly.

"Why do you ask me this question, Joseph?" she inquired, in a voice which quivered as did her frame.

"Simply, Miss," was my response, given with every appearance of unsuspicious frankness, "because I thought that you might possibly have some visits to pay to sick or poor people; and of course you would in that case dispense with my services for the time being."

She looked at me very hard for a few moments, with her beautiful blue eyes; and then with a visible effort, she said, "The other day, Joseph—when Mr. Vennachar spoke to you so positively, and three or four times too, about having been bidden to attend upon me on that particular occasion—how was it"——then she hesitated and blushed——"how was it that you did not say you had *not* been in attendance on me?"

"Because, Miss," was my prompt answer, "I saw that Inch Methglin wished it to be as he supposed it; and it was not for me to tell him the contrary."

Again she surveyed me attentively for a few moments—again blushed and trembled, perhaps with a half-suspicion that I was not exactly sincere, or at least truthful in my replies to her. Then, with the sudden resumption of a becoming maidenly dignity, Emmeline Vennachar said, "Yes—I can dispense with your attendance for one hour. You can then be at the boat-house."

I bowed, and sauntered away as if with a listless indifferent air; and Miss Vennachar entered the school-house. I was careful to take quite a different direction from that of the lane which I knew to be the trysting-place of the lovers: for it was by no means my purpose to act as the spy upon their proceedings. I retraced my way through the village, towards the loch, along the shore of which I rambled for about a mile; and then turning back, bent my steps in the direction of the boat-house. But some one was hurrying rapidly along from that point; and as he drew nearer, I recognised Lennox Vennachar.

"Ah, Joseph!" he exclaimed: "where is my cousin? where is Miss Vennachar?"

"At the school-house, sir," I responded boldly, though I had not the slightest doubt that she was elsewhere with the object of her love.

"Then hurry you thither," cried Lennox, "and tell Miss Vennachar that numerous friends have just arrived at the Castle——No, never mind! I can go quicker than you!"

Thus speaking, Mr. Lennox sped onward to the village; and I stood for a few moments irresolute how to act. To fly to the lane and seek Emmeline there, would be at once to prove to herself and Mr. Stuart that I was aware of their secret meetings in that spot; and they might possibly take me to be an impertinent spy. But to leave them there with the chance of being discovered by Lennox, if he should speed in search of his cousin, was equally impossible. I knew not how to act; and therefore thought it best to hurry after Lennox into the village, and thus be better prepared for any emergency which should arise, and in which I could make myself useful to the cause of the lovers. By the time I reached the school-house, Lennox was issuing forth; and in a hasty manner—though evidently without the slightest suspicion that anything particular was going on in respect to his cousin—he exclaimed, "Miss Vennachar is not here, Joseph! She only remained a few minutes, and left at least three quarters of an hour ago."

"I know, sir," was my answer, "that Miss Vennachar had some poor people to visit; and that is the reason I was waiting about until Miss Vennachar was ready to return home."

"How provoking!" exclaimed Lennox; "and the Castle full of guests! But here she comes!"

And true enough, Emmeline was at the moment emerging from the lane at a little distance. Oh, how I trembled lest Mr. Stuart should be near at hand!—for Lennox immediately flew towards her, —I waiting till they came up. She took his arm; and though I did not hear what were the first words he uttered, yet as they advanced quickly, I caught the latter part of what he was saying.

"The Grahams and the Campbells—every one of them—thirteen or fourteen in all! How provoking that you should have been absent just at that time! But where have you been up that lane? It's a couple of miles to any house in that direction——"

"The Grahams and the Campbells did you say?" exclaimed Emmeline, in a visible flutter and trepidation, the reason of which I could full well conjecture, but which her cousin doubtless attributed to the excitement produced by his announcements: at the same time she threw a quick look upon me—a look that seemed to imply that she could not for the life of her understand my own conduct.

"Yes—the Grahams and Campbells," exclaimed Lennox; "and as I just told you, Joseph said that you had a number of calls to make after you left the school-house, so I really began to be afraid that I might not speedily fall in with you. But where *have* you been, Emmeline dear?"

"The Grahams and the Campbells!" she ejaculated, evading as much as possible the question he had twice put. "I hope my uncle is not annoyed——But no, he cannot be, when I reflect: for it was by his express wish that I came to the school-house this afternoon."

The cousins continued discoursing during the rapid walk to the boat-house,—I following at a short distance; and though Lennox repeated his question three or four times more, as to where Emmeline had been, she avoided any definite response. I understood her well: she would not condescend to a downright falsehood—and she could not possibly tell the precise truth. The ferryman's house was reached; and when Lennox had handed his cousin into a boat—I still remaining in attendance upon them, and therefore accompanying them—he again said, "But where had you been, Emmeline? I have asked you a dozen times, and you have not yet told me."

"I took a walk, Lennox," she replied, dropping her handkerchief, and hastily stooping to pick it up again—a very favourite expedient with young ladies who are not only in love, but also in a dilemma.

"Then how was it, sirrah," exclaimed my young master, turning haughtily and angrily round to me, "that you were not in attendance upon Miss Vennachar? I understood from the Chief that you received the most positive orders to attend upon Miss Vennachar."

"I confess, sir," was my prompt answer, given with an air of frank contrition, "that I loitered at a shop-window—and losing sight of Miss Vennachar, knew not in which direction——"

"Enough, sirrah!" interrupted Lennox, sternly. "Take care that this does not happen again—or else you may pay dear for your loiterings. The next time you choose to lounge at a shop-window and commit such gross, culpable, almost insulting negligence, you shall be at once discharged."

"Really, Lennox," said Emmeline, who had flung a look of bewildered amazement upon me—for less than ever was it possible for the young lady to understand my conduct in thus thrusting myself forward as a scapegoat to relieve her from the embarrassment into which her cousin's questions had thrown her: but still blended with that look, there was an expression of thankfulness, as if she were smitten with the conviction that she *had* something to thank me for, though she scarcely knew why or what,—"really, Lennox, you are too severe upon poor Joseph——"

"Severe, Emmeline?" he interrupted her, in a tone of haughty surprise: "severe with a menial who disobeys orders?"—and then he made an imperious sign, as if it were stretching condescension much too far to speak another word upon the subject.

The Inch was reached; and the two cousins hastened on to the castle, I following at a respectful distance. When the steps of the portico were gained, Miss Vennachar glanced towards me in a manner which expressed thanks,—it might be for having merely attended upon her—it might be on account of that something for which she possibly felt she had to thank me without being enabled to comprehend the motives of my conduct.

The castle was again crowded with guests; and for several days there was no renewal of Miss Emmeline's visits to the village school-house. The time was passed in gaieties of all descriptions—riding-parties, fishing-parties, and boating-parties—sumptuous banquets, and balls in the evening. Additional visitors came; and at one time there was not less than two dozen guests beneath the hospitable roof of the Chief of Inch Methglin. All these families were accompanied by domestics of their own; and thus we were as gay and lively in the servants' hall as the company were in the oak-panelled banqueting hall or the gilded drawing rooms. At length the guests began to take their departure; and at the expiration of a fortnight there was a lull once more at Inch Methglin. I should observe that for the first few days after the scene in the boat, Mr. Lennox was haughtily distant and sternly frigid in his demeanour towards me,—uttering his commands with the air of one who exercised empire over a slave; and were it not for the peculiar circumstances under which I had provoked his resentment—or rather had chosen to make myself a scapegoat—I should have given notice to leave my situation. But I was anxious, for the lovers' sake, to avoid the chance of fixing his recollections upon the incidents of that afternoon; and as he was naturally generous—though his feelings were warped by pride and by the habit of command—his sternness towards me gradually wore off. Besides, I was in all other respects well pleased with my place: I was anxious, too, to watch the progress of a love affair, in which I had become more or less an assisting party; and it also was in my thoughts that eventualities might arise in which I could possibly render still farther succour. I had conceived a veritable attachment for Donald Stuart: every time he saw me, he spoke with the greatest kindness; and since the last-mentioned affair at the village, it had struck me that he also in his turn longed to ask me some question—but that he dared not put it.

the sounds of our footsteps. Mr. Duncansby's countenance wore an air of sadness as we paced along; and my spirits caught the same infection. I was glad when the survey was over: for it was mournful to a degree to have to call upon the imagination to furnish those vast State-rooms, when the bare walls and the blackened floors displayed the chilling reality of utter nakedness. I sighed audibly; and Mr. Duncansby bent upon me a look which was as much as to imply that he understood my feelings and gave me credit for them: then, with a sudden impulse of his good-natured disposition, he seized my hand—pressed it hard—and muttered in an under-tone, "I would freely renounce all my own costs, if you and I could but drink a bumper together within these walls, to celebrate the return of Sir Alexander Carrondale in triumph to his home!"

My own countenance expressed how sincerely I wished that such indeed might be the case; and this little incident, displaying so much true feeling on the worthy lawyer's part, increased my admiration for his honest and generous character. He was one of Nature's rough diamonds that must not be judged by the coarseness of the exterior: the value was all within.

We made our way across a spacious court-yard, encumbered with weeds, back to the great hall of the building; and there Mr. Duncansby requested me to amuse myself by walking about in the neighbourhood of the premises for half-an-hour, as he had some little business to transact with the old guardian of the place. I did as he desired; and at the expiration of that interval, he rejoined me. As we retraced our way to the village, I said, "Was there not an account in a Perth newspaper of the visit of the mortgagees to this place, —that visit of which you spoke to me last evening? and was it not coupled with a declaration that they were confident in the success of the lawsuit?"

"God bless you, young gentleman!" exclaimed Duncansby, "they have no more certitude on the subject than I have. Of course every one having a lawsuit, gives out that he is confident of success: but the issue is at the same time beyond the reach of human foresight."

"I am truly rejoiced to hear you say this," was my next observation. "I wanted to ask you the question last night; but I feared that you would think me impertinent or inquisitive."

"Impertinent and inquisitive?" ejaculated the lawyer. "No—that is impossible! I know that you entertain the most generous sympathies in this matter. Think you, Mr. Wilmot, that I did not ere now observe a tear standing on your eye-lash, as we threaded those vast empty rooms, the very atmosphere of which went cold to the heart even while the sun was glowing in summer-heat out of doors? I have every confidence in you, little though we are acquainted with each other: nor have I forgotten what you said yesterday, that even while the guest of Inch Methglin, you never suffered yourself to be swayed by the bias of his animosity in respect to your own hopes and sympathies."

"Solemnly I assure you, my dear sir," I answered, with much emotion, "that though an utter stranger to Sir Alexander Carrondale, and never having seen him in all my life—at least to my knowledge——"

"It's just that," said the lawyer drily. "Always qualify your expressions in that manner: it's safer and more prudent. But go on."

"I was about to observe," I continued, "that from all you have told me it would afford me infinite satisfaction to hear of Sir Alexander's success."

"I am sure of it," exclaimed Mr. Duncansby warmly. "Ah, I recollect!" he added as a thought evidently flashed to his mind: "you might have imagined last evening that there was a certain want of confidence on my part, because, as I remember now, I stopped suddenly short when on the point of saying something. I will tell you what it was. You will call to mind that I was explaining my motive for visiting Carrondale from time to time? One was to give instructions to the old couple up yonder; and the other," added Duncansby, with a mysterious look and measured utterance, "to meet Sir Alexander Carrondale himself!"

"What?" I exclaimed: "he is in the neighbourhood!"

"He is not a hundred miles hence," rejoined Duncansby; "and now and then, according to previously-made appointments on my part, by means of letters, he meets me at the village-inn."

"And yet methought," I observed, "that when we travelled together——"

"I told you," interrupted Duncansby, "that I was the only man in the universe who knew where Sir Alexander Carrondale was. And that is true. Did I not also tell you that he was in the world under a feigned name—and that never will he resume his proper one, unless it be at the same time to enter upon the enjoyment of his rights? God bless you, Mr. Wilmot, he was but a child when his father died, and when the property was thrown into the law-courts. He was too young to deplore the loss of the home from which stranger hands bore him away. No: not stranger hands—the hands of friends; but still not the hands of relatives—for all those deserted the poor orphan when it was believed that the family estate was passing away from him for ever. Years and years elapsed ere he revisited this part of the country: he had then grown up to manhood. Think you, therefore, that there is a single soul here who could recognise in the individual bearing a humble name, the possessor of the Baronetcy of Carrondale—and, I hope, soon to be the possessor of the princely domain likewise? He comes as a stranger to the village-inn: he goes away as a stranger; and the inmates of the house know not who has been beneath their roof. This secret I have told you, Mr. Wilmot, as a humble tribute of my confidence, in return for the noble sympathies which you have displayed on behalf of Sir Alexander Carrondale."

I thanked the worthy lawyer for his kindness; and the conversation ceased—for the village-inn was now reached. Some hours had been passed in the visit to the Castle; and an early dinner had been ordered, as Mr. Duncansby was to take his departure in the afternoon. Nothing more of any consequence ensued between us. I have already said that he was too fond of talking himself, to think of putting inquisitive questions to me; and he therefore did not ask whether I had come

direct from Inch Methglin, or whether I had been elsewhere—nor why I entered by the opposite side of the village—nor whither I was going when I should leave. He however pressingly renewed his invitation for me to visit him in Edinburgh if I took that city in my way on my presumed return to England; and his chaise being ordered, we separated.

On the following morning I mounted my horse, and set out on my return to Inch Methglin,—which I reached at about noon. I inquired where the Chief was; and was informed that some guests having arrived, there was a boating-party on the lake. Having put off my plain clothes and resumed my livery, I bent my way in the direction of the jetty,—on reaching which, I observed two boats at a little distance upon the loch. The Chief, Mr. Lennox, and half-a-dozen ladies and gentlemen were in one: Miss Emmeline, the two boys (Ivor and Lochiel), and four or five more guests were in the other. The gentlemen were rowing in both boats,—it being entirely a pleasure-trip, and the Chief's bargemen being accordingly dispensed with. Dominie Clackmannan, who did not much admire water-parties, was basking upon a bench at a little distance from the jetty—and probably endeavouring to recollect the conclusion of the last anecdote which he had left unfinished.

As I stood near the jetty, contemplating the gay scene,—the sun shining brightly upon the bosom of the lake, and the boats shooting rapidly along in a race with each other,—I was joined by Mr. Stuart, who said to me in his usual kind manner, "My young pupils are taking a holiday; and I am therefore idle. You have been absent, have you not?—for I missed you yesterday and the day before."

"I have been, sir," I answered, "on a little business for the Chief:"—but I did not choose to say what it was; for I naturally concluded that Inch Methglin had intended my mission to be altogether a private one. Besides, I knew quite enough of Mr. Stuart to be well aware that his own nature would revolt at the idea of the misfortunes of Carrondale being made the object of espial and prying inquisitiveness, as well as of selfish views, on my master's part.

"My young pupils ply their oars vigorously," observed Donald Stuart: for the two boys were both rowing. "They are fine fellows for their age. Ivor is but little past twelve, and Lochiel but a few months more than ten."

"You take pride in them, sir," I remarked.

"They are intelligent—and they are attached to me," said Mr. Stuart. "But see! the race is ended! The boat in which my young pupils are, has won it!—and now they will be returning to the jetty."

This was the case: the boats were putting about—and that which contained the Chief being nearest to the shore, reached the jetty first. The other came more slowly along: for the rowers, having beaten their antagonists, were now taking their ease. The Chief, Mr. Lennox, and the ladies and gentlemen who were with them, remained on the jetty to await the coming of the occupants of the other boat. This latter was near the end of the jetty, when Ivor and Lochiel, in boyish play, each gave three or four such sudden and vigorous pulls, that the impulse sent the boat violently against one of the piles. The ladies, affrighted by the shock, screamed out and started up;—and the next instant the boat upset.

Emmeline, the Chief's two sons, and the ladies and gentlemen who were in that boat, were in a moment immersed in the deep water. Cries of horror and alarm burst from the lips of all who beheld this scene; and quick as lightning Donald Stuart sprang from my side and plunged into the lake. The next instant I followed his example: for I was a good swimmer. Lennox and another gentleman leaped down from the jetty—while the Chief was crying out in tones of wild anguish, "My sons! my boys! my dearest boys! My niece——Save them! save them!"

It would be impossible for words to convey an idea of the terrific excitement which prevailed at that spot. Upon the jetty, Inch Methglin was raving for those who were dear to him: the ladies who were with him, were screaming in affright,—the gentlemen doing their best to tranquillize them. Under and around the jetty, which projected about thirty yards into the loch, and where the water was exceedingly deep, there were splashings and strugglings, as if so many enormous fish were rolling and disporting there:—but there were cries and screams too, that thrilled up from the water, mingling with those that rang forth from the platform of the pier itself.

Lennox quickly bore one of the immersed ladies to the bank: the next instant he was followed by Donald Stuart, sustaining the inanimate form of his own well-beloved Emmeline;—while I was fortunate enough to rescue Ivor from a watery grave. In quick succession the gentlemen who had been upset, drew forth the ladies. It was all the work of comparatively a few instants: but as the Chief, from the platform of the jetty, glanced his quick anxious eye over the rescued ones as they were borne upon the bank, he beheld not his younger son; and the rending cry of anguish went forth from his lips—"Lochiel, my darling Lochiel! where is he?"—then the next instant the maddened father himself plunged into the loch.

But the Chief could not swim: this his son Lennox knew—and he dashed in to the rescue of his father. Another also dashed in: this was Donald Stuart—and in every direction did he dive down for the missing boy. The father was borne to the bank in an almost exhausted state by Lennox: but instantaneously recovering himself, he would have plunged in again, had not his son held him back.

"Let me go, Lennox—let me go—I command you!" cried the Chief, in accents of wildest affliction. "My darling Lochiel—my last-born is lost to me! Oh, save him! save him! I take God to witness there is no boon his deliverer could ask, that I would not bestow!"—and the proud, strong man wrung his hands in bitterest anguish, as Lennox, with his arms thrown around his waist, forcibly detained him on the bank.

"He is saved!" cried forth several voices from the platform of the jetty: and the next instant the gallant Donald Stuart was seen swimming round the extremity of the piles, sustaining Lochiel's head above the water.

"He is dead! he is no more!" cried Inch Methglin, a fresh terror swiftly succeeding the former one.

CHAPTER XLIII.

CARRONDALE.

MOUNTED on a quiet, sure-footed, but tolerably fleet steed, I threaded the road formed by the isthmus, reached the main land, and then continued my way along the shore of the loch. A ride of three miles brought me to the extremity, round which I turned; and then, after skirting the other shore for a little space, struck off into a path leading in the direction of the village to which I was bound.

I could not help thinking it was singular that I who had become so much interested in the lawsuit between the mortgagees and Sir Alexander Carrondale, should have been selected by the Chief of Inch Methglin for this particular mission. He, however, was very far from suspecting that my sympathies were altogether with the unfortunate Baronet, and utterly opposed to the outrageous claims of the usurers. It was nevertheless a strange coincidence that he should have thus chosen me as his spy on the present occasion: for as a spy, and nothing less, had he sought to employ me. I rather wondered that his lofty pride should have stooped to an act which savoured of meanness, and at least showed how eager he was to avail himself of the hoped-for discomfiture of Sir Alexander Carrondale in order to grasp a portion of this Baronet's estates: but then I reflected that the natural magnanimity of the human mind—in which quality Inch Methglin was by no means deficient—loses itself amidst the rancours of a traditional animosity. I need scarcely inform the reader that though I had not dared exhibit any repugnance to undertaking my present mission—much less refuse it altogether—my mind was nevertheless made up to abstain from prying unduly or impertinently into Sir Alexander Carrondale's affairs—and at all events to report on my return to Inch Methglin nothing that I might happen to learn, if at all prejudicial to the interests of the already too unfortunate Baronet. As for the journey itself, I was pleased with it; and being so much interested in Sir Alexander Carrondale's affairs, I naturally felt an inclination to visit the abode of his ancestors, and which I fervently hoped might be likewise soon his own once more. My spirits were nevertheless somewhat damped on his account, by the intelligence which had reached me to the effect that the mortgagees were so confident in the success of their suit as to be already planning and arranging amongst themselves what they were to do with the property when it should fall into their hands.

Dressed in my plain clothes—mounted on the comfortable-going steed which the head groom had selected for me on account of its quietness—and provided with a small parcel containing a change of linen and other toilet-necessaries—I pursued my way. It was the beginning of June—the weather was beautiful, the heat of the sun being moderated by a breeze which blew refreshingly from the mountains. After about a three hours' ride, Inch Methglin being nearly twenty miles distant from Carrondale, I learnt from a shepherd tending a flock, that I was within a short distance of my destination. I thereupon diverged from the main road, and made a half-circuit so as to enter Carrondale by another direction than that from Inch Methglin: for inasmuch as I was determined not to play the spy, I was on the other hand anxious to avoid being taken for one. But as I alighted from my horse at the door of the *Carrondale Arms*, the joyous sounds of a well-recollected voice fell upon my ears; and the next instant my hand was firmly grasped by Mr. Duncansby. Yes—there was the worthy lawyer, with his round good-natured face expanding into a smile of pleasure at this unexpected meeting.

"Ah, my young fellow-traveller!" he exclaimed; "still in the Highlands? Not tired of your visit yet? But how long are you going to stay in these parts? A day or two—eh? I am rejoiced to hear it. I only arrived from Edinburgh an hour back. There's a fowl roasting at the fire—and that with a bit of ham and a dish of collops will be on the table in a few minutes. You hav'n't dined? No. That's capital!—we will dine together."

Having thus rattled on, Mr. Duncansby led the way into the little inn-parlour, which was more comfortable than the wretchedness of the exterior of the *Carrondale Arms* could possibly have given promise of. The place, though humble and half ruined, was nevertheless as cleanly as under such circumstances it could be: a clean white napkin was spread upon the table—an additional knife and fork were promptly laid—and soon afterwards dinner was served up. My ride had given me a keen appetite; and I assisted Mr. Duncansby in doing justice to the fare.

"But what is it that brings you to Carrondale?" he asked for the third or fourth time, I having not known what response to give. "Ah, I recollect! you took a very great interest in the lawsuit—and that made me take a liking to you. I knew it was something of the sort: so you are doubtless come to have a view of the district?"

"That is my object," I answered. "But how goes on the lawsuit?"

"God bless you, young gentleman," replied Mr. Duncansby, "law is so uncertain that it is impossible to give a direct opinion. But you know what I told you a short time back:—if I did not entertain a strong hope, I do not think that all my friendship for Sir Alexander Carrondale would have induced me to risk ten or twelve thousand pounds in costs. The suit comes on again before Christmas; and one thing *is* certain—but only one thing—which is that judgment will at length be finally given."

"And therefore, one way or another," I observed, "the matter must be decided."

"It's just that," answered Duncansby. "By the way, you were going to Inch Methglin when you and I were fellow-travellers. I suppose you heard a great deal there about the long standing feud between that family and the Carrondales?"

"I certainly did hear somewhat upon the topic," I answered: "but I can assure you, Mr. Duncansby, that though I was tolerably careful not to give offence on the one hand, my hopes and sympathies received no diminution on the other."

"Well spoken, young gentleman!" said the lawyer. "I knew you were right-minded and straightforward, when we travelled together. But

now I bethink me, I really do not recollect your name—even if I knew it at all at the time."

"Joseph Wilmot," I answered, feeling very certain that Mr. Duncansby could not possibly know that I was a menial in Inch Methglin's service; and I did not choose to reveal to him that such was the fact, lest he should at once think I was a spy, and that all my sympathy on behalf of the side which he himself advocated, was a mere hypocritical pretence. I had taken a liking to the worthy gentleman; and as we were again thrown together, I was naturally desirous not to suffer in his estimation.

"Well, Mr. Wilmot," he went on to say, "so you purpose to remain here a day or two? I am to leave to-morrow afternoon; and I hope that if you take Edinburgh in your way on your return to England, you will pay me a visit. I suppose you had plenty of feasting at Inch Methglin; for every one knows that the Chief's hospitality is tremendous. His son Lennox, I understand, is a very fine young man—and his niece Emmeline a beautiful creature. There are two young sons——"

"Nice boys," I observed,—"high-spirited and full of generous impulses. And they are not yet spoilt," I added, after a pause, "by their father's pride and pretensions. But then they are at present almost completely under the control of their tutor—a very worthy young gentleman—a Mr. Stuart."

"Oh, a Mr. Stuart—eh? And there's an old Dominie too—is there not?"

"Yes—Mr. Clackmannan of Clackmannanauchnish."

"Heavens, these Highland gentlemen with their terrific names!" ejaculated Duncansby: "they are too much of a mouthful for us Lowlanders. But altogether I presume you enjoyed yourself at Inch Methglin's? And you did not fall in love with the beautiful niece—eh?" he added, with a laugh. "Of course, however, it would have been useless: for according to all accounts, she is destined to espouse her cousin, the Chief's son. The castle is a splendid place, I understand—though I never saw it. To-morrow you shall accompany me to Carrondale Castle—which I am afraid," added Mr. Duncansby, his voice sinking into sadness, "you will not find in quite such good order as the one you have left. The fact is, in respect to my own visit to these parts on the present occasion,—those rascals of usurers have been down here giving their orders, and interfering just for all the world as if they were already in full possession of the property. They came with surveyors, and laid out their plans to sell it in parcels. The villagers, who are devoted to the name of Carrondale, mobbed the scoundrels when it was known who they were, and forced them to leave the place a little sooner than perhaps they would otherwise have done. They had no business here at all. The old couple taking care of the mansion, were appointed by the receiver. But there's a wheel within a wheel: for between you and me, the receiver is a friend of mine—and he allows me to give on his behalf such directions as I may think needful. That is one reason why I occasionally visit the property. And there is another too——"

But here Mr. Duncansby stopped short, as if suddenly perceiving that he was about to go a little too far with his communications; though what he was on the point of saying, I could not possibly guess. When he had disposed of three or four glasses of whisky-toddy the time for retiring to rest arrived; and we separated for the night, with the understanding that we should rise betimes to take an early breakfast, and then be off on our visit to Carrondale Castle.

Accordingly, by nine o'clock in the morning, we were on our way to the mansion. I have already said that it stood on an eminence at a distance of about a mile from the village: but the railings of the park attached to it, were within two hundred yards of the hamlet. The porter's lodge, for years unoccupied, was falling to ruins: the sweeping carriage-road leading up to the mansion, was overgrown with weeds; and a few sheep belonging to the villagers, were browsing upon the long grass of the park-ground itself. We reached a broad sheet of water—once no doubt an ornamental feature of the scene—but now with its bank overgrown with weeds in their rank luxuriance, and the bosom of the lake itself covered with a green slimy substance. Nevertheless, the trees which dotted the park, and some of which displayed the growth of centuries, were in the full richness of their verdure: and as we ascended towards the eminence, the grove in which the building was more than half embowered, presented the finest and stateliest appearance. At length the entrance was reached—a grand massive portico, with a noble ascent of steps, but all covered with Time's mildew greenness. I now obtained a view of the complete front of the building, which was of vast dimensions; and I was pleased to discern that more care had been bestowed upon the place than I could have imagined. The casements were entire—the windows were kept clean: but the shutters being all closed, and these dingy for want of fresh paint, gave to the mansion a gloomy and haunted appearance. The immense double portals stood open, doubtless to air the building; and we entered a spacious and lofty hall—finer in its dimensions as well as its architecture, than even that at Inch Methglin, where the trophies of the war and the chase were suspended. *Here* however there were none of such trophies: the walls were bare, and in many places gave evidence of the ravages of time.

An old couple came forth from one of the rooms communicating with the hall, and received Mr. Duncansby with the utmost respect. He informed them, in allusion to myself, that he had brought a visitor to see the place; and the old man, fetching a huge bunch of keys from the room, proceeded to conduct us through the premises. Heaven knows how many apartments of stately dimensions—how many commodious-sized bedchambers—how many corridors and passages—how many outhouses and offices, were on that occasion threaded by my footsteps. The castle was immense—nearly twice the size of Inch Methglin, which was itself an enormous building. But what a contrast between the two, so far as present appearances were concerned! The furniture of Carrondale had all been sold off long years back, by a decree of the court,—the money which the sale produced, being paid into the receiver's hands. It was therefore like contemplating the mere wasted skeleton of the castle's once substantial form; and echo gloomily returned

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"It's just that," said the lawyer drily. "Always qualify your expressions in that manner: it's safer and more prudent. But go on."

"I was about to observe," I continued, "that from all you have told me it would afford me infinite satisfaction to hear of Sir Alexander's success."

"I am sure of it," exclaimed Mr. Duncansby warmly. "Ah, I recollect!" he added as a thought evidently flashed to his mind: "you might have imagined last evening that there was a certain want of confidence on my part, because, as I remember now, I stopped suddenly short when on the point of saying something. I will tell you what it was. You will call to mind that I was explaining my motive for visiting Carrondale from time to time? One was to give instructions to the old couple up yonder; and the other," added Duncansby, with a mysterious look and measured utterance, "to meet Sir Alexander Carrondale himself!"

"What?" I exclaimed: "he is in the neighbourhood!"

"He is not a hundred miles hence," rejoined Duncansby; "and now and then, according to previously-made appointments on my part, by means of letters, he meets me at the village-inn."

"And yet methought," I observed, "that when we travelled together——"

"I told you," interrupted Duncansby, "that I was the only man in the universe who knew where Sir Alexander Carrondale was. And that is true. Did I not also tell you that he was in the world under a feigned name—and that never will he resume his proper one, unless it be at the same time to enter upon the enjoyment of his rights? God bless you, Mr. Wilmot, he was but a child when his father died, and when the property was thrown into the law-courts. He was too young to deplore the loss of the home from which stranger hands bore him away. No: not stranger hands—the hands of friends; but still not the hands of relatives—for all those deserted the poor orphan when it was believed that the family estate was passing away from him for ever. Years and years elapsed ere he revisited this part of the country: he had then grown up to manhood. Think you, therefore, that there is a single soul here who could recognise in the individual bearing a humble name, the possessor of the Baronetcy of Carrondale—and, I hope, soon to be the possessor of the princely domain likewise? He comes as a stranger to the village-inn: he goes away as a stranger; and the inmates of the house know not who has been beneath their roof. This secret I have told you, Mr. Wilmot, as a humble tribute of my confidence, in return for the noble sympathies which you have displayed on behalf of Sir Alexander Carrondale."

I thanked the worthy lawyer for his kindness; and the conversation ceased—for the village-inn was now reached. Some hours had been passed in the visit to the Castle; and an early dinner had been ordered, as Mr. Duncansby was to take his departure in the afternoon. Nothing more of any consequence ensued between us. I have already said that he was too fond of talking himself, to think of putting inquisitive questions to me; and he therefore did not ask whether I had come

direct from Inch Methglin, or whether I had been elsewhere—nor why I entered by the opposite side of the village—nor whither I was going when I should leave. He however pressingly renewed his invitation for me to visit him in Edinburgh if I took that city in my way on my presumed return to England; and his chaise being ordered, we separated.

On the following morning I mounted my horse, and set out on my return to Inch Methglin,—which I reached at about noon. I inquired where the Chief was; and was informed that some guests having arrived, there was a boating-party on the lake. Having put off my plain clothes and resumed my livery, I bent my way in the direction of the jetty,—on reaching which, I observed two boats at a little distance upon the loch. The Chief, Mr. Lennox, and half-a-dozen ladies and gentlemen were in one: Miss Emmeline, the two boys (Ivor and Lochiel), and four or five more guests were in the other. The gentlemen were rowing in both boats,—it being entirely a pleasure-trip, and the Chief's bargemen being accordingly dispensed with. Dominie Clackmannan, who did not much admire water-parties, was basking upon a bench at a little distance from the jetty—and probably endeavouring to recollect the conclusion of the last anecdote which he had left unfinished.

As I stood near the jetty, contemplating the gay scene,—the sun shining brightly upon the bosom of the lake, and the boats shooting rapidly along in a race with each other,—I was joined by Mr. Stuart, who said to me in his usual kind manner, "My young pupils are taking a holiday; and I am therefore idle. You have been absent, have you not?—for I missed you yesterday and the day before."

"I have been, sir," I answered, "on a little business for the Chief:"—but I did not choose to say what it was; for I naturally concluded that Inch Methglin had intended my mission to be altogether a private one. Besides, I knew quite enough of Mr. Stuart to be well aware that his own nature would revolt at the idea of the misfortunes of Carrondale being made the object of espial and prying inquisitiveness, as well as of selfish views, on my master's part.

"My young pupils ply their oars vigorously," observed Donald Stuart: for the two boys were both rowing. "They are fine fellows for their age. Ivor is but little past twelve, and Lochiel but a few months more than ten."

"You take pride in them, sir," I remarked.

"They are intelligent—and they are attached to me," said Mr. Stuart. "But see! the race is ended! The boat in which my young pupils are, has won it!—and now they will be returning to the jetty."

This was the case: the boats were putting about—and that which contained the Chief being nearest to the shore, reached the jetty first. The other came more slowly along: for the rowers, having beaten their antagonists, were now taking their ease. The Chief, Mr. Lennox, and the ladies and gentlemen who were with them, remained on the jetty to await the coming of the occupants of the other boat. This latter was near the end of the jetty, when Ivor and Lochiel, in boyish play, each gave three or four such sudden and vigorous pulls, that the impulse sent the boat violently against one of the piles. The ladies, affrighted by the shock, screamed out and started up;—and the next instant the boat upset.

Emmeline, the Chief's two sons, and the ladies and gentlemen who were in that boat, were in a moment immersed in the deep water. Cries of horror and alarm burst from the lips of all who beheld this scene; and quick as lightning Donald Stuart sprang from my side and plunged into the lake. The next instant I followed his example: for I was a good swimmer. Lennox and another gentleman leaped down from the jetty—while the Chief was crying out in tones of wild anguish, "My sons! my boys! my dearest boys! My niece——Save them! save them!"

It would be impossible for words to convey an idea of the terrific excitement which prevailed at that spot. Upon the jetty, Inch Methglin was raving for those who were dear to him: the ladies who were with him, were screaming in affright,—the gentlemen doing their best to tranquillize them. Under and around the jetty, which projected about thirty yards into the loch, and where the water was exceedingly deep, there were splashings and strugglings, as if so many enormous fish were rolling and disporting there:—but there were cries and screams too, that thrilled up from the water, mingling with those that rang forth from the platform of the pier itself.

Lennox quickly bore one of the immersed ladies to the bank: the next instant he was followed by Donald Stuart, sustaining the inanimate form of his own well-beloved Emmeline;—while I was fortunate enough to rescue Ivor from a watery grave. In quick succession the gentlemen who had been upset, drew forth the ladies. It was all the work of comparatively a few instants: but as the Chief, from the platform of the jetty, glanced his quick anxious eye over the rescued ones as they were borne upon the bank, he beheld not his younger son; and the rending cry of anguish went forth from his lips—"Lochiel, my darling Lochiel! where is he?"—then the next instant the maddened father himself plunged into the loch.

But the Chief could not swim: this his son Lennox knew—and he dashed in to the rescue of his father. Another also dashed in: this was Donald Stuart—and in every direction did he dive down for the missing boy. The father was borne to the bank in an almost exhausted state by Lennox: but instantaneously recovering himself, he would have plunged in again, had not his son held him back.

"Let me go, Lennox—let me go—I command you!" cried the Chief, in accents of wildest affliction. "My darling Lochiel—my last-born is lost to me! Oh, save him! save him! I take God to witness there is no boon his deliverer could ask, that I would not bestow!"—and the proud, strong man wrung his hands in bitterest anguish, as Lennox, with his arms thrown around his waist, forcibly detained him on the bank.

"He is saved!" cried forth several voices from the platform of the jetty: and the next instant the gallant Donald Stuart was seen swimming round the extremity of the piles, sustaining Lochiel's head above the water.

"He is dead! he is no more!" cried Inch Methglin, a fresh terror swiftly succeeding the former one.

"No—he lives!" exclaimed Stuart, as he neared the bank: and in a few moments Lochiel was clasped in his father's arms.

But scarcely had Donald Stuart accomplished this magnanimous feat,—scarcely had he reached the land and obtained a footing thereon,—when he sank down in a state of unconsciousness, the effect of utter exhaustion. Emmeline, who in the meanwhile had recovered, sprang towards him; and with a face deadly pale—all her features rigid with despair—she raised him partially up, pillowing his head upon her bosom. Not a word escaped her lips: her heart was no doubt too terribly tightened in every chord to allow her agonized feelings to find utterance in a syllable or a cry. Stuart opened his eyes—and a smile appeared upon his lips as they encountered the looks that were bending over him. There was too much excitement upon the bank at the time for any one to observe what thus passed, save and except myself and another. And that other was Lennox Vennachar. I trembled as I glanced towards him—and then I trembled still more: for I beheld a dark scowl pass over his countenance—a scowl that was instantaneously succeeded by an expression as if either a suspicion of the real truth had flashed to his mind, or as if his pride and jealousy were both shocked by the idea that his intended bride should thus bestow so much interest on Donald Stuart. He stood evidently irresolute for a few seconds; and then hastening forward, said somewhat sternly and rudely, "Emmeline, leave Mr. Stuart to my care! Hasten you to the castle—change your things—or you will get your death with cold."

Mr. Stuart,—as if all in an instant awakened to a consciousness of the danger of the position in which both himself and his beloved were placed—startled as it were from a transient dream of bliss,—rose up, and stammered out a few words of thanks to Miss Vennachar for her kind ministrations.

"I owe you my life!" she said, in a low deep tone. "They told me that it was you who rescued me!"—then, no doubt fearful of betraying her feelings to her cousin, she turned abruptly round and hastened after those who, having been immersed in the water, were now speeding to the castle to change their garments.

Lochiel had recovered; and the overjoyed father strained both his boys rapturously in his arms.

"Come," he said, "let us all back to the castle as quick as we can. Mr. Stuart, I owe you the lives of my niece and my son! Lennox, take Mr. Stuart with you, and give him a change of apparel. Joseph"—now addressing himself to me—"to you also do I owe a life that is dearer to me than my own!"

Inch Methglin uttered these words to Mr. Stuart and myself with perhaps more emotion than he had ever before displayed in all his life: but still there was no gratefully outstretched hand to clasp that of either the poor tutor or myself. Still he *was* grateful—as grateful as it was in his proud nature to be,—grateful after his own fashion. And I should not forget to add that as he hurried away from the bank with his two boys, he paused for a moment to exclaim, "Mr. Stuart, I vowed before heaven to grant whatsoever boon the rescuer of my Lochiel should demand; and that pledge is not one to be forgotten!"

"Come, Mr. Stuart," said Lennox, though with none of the cordiality which under all the circumstances he ought to have displayed; "hasten with me to my apartment—and you shall have what you require."

As a matter of course, all this scene—from the instant of the upsetting of the boat, to the point which my narrative has reached—occupied but as many seconds as it has taken minutes to describe: for seldom, not even in the midst of a battle, could more varied feelings nor a wilder excitement have been condensed into so short a space. I must not forget to observe that the poor Dominie exhibited a degree of emotion for which I could scarcely have given him credit. While the excitement was at its utmost, he ran to and fro, with the quick waddlings of a duck gone mad, upon the bank—whimpering like a child: then, in a fit of desperation, he dashed his snuff-box into the lake, just as if it would form a substitute for himself in hastening to the rescue of the immersed individuals. His joy at the deliverance of all, displayed itself in an equally whimsical manner: for he sat down upon the bank—threw off his hat—and tearing off his wig, actually wiped therewith the perspiration and tears from his face.

I was hastening after the rest of the party, anxious to get to my own room to change my garments,—when the Dominie clutched me by the arm; and as he replaced his wig upon his head, he said, "It's just yourself that behaved as well as any of them, Joseph. Ah! it was a terrible scene—and it put me in mind of something that happened many long years ago, when I was lodging at the Widow Glenbucket's, and my friend Saltcoats tumbled into the water-butt——"

"Excuse me, sir," I said,—"but I am dripping wet!"

"It's just that," replied the Dominie, with a stare of stupid astonishment, as if just made sensible of the fact that a person who had plunged into a lake was very likely to come out of it with his clothes saturated. "Another time I will finish the anecdote."

I have no doubt he added, "if I recollect it;"—but I did not tarry to hear any more, and sped away to the mansion as fast as my legs would carry me.

About an hour after the scenes which I have just described, I fell in with Cameron, who began to ask me a thousand questions in respect to the details of the accident; and when I had satisfied his curiosity, I thought I might just as well relieve my own.

"They have had luncheon, I suppose, by this time in the parlour?" I said, inquiringly.

"It's just over," responded Cameron. "I should think that even the most delicate ladies who got such a wetting, may have taken a drop of cherry-brandy to keep the cold out."

"Very likely," I said. "And Mr. Stuart—did *he* stay to lunch?" for that was the point I wished to arrive at.

"What! in the parlour?" exclaimed Cameron, surveying me with astonishment—almost with indignation. "No, certainly not! For no consideration on earth would Inch Methglin have a nobody seated at his table. But I tell you what he did—which was very kind and considerate of him: he sent me to tell Mr. Stuart that luncheon should be served up for him in the library."

"Very kind and considerate indeed!" I said, with bitter irony.

"To be sure it was," rejoined Cameron, who did not notice my accentuation and its significancy. "But Mr. Stuart declined——"

"Of course he did!" I ejaculated, now burning with indignation on the poor tutor's account.

"Of course he did?" echoed Cameron. "And why should he? Only I suppose because he was not hungry—for after so much excitement and exhaustion, it is no wonder that the appetite should have been lost."

"And if I had been Mr. Stuart," I cried,—"and if I had been starving, I would have refused a morsel of bread under such circumstances, even though that morsel were to save me from death!"

Cameron regarded me with a sort of stupified amazement, as if he were at a loss to comprehend how I could possibly so far forget myself as to utter observations at all militating against the generosity and the hospitality of the high and mighty Chief, whom he looked upon as the highest and mightiest not merely in the Highlands, but in the whole world. Not choosing to prolong the discourse on that topic, I walked abruptly away: but as I thus turned on my heel, I heard Cameron muttering to himself, "He is an Englishman, poor fellow! and so he must be pitied rather than blamed. But to think that Inch Methglin *could* do wrong—it is incredible!"

CHAPTER XLIV.

ANOTHER VISIT TO THE VILLAGE.

I was not summoned, during the remainder of the day, into the Chief's presence to give an account of my expedition to Carrondale. The exciting scenes on the lake had no doubt banished from Mr. Vennachar's mind the circumstance that he had despatched me on any such mission at all. Neither did I see anything more of Emmeline for the rest of that day: but in the evening—when the family and the guests were sitting in the drawing-room, with the windows thrown open, and no doubt enjoying the refreshing breeze which was wafted over the lake, and came softly tinctured with the perfume of flowers—I noticed Mr. Lennox Vennachar come forth from the mansion, and plunge in a somewhat hurried manner—methought likewise with excitement too—into the shadiest avenue of the spacious garden. I myself was rambling there at the time: but he passed me by without seeming to notice me; and this was another reason why it occurred to me he had something upon his mind. For if such were not the case, I thought to myself that he would surely have some kind and civil word to say after I had rescued one of his little brothers from a watery grave.

I turned into another avenue; and while sauntering along, pondering on a variety of subjects—amongst which the image of the beloved Annabel was not forgotten—I reached a shady arbour, which I entered; and throwing myself upon a seat, pursued my meditations. I had not been there many minutes, when I heard footsteps slowly approaching: then they stood still—then they advanced again—until at length some one came close up to the outside of the arbour, and leant against one of the trees which formed it. The intervals of these trees were so completely filled up with roses, jasmines, honeysuckles, and other creeping plants, as to form a perfect tapestry of verdure and of flowers, so dense that the eye could not penetrate through: while the overarching boughs of the trees themselves formed the roof of this umbrageous retreat. I was about to issue forth, on hearing the person approach the arbour—for it struck me that it might be Mr. Lennox Vennachar himself: but the manner in which he threw himself against the tree, struck me as so singular that I could not help remaining where I was. It was evidently in a sort of desperate excitement that he had done so: for the entire arbour was shaken with the concussion.

"Those looks which they exchanged!" he murmured audibly—and it *was* Lennox Vennachar who spoke: "could there be anything in them? There is madness in the thought! By heaven! if that wretched teacher—a miserable unknown, without family or fortune—should have dared lift his hopes——But no—it is ridiculous! It is mere fancy on my part! I will not so humiliate myself as to take any serious notice of the matter. No—I will not speak to my father. But I will watch—yes, I will watch! And yet that were derogatory! Oh, this accursed jealousy!—that I should ever have known such a feeling!"

With these words, Lennox Vennachar hurried away from the vicinage of the arbour; and the sounds of his retreating footsteps were soon lost in the distance. Accident had thus revealed to me the state of his feelings: that scene upon the bank of the loch—when Donald Stuart, recovering from his state of unconsciousness, beheld Emmeline bending over him—had inspired Lennox with a fierce jealousy. Yet his natural pride had made him loathe the very feeling which had thus sprung up in his heart: while, on the other hand, the feeling itself was threatening to drive him to mean actions, and to keep watch upon his cousin and the tutor. Alas, poor lovers! I thought to myself that the difficulties of their position were increasing visibly and rapidly: but I resolved to help them to the utmost of my ability, if opportunity should render such services available.

When I entered Lennox Vennachar's chamber on the following morning, according to custom, to put out the clothes which he might require for the day, the first glance which I threw at him, showed me that he was pale, and that his countenance bore the evident traces of a restless and uneasy night. He was up, and in the middle of his toilet when I thus entered.

"Ah! Joseph, by the bye," he said, with the abruptness of one whose feelings were inwardly troubled, "you performed a noble deed yesterday: you saved Ivor's life—and I take the earliest opportunity to express all the gratitude I feel."

"I thank you, sir, for your kindness," was my answer. "It was at one moment a fearful scene; and it is a wonder that life was not lost."

Lennox made no farther comment for some minutes: he had fallen into a profound abstraction; and then with another abrupt start, he said, "I think, Joseph, that my father gave you ex-

press orders to attach yourself to the service of Miss Vennachar as well as to my own person? Now, if I were angry with you a short time back, when you disobeyed those orders—you recollect the occasion—such displeasure was natural enough. I do not revive the matter through any ill-feeling—because that displeasure has past and gone. But—but——"

He hesitated for a few moments; and there was a visible struggle taking place within him, the nature of which I was at no loss to comprehend. On the one hand his jealousy prompted him to give me certain instructions: on the other, his pride and the natural generosity of his feelings revolted against such meanness. But which got the better—pride or jealousy? Alas, for the weakness of human nature! When the heart loves—or even when it loves not sincerely, but when it is merely bent upon the possession of some lovely object—jealousy becomes dominant over pride.

"I was about to say, Joseph," continued Lennox, speaking with the haste of one who is anxious to get over a task of which he is in reality ashamed, "that you must be careful to carry out my father's instructions, and invariably attend upon Miss Vennachar when she goes over to the village and I am not in the way to accompany her. But it is not merely sufficient that you should attend on Miss Vennachar across the loch: it is your duty to follow her to the various places which she may have to visit. You understand, Joseph?—and I hope that you will be more guarded in future than you were the other day, when I found you wandering about, having lost sight of my cousin through looking in a shop-window."

"I will attend to your orders, sir," was my response.

At about eleven in the forenoon, I was told by Cameron that the Chief of Inch Methglin desired to speak to me at once, and that he was in the library. Thither I accordingly proceeded: but on opening the door, found Mr. Vennachar engaged in conversation with Donald Stuart. I was about to retire, when the Chief exclaimed, "Come in, Joseph. I shall have done with Mr. Stuart in a few moments."

I accordingly shut the door, and remained standing near it. The Chief was seated at the central table: Mr. Stuart was standing on the opposite side of it. It was but too evident that Mr. Vennachar had not asked the tutor to take a chair—but was literally having him up before him, just as if the young gentleman was a domestic; or as if it were a scene in which the patron and the patronised were enacting the principal parts—the former conscious of his own immense superiority, and displaying that consciousness in a manner that was habitual rather than with the preconceived and deliberately settled purpose of inflicting positive humiliation. But I could not help noticing that though Donald Stuart's demeanour was perfectly respectful towards the Chief, it had a certain gentlemanly ease, bordering even upon dignity,—as if Mr. Stuart had the inward consciousness that his own natural nobility of intellect was not very far from being a complete set-off against the Chief's pride of descent and position of wealth and influence.

"Mr. Stuart," Inch Methglin went on to say, after having bidden me remain in the room, 'my pledge was solemnly given: it was a sacred one, and must be religiously kept. I have expressed my thanks for your gallant conduct in rescuing my niece and my younger son from watery graves. But thanks are not sufficient to repay you for that conduct. You must name some boon which you require: so that I may acquit myself of my obligation. Otherwise you place me in the position of a debtor; and Inch Methglin," added the Chief proudly, "never can consent to remain a debtor!"

"It's just that," said the Dominie, whom I had not previously noticed as being present, because he had rolled himself up in the deep window-recess which was farthest from the spot where I was standing. "Of course never remain in debt. It's just what I said to a fellow-lodger at Widow Glenbucket's, when he owed three-and-sixpence to his washerwoman——I think it must have been the washerwoman——it couldn't have been the cat's-meat-man. But I shall recollect presently."

"Now, Mr. Stuart, what can I do for you?" demanded the Chief, not deigning to pay the slightest attention to Dominie Clackmannan's interjected inanities.

"Really, Mr. Vennachar," responded Stuart, "I have nothing at the present moment——"

"Address me, if you please, sir, as Inch Methglin," interrupted the Chief, drawing himself up with stateliest hauteur.

"It's just that," said the Dominie. "People would have to call me Clackmannanauchnish, if my kinsman Knockmedownarder, the head of the family, were to pay the debt of nature. And that's what I said one day to Saltcoats——"

"What were you about to observe, Mr. Stuart?" inquired the Chief.

"I was about to say, sir," replied the tutor, "that there is nothing at this present moment which I can ask; and if you will be kind enough to reserve your pledge, giving me permission to name a boon at some future time——"

"If you persist, Mr. Stuart, in this course," said Inch Methglin, "I must submit. It would be ungenerous in me to press you upon the point after your conduct of yesterday. But while I hold myself bound to fulfil my pledge at some short time hence—for you must not make the interval long—you will of course understand that my promise has its limits to that which may be rationally and reasonably conceded."

"Rest assured, Inch Methglin," rejoined Stuart, "that I view the matter in precisely the same light."

"It's just that," interposed the Dominie: "for of course you must not think of asking Inch Methglin to give you his castle—nor his estate—nor his niece in marriage—nor his two little sons to wait upon you as slaves—nor yet to order me to row you about in a barge——for if such were to be the case, we should both go to the bottom. And that puts me in mind of what happened to Saltcoats——"

"Mr. Clackmannan has *for once*," said the Chief, emphasizing the words of qualification, "spoken to the purpose. My pledge, Mr. Stuart, extends not to any such unreasonable things as Mr. Clackmannan of Clackmannanauchnish has specified."

"I understand full well, sir," answered Mr. Stuart, upon whose countenance a deep blush had

suddenly mantled when the Dominie, in his intense stupidity, had alluded to the possibility of the tutor demanding Emmeline's hand in marriage. The words, though unmeaningly thrown out, were indeed but too significant — though neither the Dominie nor the Chief comprehended how accurately the random arrow hit its mark. As for the blush, Inch Methglin did not seem to observe it: or if he did, he considered it to be of no moment. Mr. Stuart, with a distant and somewhat dignified bow, issued forth from the library,—bestowing upon me the wonted nod and smile as I opened the door to give him egress.

"Now, Joseph," said the Chief of Inch Methglin, beckoning me to approach the table at which he was seated, "give me an account of the results of your expedition to Carrondale."

"All the intelligence that it is necessary to report, sir," was my answer, "may be summed up in a very few words. The impression in the neighbourhood is by no means so favourable to the cause of the mortgagees, as the Perthshire newspaper represented: and as for the mortgagees themselves, when they went to Carrondale the other day, they did not remain there long—for the villagers rose in a body against them, and drove them out of the place."

"Then you learnt nothing, Joseph, of the plans of the mortgagees?" exclaimed the Chief, with an expression of annoyance in his countenance,—"I mean, supposing they do succeed in their lawsuit."

"After the reception, sir, which those persons experienced at the village," I rejoined, "it was by no means likely they would be over-communicative to any persons there."

"Well," said the Chief, still with an air of vexation, "you have done your best, and could do no more."

"It's just that," interposed the Dominie; "and if Sir Alexander Carrondale does get possession of his rights——"

"His rights, Mr. Clackmannan?" exclaimed Inch Methglin indignantly: "he has no rights, sir!"

"It's just that," answered the Dominie, with the cool indifference of indolent stupidity: "if he gets his wrongs, it won't be Joseph's fault."

"Young man," continued the Chief, addressing himself to me, his countenance wearing a residue of that stern indignation which the Dominie's remarks had conjured up,—"you yesterday saved the life of my son Ivor: and at the present moment Inch Methglin is your debtor."

"I can assure you, sir," I answered, somewhat hastily—for I recollected how very averse the Chief was to be held in the light of debtor at all: "I have no such idea. I merely performed a duty——"

"To be sure!" interjected the Dominie: "just as my friend and kinsman Baillie Owlhead of the Gallowgate, Aberdeen, performed his duty when he tumbled into the horsepond——No, it couldn't be that—I mean when he sent that rascal Whistlebinkie to the Tolbooth for kicking him into the pond. How it all ended, I forget at the moment; but I shall recollect presently:"—and Mr. Clackmannan took snuff for two minutes without ceasing.

"Young man," continued the Chief, "I am your debtor—and I do not choose to remain so. Let me have no more words upon the subject. This purse contains fifty guineas: they are your's. Not another syllable! It is the Chief of Inch Methglin's way of acquitting himself; and you are bound to submit."

I dared not offer any farther remonstrance—though it really went against my scruples to receive a money-reward for having saved a human life. I took the purse—expressed my acknowledgments—and was about to retire, when the Chief, recollecting something, called me back.

"One word, young man," he said. "I am not about to scold you; because what my son Mr. Lennox just now mentioned to me, has been already pardoned by him. You received my instructions to attend upon my niece Miss Vennachar in her frequent visits to the village; but the last time you followed Miss Vennachar, you displayed a certain degree of negligence, which must not occur again. Remember, I am not upbraiding you now: I am merely condescending to remind you that my instructions must be obeyed to the very letter. Another time see that you idle not at shop-windows—but do your duty, and attend properly on my niece."

The Chief waved his hand imperiously towards the door; and I retired from the library without uttering another word. I had however received, in this last incident, an additional proof of Lennox Vennachar's jealousy in respect to Donald Stuart: for it was of course evident that he had said enough to his father to induce the latter to give me the positive instructions which I had just received.

The weather had changed since the preceding day: the rain was falling in torrents—the family and the guests remained in-doors. The weather continued thus unpropitious for the four or five days following; and when it cleared up, the guests took their departure. There was again a lull at Inch Methglin. I was now anxious to avail myself of the possession of means for the purpose of remitting to the kind-hearted Dutch Captain at Rotterdam the money he had advanced me; and I resolved to have recourse once more to the Chief's factor in the village. I was about to set off one afternoon, as soon as the weather had cleared up and the guests had taken their departure,—when I bethought me that having received such special instructions from both father and son in respect to Miss Vennachar, I had better inquire of her whether she needed my services before I absented myself for an hour or two? I accordingly proceeded to the drawing-room—where I found her seated with a book, while the Chief was engaged with a newspaper, and the Dominie was dozing on an ottoman in the corner. Lennox, I knew, had gone out for a ride on horseback.

"If you please, Miss," I said, "do you require my attendance this afternoon?"

"You are a good young man, Joseph," said the Chief, bending upon me a condescending look of approval. "Emmeline, my dear," he continued, turning to his niece, "you have not been out for some days; and a little excursion will do you good. It is really almost too bad of Lennox not to have asked you to walk or ride with him."

"Lennox asked me to ride, uncle," responded Miss Vennachar: "but I did not feel well."

"The very reason," exclaimed the Chief, "why a little walk will do you good. Besides, when I spoke to you the other day in a certain strain, I did not mean you to renounce altogether your visits to the village-school."

"Then I will go, uncle," said the young lady: and addressing me with her wonted air of kindness, she observed, "I shall be ready, Joseph, in about ten minutes."

"It's just that," said the Dominie. "And now I bethink me, I will do myself the pleasure of accompanying Miss Emmeline as far as the village: for the last snuff I bought there was not of the usual sort. If my friend Saltcoats were here, I should have a good pinch out of his mull. And that reminds me——"

I heard no more: for I now quitted the room, to wait for Miss Vennachar in the hall. In about ten minutes she descended, followed by the Dominie, who was endeavouring to recollect some anecdote which he had just commenced. We reached the jetty, and entered the boat. During the transit across the lake, Mr. Clackmannan recollected the proposal which he had made to the Chief relative to a bridge.

"You see, Miss Emmeline," he said, "if your uncle could but be persuaded to build this bridge, it would be a very great convenience. I for one should like it amazingly—and so would my friend Saltcoats, if he came to see me. Ah, by the bye, I wish that it had been my good luck to rescue Lochiel the other day. And that reminds me of a little anecdote——"

"But why, Mr. Clackmannan," inquired Miss Vennachar, "did you express that wish?"

"It's just that," responded the Dominie. "Don't you see, Miss Emmeline, the Chief pledged himself to grant whatsoever might in reason be demanded of him, by the individual who saved

Lochiel. Now, if I had been the fortunate deliverer, I should certainly, in claiming the boon, have insisted upon the building of the bridge. And now I bethink me, it was Mr. Stuart who saved Lochiel——I wrote to Saltcoats and also to Baillie Owlhead——I would have written to the worthy Widow Glenbucket, only she's dead——"

Here the Dominie interrupted himself to take a pinch of snuff; and I could not help noticing that the mention of Donald Stuart's name in connexion with that gallant exploit, conjured up a blush of mingled tenderness and pleasure to the lovely Emmeline's cheeks.

"How foolish it was of me the other day," resumed the Dominie, "when Mr. Stuart so positively refused to name any boon at present, not to have dropped him a hint about the bridge. I don't think Baillie Owlhead of the Gallowgate would have neglected such an opportunity to accomplish a good purpose. It was very stupid of me! I remember I told Mr. Stuart of several things that he might not ask; but I did not tell him what he ought to demand. And, by the bye, Miss Emmeline, I said amongst other things that he must not have the impudence to demand your hand in marriage——"

"Look, Mr. Clackmannan!" said the blushing girl, speaking hastily, but full of confusion, "how beautiful the Inch appears from the middle of the loch!"

"It's just that," rejoined the Dominie: "but it would look much better from the top of a bridge. Of course I told Donald Stuart that he must not aspire to your hand—because I not only knew that he has neither family nor fortune, but also that you are as deep in love with your cousin Lennox as a young lady can be. And this reminds me of what I said to Saltcoats——"

But here the Dominie's anecdote was nipped in the very bud, by the circumstance of a little gust of wind blowing the contents of his snuff-box into his face: so that it occupied some minutes for him to wipe the powder out of his eyes, which it left all bleared and watery. I pitied Miss Vennachar while the obtuse old Dominie was dwelling at more than his usual length upon topics which must have been so painful for her; and I could not therefore commiserate the Dominie on account of the incident of the snuff-box, because it so fortunately cut short his prating.

The bank was reached: Mr. Clackmannan offered his arm to Miss Vennachar; and I followed at a little distance. On entering the village, the Dominie separated from her to enter the tobacconist's shop; and when he had disappeared from view, I accosted Emmeline, saying, "If you please, Miss, I have a little business to attend to on my own account. May I crave half-an-hour's leisure while you are at the school?"

She looked hard at me for a few moments, while the colour went and came upon her cheeks: but I retained a perfect command over my own countenance—because I would not for the world humiliate her by suffering her to think that I, a mere menial, knew the secret of her love, and that I was studiously affording her an opportunity to meet her lover.

"You know, Joseph," she answered, in a slightly tremulous tone, "that my uncle's orders are positive——"

"But when I am in attendance upon you, Miss," I interjected, "I conceive that *your* orders are paramount. I hope you will grant me half-an-hour. I have a certain payment to make elsewhere: it must in honour be made—and I am going to ask the Chief's factor to remit the money for me."

"In that case, Joseph," responded Emmeline, "you can of course go. Perhaps you will wait for me in the neighbourhood of the church when you have finished your business."

I hastened away, perfectly well assured that Mr. Stuart—who had left the Castle before us—would not fail to be on the watch, and that the lovers would enjoy the pleasure of at least a few minutes' meeting. I proceeded to the factor's, and explained to him what I wanted. He undertook the commission with his wonted urbanity, and without asking me any questions as to my reasons for remitting a sum of money to a person at Rotterdam. I sauntered back to the village, and deposited in the post-office a letter which I had written to the Dutch captain, advising him of the remittance, and renewing the expressions of my gratitude for all the kindness I had received at his hands. As I came forth from the little shop where the letter-box was kept, whom should I suddenly run against but Mr. Duncansby! The worthy lawyer could not believe his eyes when he beheld me apparelled in a livery-garb; and I felt so overwhelmed with shame and confusion, that I wished the earth would open to swallow me up. The thoughts which naturally swept through my brain, were to the effect that he would be deeply indignant at my conduct in placing myself on a footing of equality with him on the two occasions that we had previously met; and moreover, that he would regard me as a vile spy on the Chief of Inch Methglin's part at the time that I fell in with him at Carrondale. He stared at me in a sort of stupid amazement: his lock, naturally so good-humoured, grew severe; and he said, "So, young man, it is now no secret how you came to be a *visitor*"—and he ironically accentuated the word—"at Inch Methglin."

"Mr. Duncansby," I said, recovering my self-possession, "I beseech you not to misjudge me! Pray listen for a few moments while I explain."

"Well, well," said the worthy lawyer, softening somewhat, "I took you all along for a straightforward young man; and I hope that I shall have no reason to alter my opinion."

"You will not, sir—believe me that you will not!" I exclaimed. "You treated me kindly—and not for the world could I have proved ungrateful for your goodness, nor for the confidence you to a certain extent reposed in me."

"It's just that," observed Duncansby. "I don't care about your passing yourself off as something you were not: but if I thought you had striven to worm yourself into my confidence on certain points——However, come in here, young man, and we will talk it over."

Thus speaking, he hastily led the way into the little village inn: and entering a parlour, sat down, bidding me take a chair likewise.

"You remember, Mr. Duncansby," I said, "we first met at Perth; and you proposed that I should accompany you in a chaise as far as Carrondale. I was going to tell you at the time that the indi-

vidual whom you thus addressed, was but a humble one——"

"Well, I understand!" interrupted Duncansby: "you did not think it worth while, for the short space we should be together. Quite right! God bless you, young man, there was no harm in that. I really liked you: and by the bye, you must have been well brought up—your language is good—your manners too——"

"I was genteelly brought up, sir," I answered: and the tears started into my eyes as I thought of the past.

"Come, come—I didn't mean to say anything to annoy you," exclaimed the good-natured attorney. "I don't think any the worse of you for earning the bread of honest industry. All good people do *that* in different ways. But about the little visit of your's to Carrondale? Of course I see that you wear Inch Methglin's livery: were you not in his service then?"

"I was, sir," I answered: and my looks steadily met those of the lawyer. "A few words will explain. Mr. Vennachar despatched me, in plain clothes, to Carrondale to make certain inquiries. I could not refuse the mission: but I take heaven to witness that I resolved to execute it in a way that, whatever intelligence I might obtain, should not be prejudicial to the interests of Sir Alexander Carrondale. Indeed, it was not my purpose to pry impertinently into that unfortunate gentleman's affairs; and when I went back to Inch Methglin, I simply told the Chief that Sir Alexander's chance of gaining the lawsuit was by no means so desperate as the Perthshire journals had represented, and that his name was revered by every one upon his estate."

"I believe you, young man—I believe you!" exclaimed Duncansby, evidently quite rejoiced that he could thus think well of me again.

"I can assure you, sir," I continued, "that my sympathies on behalf of Sir Alexander Carrondale are, if possible, stronger than ever. The more I hear of the rancour of feuds and animosities between clans and chiefs, the more I detest them. I have even risked giving offence occasionally to some of my fellow-servants for speaking out too freely on these and similar subjects. I like the Highlanders, all save in respect to their pride and that spirit of partizanship which sustains evil feelings between one great house and another."

"It's just that," said the lawyer. "The Highlanders are a noble people—but they have their failings as well as all others. We are now complete friends again; and I can assure you that I have no undue pride. So if you have time and will take a social glass with me——"

"I thank you, sir," was my response; "but I am unable to tarry any longer. Believe me, I am rejoiced to know that you do not think ill of me! It would deeply grieve me if it were otherwise."

"God bless you, young man," exclaimed Duncansby, "after all you have told me, I think better of you than ever. I dare say you are surprised to see me at Inch Methglin: but I have got a little business to transact here. I need not say that perhaps it would be as well if you did not mention over at the castle, that the lawyer engaged on behalf of Sir Alexander Carrondale had paid the village a visit."

"Not for the world!" I ejaculated. "And now I must take my leave——"

"You would like me to tell you," interrupted the lawyer, "how the Carrondale affairs get on. The mortgagees are determined to make the boldest possible stand: they will not listen to a compromise; and so we shall have a hard fight for it in the law-courts soon. My hope is neither stronger nor weaker than it was when last I saw you. In a few months the thing will be settled in one way or another; and you are certain to hear of the result."

"I can promise you, Mr. Duncansby," I answered, "that I have so far identified my feelings with this remarkable case, that if you do succeed I shall be infinitely rejoiced."

The worthy lawyer shook me kindly by the hand: and I issued forth from the village tavern. An hour had by this time elapsed since I parted from Miss Vennachar: and I bent my way towards the church, where I was to meet the young lady. She was not to be seen; and as I strolled round the building, I beheld Lennox on horseback riding at a little distance. He was coming along the road from which diverged the lane where the lovers were wont to meet. If they were about to separate in that lane, Lennox would see them. A few instants more—and they would be lost! The recollection of all his jealous apprehensions swept through my mind; and in a moment I balanced these two alternatives—namely, whether it were better to let them be seen together by Lennox, or whether it were preferable to subject them to such humiliation as would be inflicted by the knowledge that I was aware of their secret. The latter at once struck me as being the wiser and the kinder course to pursue. Not a minute was to be lost, I repeat;—and dashing through the hedge, I sprang into the lane.

I was not deceived. Donald Stuart and Emmeline Vennachar were there, at a little distance, but quite visible from the road along which Lennox was fortunately walking his horse very slowly. The lovers did not perceive me: neither did the noise I made in springing through the hedge, reach their ears. Emmeline, as if overcome by her feelings, was supported by Donald's arm, which was thrown round her waist; and he was no doubt breathing in her ears such encouraging and cheering words as a lover is wont to breathe, even when hope is far more distant than he chooses to represent it. Such was the scene which met my view, and which my glance embraced in a moment.

"It's just that," I heard a voice saying close behind me; and looking round, I beheld the Dominie, who had that instant entered the lane from the road.

At the same moment the lovers caught sight of us both; and Donald Stuart, recovering his self-possession quick as thought, took off his hat as if making a respectfully formal bow to Miss Vennachar, and hurried along the lane in the contrary direction from the road. I hastened towards the young lady, and said in a quick voice, "Mr. Lennox is riding by on horseback!"

Emmeline was covered with confusion at the instant I thus accosted her; but the next moment she drew herself up proudly, and flung upon me a look of severest reproach mingled with haughtiest

indignation: for the first impression evidently was that I had been set to espy her. But that impression vanished as quickly as it was formed, when I spoke those words which were sufficiently significant, and were accompanied too with a meaning glance, to show that I was warning her of Lennox Vennachar's presence close at hand. Then her look, changing in a moment, convinced me that she understood my kindness and that she thanked me for it.

All that I have just been describing occupied but a quarter of a minute; and Lennox Vennachar rode past the end of the lane without turning his eyes up it; but, on the contrary, he was gazing at the moment in just the opposite direction. Then he put spurs to his steed; and the quick tramplings of the horse's hoofs, as the animal careered through the village, reached our ears. Dominie Clackmannan had stopped short at a distance of about twenty yards from the spot where Donald and Emmeline so abruptly parted; and as I glanced back, I perceived Mr. Clackmannan taking pinch after pinch of snuff as if in bewilderment at the scene which he had beheld.

"Joseph," said Miss Vennachar with a blush still upon her cheeks and bashful confusion in her looks, "what must you think of me?"

"Everything that is good, Miss," I answered, in the most respectful manner.

"You have discovered a secret, Joseph," she went on to say, timidly and hesitatingly.

"I have known it, Miss, for a long time," was my response.

"Ah!" she murmuringly ejaculated, with the air of one upon whose comprehension a sudden light breaks: for she doubtless comprehended in a moment all the past phases of my conduct.

"The best proof, Miss Vennachar," I observed, "that I have not betrayed what I knew, is that you have never had cause to believe I have given way to idle gossip or mean and cowardly scandal on the subject."

"No," she rejoined, in a low sweet tone, in which there was nevertheless a gush of enthusiastic gratitude: "you have endured blame and reproach——Ah! I understand now all that I considered strange and mysterious in your conduct!"—and with another look did she thank me. "But Mr. Clackmannan—how came he here at this moment?"

"I know not, Miss. From the eminence where the church stands, I saw Mr. Lennox riding along; and I hastened to warn you. Not for worlds would I otherwise have suffered you to understand that the secret was known to me! But I thought that to give you such warning was the lesser evil of the two——"

"Yes, yes, Joseph—and I thank you, sincerely thank you! And now, think not the worse of me if you hear me tell Mr. Clackmannan some tale——"

She meant a tale to account for her being seen supported by the arm of Donald Stuart: but her natural feelings of maidenly shame and bashfulness would not permit her to conclude the sentence.

This hurried dialogue between Miss Vennachar and myself, and which was carried on in whispering voices, occupied far less time than it has taken to describe; and the old Dominie still stood riveted to the spot twenty yards distant, in a sort of stolid stupefaction,—his snuff-box in one hand—and the other, as if paralyzed, about two inches from his nose, the finger and thumb holding a pinch. Miss Vennachar now approached him,—I following her at a very short distance.

"Give me your arm, Mr. Clackmannan," she said, in a sort of coaxing tone. "I had a fall just now——"

"It's just that," observed the Dominie, at length recovering from his stupid bewilderment and relaxing from his statue-like attitude. "I thought it must have been something of the sort: for I remember one day, when I entered my lodging in the Grassmarket, Edinburgh, somewhat unexpectedly, I found the Widow Glenbucket supported in the arms of my friend Saltcoats; and he said——what was it that he said?——I shall recollect presently——Oh! that she had tripped over the rug and had knocked her face against the fender. I knew it must be so, because the poor creature's cheeks were so very red."

This was the longest and completest anecdote I had ever as yet heard issue from Dominie Clackmannan's lips; and he seemed both proud and rejoiced, but in his own stolid manner, at having achieved so great a triumph over the sluggishness of his memory. He put the pinch of snuff to his nose with one hand, the snuff-box into his pocket with the other; and then offered Miss Vennachar his arm.

"You spoke of tripping over a rug, Mr. Clackmannan," resumed the young lady; "but it is still more awkward to trip over a stone—as I did just now."

"It's just that," said the Dominie; "and perhaps it was very fortunate Mr. Stuart happened to be by."

I saw Miss Vennachar glance towards Mr. Clackmannan's countenance, as if to discover whether there was any covert irony in his speech: but I am sure that she might have saved herself any anxiety on that score—for the old Dominie was far too obtuse, and also too simple-minded as well as naturally good-natured, to have any such intention.

"But how was it," he inquired, "that Mr. Stuart happened to be there at the instant?"

"Oh! I presume he was taking a walk in that direction," replied Emmeline. "But perhaps, Mr. Clackmannan, it would be better that you would not mention the circumstance at the castle——"

"It's just that," interrupted the Dominie; "for the Chief might think you were much more hurt than you really are. That was exactly the case with Widow Glenbucket. I fancied she was half killed: but five minutes afterwards, she seemed as if nothing had occurred. So I said to Saltcoats——What was it that I said? I shall recollect presently."

The village was threaded; and as we were approaching the jetty, Mr. Clackmannan said to me, "Now that I bethink me, Joseph, you tumbled out of a hedge at the very instant I entered the lane."

"I was going to gather some wild roses," I answered; "and seeing Miss Vennachar fall, I of course jumped down to render assistance: but Mr. Stuart, who happened to be walking past at the moment, anticipated me."

"It's just that," said the Dominie. "Of course it's the duty of the tutor to exhibit all possible attentions; and if it weren't that Miss Emmeline would rather the thing should not be mentioned, I should consider it incumbent on me to inform the Chief of Mr. Stuart's readily administered good offices."

We entered the boat; and during the transit, Miss Vennachar looked pensive as well as grieved. Methought, too, that mingled with that expression, there was a certain sense of humiliation; and I concluded that it arose even more from the fact of having been compelled to utter a few falsehoods to the Dominie, than from the circumstance that I was acquainted with the secret of her love for the humble tutor. We reached the opposite jetty, and bent our way to the castle—which we reached some time before the return of Lennox Vennachar, as he had to make a long circuit, so as to round the extremity of the loch and enter the Inch by way of the isthmus.

On the following day, when I happened to meet Mr. Stuart in the afternoon, as he was leaving the castle at the usual hour, he stopped and spoke to me in the kindest manner. His demeanour towards me had always been most affable and condescending: but now there was a positive friendliness in it. I rather wondered at this; for I could not conceive that during the day he had found any opportunity of speaking alone to Miss Vennachar—so that I did not think it was from her lips he had received the assurance that I was not a spy upon their actions, but a friend secretly serving them according to my humble capacity. But then, perhaps, he gave me credit for this; and inasmuch as he had heard nothing said at the castle of the previous day's adventure in the lane, it was natural he should conclude that I had kept it secret and that the Dominie had been cajoled over into silence.

These were the conjectures with which I accounted for his exceeding friendliness towards me.

CHAPTER XLV.

THE EXCURSION.

Upwards of two months passed without any incident worthy of mention. Lennox Vennachar became far more assiduous towards his fair cousin than he ever was previous to the awakening of his jealousy. He rode out with her—he accompanied her in her walks—he went with her to the village-school: and during this entire interval, she never once had an opportunity of proceeding alone, or attended by me only, to Methglin. It was generally understood likewise that the marriage was to take place between Lennox and Emmeline in the early part of December; and as it was now the beginning of September, a period of three months alone remained for the evolvement of circumstances that should decide the young lady's fate. I trembled for her—and I pitied her: I felt deeply likewise for Mr. Stuart,—at the same time wondering whether they entertained any hopes, and if so, to what intentions they might lead. Methought that Emmeline's cheeks grew paler, and that a certain degree of pensiveness was deepening in her looks: methought also that Mr. Stuart had at times a desponding air—at other moments that he seemed excited — and he was assuredly often abstracted; for I had frequent opportunities of judging, inasmuch as whenever accident threw me in his way, he invariably stopped to speak.

During the period which I have described as thus elapsing since the last occurrences at the village, there had been numerous guests at the castle: but now, at the beginning of September, the spacious mansion was once more comparatively quiet again. One morning, the weather being supremely beautiful in that autumn season, the Chief decided upon a boating excursion to the extremity of the loch. The state-barge was ordered to be manned with its twelve rowers: the whole family was to proceed on the trip. Mr. Stuart was to go to take charge of Ivor and Lochiel: Cameron and I were to be in attendance to serve the cold collation, which was to be partaken of in a tent to be erected in some convenient spot. It was about ten o'clock in the morning when we set off. The Chief and the Dominie, Lennox and Emmeline, Mr. Stuart with Ivor and Lochiel, occupied the cushioned seats in the splendid barge: Cameron and I were placed a little nearer to the stern, but so close to the Chief and his family that we could not avoid overhearing all their conversation. This was the first time since I had been at Inch Methglin, that I had ever seen Donald Stuart in company with the whole of the family; and I knew full well that the position of the two lovers must be awkward and embarrassing enough. They dared not exchange a single glance of tenderness: they must study all their words and looks; and what was more galling still, Emmeline was compelled to receive the attentions of her cousin Lennox, whilst Stuart was equally constrained to sit by and behold what thus passed.

"The weather is superb, and the country everywhere looks beautiful," observed the Chief, thus breaking a pause which had ensued in the conversation: and as he spoke, he cast his eyes slowly around with the proud satisfaction of one who felt that all he looked upon of hill and dale, grove and forest, mansion, villages, and homesteads, was his own. "A fairer scene than this," he continued, "the Highlands cannot afford."

"No—it is superb!" remarked Lennox, likewise gazing around with the prideful aspect of one who knew that all he looked upon was destined to be his inheritance. "The domain is vast: but if circumstances prove favourable, it may yet be larger."

"And larger it shall be," said the Chief, who penetrated the meaning of his son's words, "if there be an opportunity of purchasing any of the lands of Carrondale. By the bye, Mr. Stuart," he added, turning towards the tutor, "I know you always read the newspapers very carefully: have you seen anything in them of late, respecting the Carrondale lawsuit?"

"Nothing of any consequence, Inch Methglin," replied Donald: and then he added, after a few moments, "except what you yourself know—that the case will come finally before the law-courts in the month of October."

"Then a few weeks," said the Chief, "will decide the great question. I wonder what has become of Sir Alexander Carrondale."

"It's just that," said the Dominie: "for no one knows. Some declare that he is serving in the English army abroad, as a subaltern officer and under another name. And that reminds me that the Laird of Tintosquashdale has lately changed his name into Shankspindles, the inheritance of which property he has acquired. I wrote to my friend Saltcoats about it——And what was it that I said? I forget now: I shall recollect presently."

"Other persons," resumed the Chief, "insist that so far from Sir Alexander Carrondale being abroad, he is concealed somewhere in Scotland, watching the progress of his lawsuit. When I use the word *concealed*, I mean that he is veiling his identity under some fictitious name; and doubtless his proud heart swells in bitterness at the obscurity and poverty in which he must be plunged."

"And it may be," said Lennox Vennachar, "that he has no family pride left in his heart at all: for whatsoever bringing-up he may have enjoyed, must have been the result of eleemosynary charity."

"It's just that," said the Dominie: "for when a man has got nothing of his own, he must live upon what other people give him. This is as self-evident as the fact that if you tumble into the lake, you are sure to come out wringing wet. Ah! now I bethink me, you young gentlemen," continued Mr. Clackmannan, addressing himself to Ivor and Lochiel, "must not think of taking oars to-day; for it would be very inconvenient for the boat to be swamped at this distance from land. That was an exciting scene which took place about three months back: I shall never forget how you dashed in, Mr. Stuart, and rescued first Miss Emmeline—then Lochiel——"

"Pray, Mr. Clackmannan," exclaimed Lennox angrily, "do not recal such unpleasant recollections:"—and the countenance of the Chief's son was fiery red at this mention of Donald Stuart's gallant exploits.

"It's just because what might have been a tragedy, turned out a comedy," said the Dominie, "that I allude to it. Indeed, the other day when I had nothing better to do, I sat down for three hours on a bench near the loch, thinking of that scene. Do you know, Mr. Stuart, you behaved very well? and though I lost my snuff-box on the occasion—which I regretted, as it was the gift of my friend Mucklenose——No, it must have been my relative Knockmedownarder——"

"Well, well, Mr. Clackmannan," ejaculated Lennox angrily, "do turn your conversation on something else. Mr. Stuart does not wish to be complimented to his face."

"It's just that," said the obtuse old Dominie. "And now I bethink me, Inch Methglin, you have never fulfilled your pledge to Mr. Stuart——"

"Mr. Stuart knows perfectly well," interrupted the Chief proudly, "that he has only to name the boon he craves at my hands—and which must be within the limits of reason—in order to have it granted at once."

"It's just that," resumed the Dominie. "And now I bethink me, if I were Mr. Stuart I would ask you to build a bridge across the loch——"

"Mr. Clackmannan, I am surprised at you!" interrupted the Chief sternly.

"It's just that," responded the Dominie. "Saltcoats was one day very much surprised when I told him that I did not like collops. But when I bethink me that Mr. Stuart is yet unrewarded for his services——Ah! and this reminds me, too, of his very dutiful attention on another occasion——You know what I mean, Miss Emmeline."

The young lady became all in an instant violently agitated and confused: a crimson blush mantled on her cheeks, leaving them the next moment as pale as marble—so that Lennox Vennachar, with the eagle-eyes of jealous suspicion, gazed upon her with mingled astonishment and distrust.

"Now that the incident is past and gone," continued the obtuse old Dominie, rolling himself round upon his seat as he took a pinch of snuff,—"and that no evil consequences ensued from the fall——"

"Mr. Clackmannan," said Emmeline hastily—and it must have cost her an immense effort to regain her self-possession,—"you will have all the snuff in your eyes: for a breeze is springing up——"

"A breeze, Emmeline?" ejaculated Lennox, in a tone of mocking irony blended with a visibly concentrated rage: "there is not the faintest zephyr!"

"It's just that," resumed the Dominie. "But as I was saying, it was indeed very fortunate that while Joseph was gathering wild roses up in a hedge—just for all the world as if he had hidden himself there——Ah! and now I bethink me, Mr. Lennox, you rode by the end of the lane at the very instant: but you did not see what was taking place. I wrote to my friend Saltcoats——"

"Perdition take Saltcoats!" ejaculated Lennox fiercely. "What is it that you are talking about?"—and his looks travelled, with a sort of feverish rage and furious jealousy, from the countenance of the Dominie to that of Emmeline—thence to the features of Stuart—and back again to Emmeline's.

Oh! how I longed to knock the contents of the stupid old Dominie's snuff-box up into his eyes—or roll him over the gunwale into the water, to give him a good ducking for his obtuse and pig-headed perverseness. I saw that a storm was imminent: it was already on the point of bursting forth on the part of Lennox Vennachar. The Chief himself looked grave and severe: Emmeline was trembling visibly with agitation: Mr. Stuart was pale, and the glitter of uneasiness was in his eyes.

"My dear Mr. Lennox," observed the Dominie, "it's not just that. If you knew Saltcoats, you would not wish him evil. See him over a dish of collops and a bottle of wine by his side—and you would love that man! But what were we talking of?"

"Miss Vennachar's fall in some lane," said Lennox, with as much anxious curiosity as jealous spite. "And you say I was riding by——"

"It's just that," answered the Dominie. "I remember I was seized with amazement at what I saw: but I glanced over my shoulder on hearing the sounds of a horse's hoofs—and I beheld you. You were looking in another direction. Perhaps you were wondering what there would be for

dinner—as I often do—and as my friend Saltcoats——"

"Mr. Clackmannan, you are unpardonable with that wretched Saltcoats!" ejaculated Lennox.

"The incident to which Mr. Clackmannan alludes," said Donald Stuart, now interposing in a calmly dignified as well as easy and well-bred manner, "is readily and simply explained. Miss Vennachar tripped and fell: I happened to be near——"

"Oh, you *happened* to be near?" exclaimed Lennox, with bitter irony. "And where was Joseph?"

"It's just that," said the Dominie: "he tumbled out of a hedge. Of course I did not mention it at the time—because Miss Emmeline said that I had better not: but now that it's past and gone——"

"And you stood gazing in amazement, did you, Mr. Clackmannan?" inquired Lennox. "What! amazement at so simple an occurrence!" he added sneeringly, but his voice sounded hollow.

"Ah! but at the first appearance," replied the stupid old Dominie, continuing to take snuff at intervals, and not for a moment perceiving one atom of the mighty mischief he was creating,—"at the first appearance it did of course look odd to see a young lady in the arms of a paid tutor: but when it was all explained, it was natural enough."

"Explained, I presume, by Miss Vennachar herself?" said Lennox, with another malignant sneer.

"We will say no more upon the subject," observed the Chief sternly: for he evidently liked this revelation almost as little as did his son.

Fortunately the barge reached the end of the lake at this moment; and the landing was effected. The bargemen put up the tent in the course of a few minutes: Cameron and I spread the collation; and as we were doing so, my companion whispered to me, "What was it all about, Joseph, that the Dominie was talking of?"

"A very simple and trivial circumstance," I responded.

"I am afraid Mr. Lennox does not exactly view it in that light," rejoined Cameron. "But of course it is silly to be jealous: for Miss Emmeline never could have entertained a thought of a poor miserable tutor, without family or fortune. You can go now and say that the repast is ready."

I went forth from the tent. Mr. Stuart and his two pupils were standing gazing at the water: the Chief and Mr. Clackmannan were sauntering at a little distance: Lennox and Emmeline were walking in another direction—but not arm-in-arm, and I thought by their manner that not a word was passing between them. Having told the Chief first, and Mr. Stuart next, that the repast was served, I approached Lennox and Emmeline, who were farther off than the rest; and as I drew near, I observed that the features of the Chief's son wore a scowling expression, mingled with injured pride and jealous wrath: while Emmeline looked deeply desponding and pensive.

"The collation is served," I said.

"Very well," ejaculated Lennox quickly—even savagely. "Be off with you!—we shall follow."

Yet ere I turned aside, I caught the rapid glance of sympathy which Miss Vennachar threw upon me on account of this brutal treatment, for which we both full well understood the cause. In a few minutes the whole party was assembled in the tent, where the repast was spread upon a portable table contrived for such purposes, and around which a sufficient number of camp-stools were placed. The seats were taken in silence: a damp had been thrown upon the spirits of all, save and except Dominie Clackmannan and the two boys,—the former being too stolid and the latter too young to comprehend the mischief that had arisen. As for Mr. Clackmannan, he was soon deep into the mysteries of a raised pie; and when he found it to contain veal, ham, and sausage-meat, he gave his usual exclamation of "It's just that!"

"Mr. Stuart," suddenly exclaimed Lennox, "you will take your place, sir, at the table when we have finished."

The tutor started up, crimson with indignation; and for a moment methought that some retort of prideful wrath was about to burst from his lips: but if so, on a second thought he kept it back—and addressing himself to the Chief, simply asked, "Was it your purpose, Inch Methglin, to bring me hither as a sort of lacquey?"

"I certainly intended on such an occasion as this, when the ordinary rules of etiquette may be in some way dispensed with, that you should sit down to table with us. But if it be offensive to my son"—and here the Chief glanced towards Lennox—"as a matter of course——"

"Uncle!" ejaculated Emmeline, her generous spirit bursting through all bonds of self-restraint: "it is impossible you can allow such an insult to be put upon one who, if he have no haughty name nor proud fortune, is nevertheless as much a gentleman as my cousin!"

"Emmeline, sit down! I am surprised at you!" said the Chief sternly.

"Oh, this is a day of revelations," exclaimed Lennox, in a renewed tone of mingled rage and irony; "and there is nothing to be astonished at!"

"If my presence be offensive," said Mr. Stuart, "I will immediately withdraw. But I sincerely thank Miss Vennachar for her noble and generous interposition."

"Breathe not the name, sir, of Miss Vennachar!" cried Lennox, springing up in a towering passion. "Such a name is not to be breathed by the lips of one who can only be regarded as a pauper dependant!"

"Pauper dependant, Mr. Vennachar?" said Donald Stuart, his countenance beaming with indignation, and yet with a dignity incomprehensibly noble and striking: "such words would, under other circumstances, merit chastisement. What I receive from your father, I earn honestly."

"It's just that," interposed the Dominie, who in his own way was good-natured enough. "I think you had better let Mr. Stuart sit down and have some of this pie. If Saltcoats were here——"

"Silence, Mr. Clackmannan!" said the Chief sternly. "Mr. Stuart, your services in my family are dispensed with from this moment. Whatsoever is due to you, will be remitted to your lodging."

"You have only given me, Inch Methglin," re-

plied Donald, with an air of such lofty dignity that it seemed for the moment as if he considered himself, by the very nobility of intellect, far superior to the mightiest Chief in all the Highlands—and never did he appear more handsome than he was then, with his tall form drawn up and the colour mantling on his countenance,—"you have only given me that discharge which, after your son's conduct, I should have on my own account demanded."

"This insolence!" ejaculated Lennox Vennachar.

Donald Stuart disdained to notice the impertinent taunt; and with a cold bow to the Chief, he glanced his eyes around, flinging a cordial farewell to me—settling them for a moment expressively upon Emmeline—and then turning them towards the Dominie.

"Good bye, Mr. Clackmannan," he said. "And you, my young pupils," he continued, addressing himself to Ivor and Lochiel, "I wish you all possible happiness."

"Farewell, Mr. Stuart," said Emmeline: and she was advancing with outstretched hand towards the tutor, when Lennox, seizing hold of her arm not merely forcibly, but even with a brutal violence, held her back.

"Unhand me, sir!" she exclaimed proudly: and so startling was the effect of this courageous rebellion against her cousin's tyranny, that his grasp was relaxed in a moment, his arm falling as if palsied by his side.

"Farewell, Mr. Stuart," repeated Emmeline, now advancing towards the tutor, who sprang forward and took the outstretched hand. There was only a moment for the lovers to exchange glances—but there was doubtless a whole world of meaning therein; and in another instant Donald

Stuart, no doubt anxious to avoid the chance of compromising his beloved any farther with her relatives, rushed forth from the tent.

When he had thus disappeared, Miss Vennachar—pale and trembling, evidently much agitated, and, I felt convinced, with difficulty restraining a violent outburst of grief—returned to her seat. Lennox Vennachar, with jealous rage still imprinted upon his countenance, likewise sat down. The Chief looked stern and grave—and his cheek was also pale. The two boys were scarcely able to comprehend a scene which had smitten them with astonishment and grief: for they loved Donald Stuart—and all that they did understand was that he had left, to be their preceptor no more.

"Well," said Dominie Clackmannan, who was the first to break the silence which every one must have felt most awkward and embarrassing, "it's a pity he did not stay to partake of this pie—which is really excellent. And that reminds me, Inch Methglin, that your cook ought to imitate the Widow Glenbucket, who always used to put a clove of garlic into her sausage-meat. Saltcoats said——"

"Mr. Clackmannan," interrupted the Chief sternly, "help yourself to wine—and leave Saltcoats alone for the present."

"It's just that," said the Dominie, as he filled himself a glass of sherry.

"Emmeline," asked the Chief, but speaking coldly and distantly, "what can I serve you? Lennox, you do not attend to your cousin."

"I require nothing," responded the young lady, in a voice that was likewise cold, but clouded as if with the difficulty of keeping back tears and sobs.

"You had better take some refreshment," said Lennox: and *his* voice was deep almost to hollowness—for it was but too evident that the barbed arrow of jealousy was rankling in his heart.

The collation was hastened over by the Chief and Lennox,—Emmeline eating nothing. The two boys however had not lost their appetites: while Dominie Clackmannan appeared as if he thought it imperiously incumbent on him to eat for those who ate not at all.

"Will you take a walk, Emmeline?" asked Lennox, haughtily and distantly, as they rose from table.

"No, I thank you," she replied, with glacial coldness. "I will sit in the barge until we take our departure. I have a book, and shall read."

"But the sun is powerful," said Lennox, biting his lip, which was white with ill-subdued rage.

"I have my parasol," she rejoined: "or the bargemen can put up the awning."

Lennox turned abruptly away, and did not even escort his cousin to the boat.

The Chief accordingly performed that office; and entering the barge also, he remained in conversation with his niece until the moment for departure.

"What a scene!" whispered Cameron to me, when Dominie Clackmannan at length made an end of eating and issued forth from the tent, to which the bargemen were now thronging in order to take their own repast.

"Very painful," I answered.

"Yes—shocking on Donald Stuart's part!" observed Cameron.

"On Mr. Lennox Vennachar's, you mean," I rejoined: but not choosing to argue the subject, I hastened to take my place at the table.

During the row homewards, very little was spoken—unless it were by Dominie Clackmannan, who was now enabled to recite his portions of anecdotes without much interruption. The Chief was grave and thoughtful. Whatever his conversation might have been with his niece, it evidently had not tended to cheer his spirits, nor to lead him into a satisfactory state of mind. As for Lennox, he was haughtily distant for the most part towards his cousin: but every now and then when he did speak a few words, he could not help displaying his bitter feelings by a mocking irony of tone. Once or twice he affected to laugh heartily at something the Dominie said: but there was hollowness in the sound of that laugh—and it was impossible for him to assume an air of indifference. Emmeline kept her eyes fixed upon her book the whole way homeward: but she assuredly was not reading,—for she did not turn the pages more than twice or thrice, and when she did she turned over a dozen at a time.

At length the jetty was reached—the landing was accomplished. I observed that when Lennox reached out his hand to assist Emmeline up the steps, she passed him by without seeming to notice his presence. As the party stepped from the jetty on the bank Lennox turned abruptly away; and the Chief gave his arm to Emmeline. About an hour afterwards I was told that Inch Methglin commanded my presence in the library; and thither I accordingly hastened. He was alone; and notwithstanding his endeavour to conceal his agitation beneath a haughty reserve, it was by no means difficult to discern that he was inwardly troubled.

"Joseph," he said, "you beheld all that took place, and you overheard all that was said, just now. It is a painful thing for me, the Chief of Inch Methglin," he went on proudly to observe, "to be compelled to condescend to question a dependant: but it is necessary I should do so. Tell me, Joseph, exactly what took place on the occasion to which Mr. Clackmannan referred——I mean, in short, the occurrence in the lane."

"It was, sir," I answered, steadily meeting the Chief's searching gaze, "as it was explained. I was in attendance upon Miss Vennachar, walking some distance behind her: I ascended the bank on which the hedge of the churchyard stands, to gather some flowers: I heard a sound, as of some one falling—I sprang down—and beheld Mr. Stuart, who was coming from an opposite direction, raising Miss Vennachar up. At the same moment Mr. Clackmannan entered the lane; and a few instants afterwards Mr. Lennox Vennachar rode by. Mr. Stuart bowed to Miss Vennachar when he had raised her up, and proceeded on his way."

All the time I was giving utterance to this tale, in which many falsehoods were blended with a few truths, the Chief never took his eyes off me. He seemed to be watching as if every word came up from my soul, into the depths of which he sought to penetrate. I must confess that it was with an unblushing effrontery, yet with no outward betrayal of this bold hardihood, that I wove the tissue of mingled fictions and facts: but I did not consider that I was committing any crime in

shielding an amiable and unhappy young lady from the wrath which her uncle would have been sure to vent, had I proclaimed the full truth.

"Enough," said Mr. Vennachar. "You may retire."

When I proceeded, a little before the dinner-hour, to the chamber of Mr. Lennox, to see if he required anything while performing his evening toilet, I found myself treated with that same haughty coldness, not untinctured with brutality, which he had shown towards me on a former occasion. I affected however not to perceive it—and was, if possible, more respectfully civil in my manner and speech than ever. He said not a word in allusion to the same topic on which I had been questioned by his father; he was evidently labouring under what may be termed an ill-subdued and only half-stifled excitement of feeling. He did not detain me long, and dismissed me as if he were speaking to a dog. I am convinced it would have given him pleasure to turn me away on the spot: but his father was perhaps more trustful in my good faith than he was. In short, I conjectured that the Chief firmly believed I had told the exact truth in respect to the scene in the lane—but that Lennox, having all his feelings warped by jealousy, thought far otherwise, and fancied me to be an accomplice in the meeting of Emmeline and Donald Stuart on that occasion.

A month passed: it was now the beginning of October. During these four weeks Lennox Vennachar continued to treat me with the most distant coldness—sometimes with the haughtiest contempt. For the same reason that had before induced me to put up with this conduct on his part, did I endure it now. I was anxious to see how the love-affairs, in some details of which I had been mixed up, would end; and therefore I did my best to keep my situation. Donald Stuart had left the neighbourhood the very day after the scene in the tent: Emmeline seldom stirred out—and when she did, it was only to walk in the garden.

Lennox was almost constantly with her: but I had little opportunity of judging of their mutual demeanour, beyond this—that the young lady looked pale and pensive, scarcely making an effort to conceal her unhappiness; while Lennox appeared, methought, assiduous in working himself into his cousin's good graces.

It was at the expiration of this interval of a month, that I one morning received a letter, the handwriting of which was totally unknown to me: but upon opening it, I found it was from the worthy writer to the signet. Its contents ran as follow:—

"Edinburgh, October 3rd, 1839.

"My young friend,

"I wish to know whether you are still at Inch Methglin; and for this purpose I write. My object is simply to give you to understand that I am so favourably impressed with your good disposition, and therefore so much interested in you, that should circumstances lead to any change in your condition, you may look to me as a friend who will strive to do what he can in your behalf. I purposed to send you some little token of my esteem; but not exactly knowing what would best please you, I beg your acceptance of the enclosed ten pound note; and hope, young man, that you will not feel offended by the nature of the gift.

"Your well-wisher,

"DUNCAN DUNCANSBY."

I was much pleased at finding myself the object of the worthy lawyer's remembrance; and I sat down to answer his letter at once,—expressing my gratitude in suitable terms. I took the letter across to the village, and delivered it at the post-office,—being careful to do this myself, lest any one at the castle should discover that I was in correspondence with the solicitor engaged in the Carrondale suit. For I firmly believe that such discovery would have been regarded by Inch Methglin as an act of treason, and in as evil a light as the conduct of a spy in an enemy's camp.

About a week afterwards I received another letter, and the writing of the address instantaneously struck me as being in a feigned hand. I opened it: it contained a note—and this note was addressed to Miss Vennachar. The letter to me was from Donald Stuart, and ran as follows:—

"Perth, October 10th, 1839.

"Joseph,

"I am convinced that I have not miscalculated the generosity of your nature. I am at no loss to comprehend the kind feelings which actuated you on several occasions in respect to Miss Vennachar and myself. It is of the highest consequence that I should communicate with Miss Vennachar. I have hopes that some change will take place in my position; and without explaining what these hopes are, you can perhaps understand my anxiety to convey to Miss Vennachar the assurance that such hopes *are* entertained, and that there is little fear of their proving visionary. May I ask you to take an opportunity of delivering the enclosed to Miss Vennachar?—and should she wish to answer me, may I farther trespass upon you to take charge of the reply and post it with your own hand? The time may come, Joseph, when I shall be enabled to testify my gratitude. In the meanwhile you will be conferring an immense obligation upon one who wishes you well,

"DONALD STUART."

I felt flattered and happy at being thus regarded as a trustworthy confidant on the part of a young gentleman for whom I entertained so much esteem. I took care to lock up his letter in my box; and with the one for Miss Vennachar in my pocket-book, I descended to the garden, in the hope of finding an opportunity to deliver it. Fortunately I had not long to wait: Emmeline came forth to walk—and for a wonder, Lennox Vennachar was not with her. I accosted her—swept my rapid glances round to assure myself that no one observed us—and hastily producing the note, slipped it into her hand, saying, "It is from Mr. Stuart."

Her countenance became all in a moment agitated with the pleasure excited in her fluttering heart, as well as with mingled trepidation and suspense,—trepidation lest we should have been observed, and suspense as to what the contents of the note might be. All these feelings were as legibly depicted on her countenance, as if she had explained them with the utmost eloquence of words.

"Thank you, Joseph—thank you, from the very bottom of my heart," she said, in a fervid manner.

"Mr. Stuart has charged me to receive your answer, Miss Vennachar," I said quickly; "and I will take it myself to the post-office in the village:"—for I did not doubt for an instant that she *would* reply to her lover's missive: and having so spoken, I hurried away.

About three hours afterwards, I again had an opportunity of seeing Miss Vennachar in the garden. She made a scarcely perceptible sign for me to approach; and as I drew near, I saw that happiness was now depicted upon her countenance. Nevertheless, it was with nervous trepidation she glanced around,—so fearful was she of being observed by her jealous and vigilant cousin. No one was however nigh; she gave me a note—and I hurried away. I thought it better to enclose it in an envelope with my own handwriting; for fear of the effects of any curiosity on the part of the gossiping old couple who kept the village post-office. I likewise penned a few lines to assure Mr. Stuart that I was ever ready to do him whatsoever service might be within the reach of my humble ability. I conveyed the letter, with its enclosure, to the post-office in Methglin; and from that day forth Emmeline's looks improved—her mind was evidently more at ease.

It was in the last week of October that the intelligence was received at Inch Methglin, through the medium of the newspapers, of the commencement of the final hearing of the celebrated Carrondale lawsuit,—a lawsuit which had dragged its slow length through a series of so many years, and in the result of which such vast interests were involved. It appeared, from the statements in the Edinburgh journals, that a formidable array of the very best talent belonging to the Scottish bar, had been marshalled on either side; and that for a long time no legal process had created such immense excitement in the Scottish capital. But it was tolerably evident that the public sympathies preponderated on behalf of Sir Alexander Carrondale. Where, however, was Sir Alexander himself? This was a question which, according to the newspaper accounts, everybody seemed to be asking, and to which no one could or would give a satisfactory response. That he was however in existence, and that he would be forthcoming in case of success,—was well accredited, on the word of the respectable and enterprising Mr. Duncansby.

At Inch Methglin a considerable degree of excitement likewise prevailed with every one in respect to this lawsuit,—Miss Emmeline perhaps alone excepted. She was too generous-hearted to enter into the spirit of those traditionary animosities and family feuds which were cherished by her relatives and by all the members of the Inch Methglin clan. Besides, she had doubtless sufficient occupation for her thoughts in her own anxieties in respect to the success of those hopes which Donald Stuart appeared to entertain. But on the part of the Chief—of Lennox Vennachar—of all the dependants of the household (myself excepted)—and even of the Dominie, there was the fervid aspiration that the lawsuit might terminate against Sir Alexander Carrondale. Therefore, as the process lasted for several days, each successive arrival of the Edinburgh newspapers was awaited with the utmost anxiety. It appeared that the case for the mortgagees was regarded in the Scottish capital as exceedingly strong; and thus at Inch Methglin hope was already well nigh exultant. But when the arguments of the counsel on the opposite side came to be read, this hope proportionately diminished. It was evident that Mr. Duncansby had got up his case with amazing tact, and that no reasearch into musty documents and old entails had been neglected by him. In short, he adduced before the tribunals a voluminous mass of evidence to prove that the entail was so strict that the late Sir Alexander Carrondale had no power or right to grant mortgages on the property itself.

The trial lasted ten days; and it was not till the beginning of the second week in November that the result was known at Inch Methglin. This result was a decision in favour of Sir Alexander Carrondale,—who was thus restored to all his rights, and who could now, without a sense of humiliation, emerge from whatsoever obscurity he had for long years dwelt in,—and throwing off the fictitious name which had veiled his identity, stand before the world without disguise and without shame.

Nothing could exceed the vexation and disappointment which prevailed at Inch Methglin when this decision was known. It is true there was the right of appeal from the Scotch tribunal to the House of Lords: but the same journals which brought the account of the judicial decision, added that although this decision exempted Sir Alexander Carrondale from any hereditary liability on his deceased father's part—and although the immense accumulations of money which had been amassed in the receiver's hands, were now at his own disposal—he had most honourably and most magnanimously paid the mortgagees that which he considered their due—but on the condition that the right of appeal should be waived: so that the judgment of the Edinburgh law-court was final and decisive.

I need hardly say that I hailed this result with supreme satisfaction. I had become as it were enthusiastic in the cause of the Baronet: I had watched—through the medium of the newspaper accounts—the progress of the contest between himself and the mortgagees, with as much anxious interest as the operations of belligerent Powers are contemplated by any one who gives his sympathies to a particular side. I had a great mind to write a congratulatory letter to Mr. Duncansby: but I thought it might seem obtrusive—and moreover, that he had now quite enough upon his hands without being troubled by private correspondence.

Two or three days after the decision of the law-court was known at Inch Methglin, I received another letter from Donald Stuart, the address of which was penned in a feigned hand, as before—and the contents of which were as follow:—

"Perth, November 10th, 1839.

"Joseph,

"I have to express my thanks for the fidelity and zeal with which you executed the commission entrusted to you a short time back; and I must farther declare my gratitude for the assurance you sent me of your readiness to serve me in future. I recollect that on two or three occasions, when we conversed together, you expressed yourself in very enthusiastic terms in respect to a lawsuit which was at the time pending, but which has just been concluded. I refer to the memorable process between Sir Alexander Carrondale and others. You will now, perhaps, be pleased to learn that I enjoy the intimacy of Sir Alexander Carrondale; and that the result of the lawsuit has fulfilled those hopes which I described myself as entertaining when last I wrote. Interested as you are in these matters, you will likewise be gratified to learn that I am now studying to smooth down the rancour which for centuries has subsisted between the Car

rondales and the Inch Methglins. On behalf of Sir Alexander, I can confidently assert that he abhors personal animosities of every kind—but especially those which have no positively existing cause, and which can only be regarded as the evidences of a detestable traditionary barbarism. You will therefore be gratified, perhaps, to learn that by this same post I have addressed a letter to the Chief of Inch Methglin, of which I send you a copy.

"Do me the favour to present the enclosed note, in as private a manner as before, to Miss Vennachar; and believe me ever your well-wisher,

"DONALD STUART."

This letter contained two enclosures—one being the note for Emmeline, the other the copy of the epistle to which Mr. Stuart alluded, and which was couched in these terms:—

"Perth, November 10th, 1839.

"Sir,

"You will probably be surprised to receive a communication from one who parted from you under such unfavourable circumstances: but I request your patience for the perusal of this letter. I need scarcely remind you that for a certain service which Providence enabled me to render you, your word was pledged for the granting of any boon I might reasonably demand. You are likewise aware, sir, that the pledge remains as yet unfulfilled: but I know enough of the character of the Chief of Inch Methglin, to feel confident he will not suffer any past occurrence in respect to myself, to serve as a motive or a pretext for refusing the fulfilment of that word which is as sacred as a bond. Inspired therefore by this conviction, I now proceed to explain the nature of the boon which I ask at your hands.

"I have to inform you, sir, that circumstances have rendered me intimate with Sir Alexander Carrondale; and I am no stranger to the hereditary animosity which existed throughout centuries, from generation to generation, between the Inch Methglins and the Carrondales. Sir Alexander constitutes an exception to his race; and so far from cherishing a rancour as monstrous as it is stupid, against yourself and your family, he seeks to cultivate your friendship. On the point of taking possesion of his ancestral domain, he will shortly become your neighbour; and he hopes to enjoy peaceful relations with the Inch Methglin clan.

"The boon, sir, that I ask at your hands is the renunciation of all animosity against Sir Alexander Carrondale.

"I feel convinced that this boon will be regarded as a reasonable one,—inasmuch as it costs you nothing beyond a concession to every possible good feeling and to the very principles of civilization itself. Should your answer be favourable, I have to announce on the part of Sir Alexander Carrondale, that he will with the least possible delay repair to Inch Methglin to pay his respects to its Chief, and thus perform a sort of homage to the head of that clan with whom he hopes henceforth to live on terms of amity and concord. The visit of Sir Alexander Carrondale will thus be one of dignified respect and manly homage to the Chief of Inch Methglin; and he moreover deems it perfectly consistent with his own personal pride and position, to express his gratitude for that concession which he is willing on his own account to regard in the light of a boon.

"Should you, sir, have any objection to correspond direct with me upon the subject, a letter for Sir Alexander Carrondale, addressed to the care of Mr. Duncansby, Edinburgh, will at once reach the Baronet.

"I have the honour to remain, sir,

"Your obedient servant,

"DONALD STUART.

"To the Chief of Inch Methglin," &c., &c., &c.

I read this letter with infinite pleasure: I conceived that it did equal credit to Mr. Stuart and Sir Alexander Carrondale. That Mr. Stuart's hopes had been fulfilled, I was equally rejoiced to perceive: but still I was somewhat at a loss to understand how anything which Sir Alexander Carrondale might be willing to do for him, would give him either means sufficient or a social position so improved as to justify him in the belief that Inch Methglin would consent to his marriage with Emmeline. But then it occurred to me that Mr. Stuart had only been waiting until he could place himself in a certain condition of independence—no matter how moderate and humble—in order to bear off Emmeline and wed her without her relative's consent at all. She had a few thousand pounds of her own; and if, through Sir Alexander Carrondale, Donald Stuart could be certain of enjoying a few hundreds a-year, as private secretary, intendant of the estates, or in any other suitably genteel position,—there was no earthly reason why the young couple should not link their destinies at the bridal altar.

Such were my reflections after reading the above correspondence; and I now sought an opportunity of slipping Donald Stuart's note into Miss Vennachar's hand. This opportunity I found in the course of the forenoon; and two or three hours afterwards, the young lady gave me her answer for enclosure to him. She looked happier than ever I had yet seen her: the very blush that glowed upon her cheeks, as she gave me that letter, was full of the animation of heartfelt joy, blended with maiden bashfulness.

In the course of the evening—after my return from the village, whither I repaired to post the letter—I fell into conversation with Cameron, who seemed to wear a very mysterious look, as if he were acquainted with a great secret, of which he was anxious to disburthen himself.

"What do you think, Joseph?" he said: "and I know, from some remarks you have let drop at different times, the news will be gratifying to you."

"Indeed, Cameron? And what may these news be?"

"The feud between the Inch Methglins and the Carrondales is at an end," was Cameron's response.

"Ah!" I ejaculated: and I felt my countenance glowing with the radiancy of joy. "I am indeed delighted at this intelligence."

"Well, it is for Inch Methglin to decide," observed Cameron: "and whatever he likes or dislikes, thinks fit or unfit, must become the law. So it is not for me nor any of the other dependants to grumble. All the relatives of the family—all the kinsmen of the clan, will assemble here to-morrow to consult with the Chief."

"But if the Chief," I observed, "has already made up his mind, what is the use of consulting the clan?"

"Oh! don't you see? It is merely for form's sake," replied Cameron. "Inch Methglin will appear to refer the point to the deliberation and decision of the clan: but his opening speech will convey his own opinion—and that opinion will rule the minds of all the rest. You see, Joseph," continued Cameron, "Inch Methglin could not possibly avoid acting as he is doing—at least he says so——"

"And why not?" I asked, affecting to be in total ignorance of the circumstances which had brought all this about.

"I was in attendance on the Chief this morning, when the letters came," resumed Cameron; "and he condescends to speak pretty freely at times in my presence. When he had read a certain letter, I saw that it produced a deep impression upon him. He remained grave and thoughtful for several minutes. Then he read the letter again—and bade me go and summon Mr. Lennox at once. I came back with Mr. Lennox; and as the Chief had not finished dressing, I was ordered to remain and continue my services. So the Chief and his son spoke freely in my presence. Now that letter, Joseph, was one from Mr. Stuart, claiming the boon which the Chief had promised him when he rescued Lochiel; and this boon was nothing more nor less than a treaty of friendship between the Inch Methglins and the Carrondales."

"Indeed!" I observed. "And how did the Chief and Mr. Lennox appear to take it?"

"The Chief said that the boon must be granted," proceeded Cameron. "Mr. Lennox thought otherwise, and gave vent to several angry expressions with regard to Donald Stuart's impudent meddling. And of course it *is* impudent enough: but still the Chief's word was pledged to grant any boon that was of a reasonable character—and it would have been rather difficult to distinguish this request as unreasonable. That is what the Chief himself said. And then he observed, too, that as Sir Alexander Carrondale had proposed—through Donald Stuart—who, I presume, must be his secretary; for it is scarcely possible he can be an intimate friend——"

"And why not?" I asked. "But never mind: we will not revive old arguments. Proceed with your narrative."

"Well, I was going to relate," continued Cameron, "that it appears Sir Alexander Carrondale has proposed to make certain concessions, so to speak, towards the Chief, and to pay him a visit of homage, at the same time thanking him for the renunciation of animosity—which is almost tantamount, you know, to suing for forgiveness and expressing proper acknowledgments for such pardon. It is in this light that Inch Methglin views the matter. Sir Alexander Carrondale, on behalf of all his ancestry, is to ask forgiveness; and Inch Methglin, as the living representative of his own ancient race, is to accord it. Such was the reasoning the Chief made use of in my presence this morning, in order to over-rule the scruples of Mr. Lennox. I don't think Mr. Lennox would have entertained any such very great scruples—for you know he is naturally of a generous disposition, and I heard him say to his father that there really was, after all, something barbaric and stupid in these hereditary hatreds,—but it was because the proposition came from Donald Stuart, and assumed the shape of a boon which *he* demanded. However, Mr. Lennox was satisfied at last when the Chief promised that after the family conference, he would communicate direct with Sir Alexander Carrondale, and not with Mr. Stuart. Thus stands the matter."

"And infinitely rejoiced I am that the feud is likely to be ended. You have no doubt as to the Chief's decision being stamped by the approval of the clan?"

"Not the slightest," responded Cameron. "But we shall see to-morrow."

The morrow came; and with it a constant succession of arrivals at the castle, from the dawn until mid-day. The ferry-boats were in uninterrupted requisition during those hours; and there was an equally incessant rolling of equipages through the isthmus, and dashing along the carriage-sweep, round to the front of the mansion. The council was to take place in the great feudal hall, which I have before described as being decorated with the emblems of war and of the chase. The piper, plumed and kilted, paced to and fro in a manner more stately and with a demeanour more important than ever: bustle and excitement prevailed thoughout the castle. At one o'clock a splendid banquet, though bearing the simple denomination of luncheon, was served in the dining-room; and when it was over, the Chief and all the male members of his clan, to the number of forty or fifty, repaired to the baronial hall. Of the dependants of the household, the piper was alone permitted to be present; and he, it appeared, was so necessary an appendage to the rank and authority of a Highland Chief, that he could not possibly be dispensed with.

The conference lasted until about six o'clock in the evening; and when it broke up, the rumour quickly spread through the castle that the traditionary feud between the Inch Methglins and the Carrondales was virtually at an end. It was moreover stated that the proposed visit of Sir Alexander Carrondale was to be accepted, and that the Chief would make the grandest display of his hospitality on the occasion. But in order that the Chief's kinsmen and household, as well as all retainers and dependants having occasion to call at the castle, might be rendered thoroughly aware of the course to be adopted, a programme of instructions was drawn up in the course of a few days, and copies were affixed in different parts of the premises. This programme was to the following effect:—

"Sir Alexander Carrondale has proposed to pay Inch Methglin a visit; and the Chief of Inch Methglin has written to Sir Alexander Carrondale to fix the 26th of November as the day on which Sir Alexander is to be received at the Castle.

"The Chief of Inch Methglin has thought fit to prescribe the etiquette which will be observed on the occasion; and he has therefore made known to Sir Alexander Carrondale the circumstances under which he requests the visit may be paid.

"Precisely at mid-day, on the 26th instant, the state-barge, manned by the twelve oarsmen in their best uniform-apparel, will be stationed at the jetty on the bank of the main land—at which hour Sir Alexander Carrondale may be expected to arrive at that point.

"At the same time the Chief and all the members of the clan will be gathered near the jetty of the Inch. Those household domestics whose occupations may no keep them in-doors at that hour, will marshal themselves at a short distance behind the Inch Methglin clan.

"When the state-barge, having received Sir Alexander Carrondale and his suite at the opposite jetty, shall reach the landing-place of the Inch, Sir Alexander will be suffered to ascend the steps of the jetty without any demonstration. As he advances along the jetty, the Chief will step forward a few paces, and wait thus in front of his kinsmen to be accosted by Sir Alexander,—who will be the first to stretch out the hand of that friendship which is about to succeed to a long existing feud. At the moment the Chief takes Sir Alexander Carrondale by the hand, the music will play, and shouts of welcome

will be sent forth in honour of Sir Alexander Carrondale,—who will then be escorted to the Castle.

"A festival worthy of the hospitalities of Inch Methglin, will be provided in the grand banqueting-room at seven in the evening. An hour later, a repast will be given in the servants' hall, to which every dependant of Inch Methglin shall be freely welcome."

I have given this programme in its entirety, because its inflated pompousness and the rigid rules of etiquette therein laid down, will perhaps afford the reader a better insight into the true character of the Chief, than all I have yet written of him has been enabled to convey. The arrangements for the meeting of the two greatest potentates of the earth, could not have been more seriously laid down nor more gravely detailed, than these for the interview of the Chief of Inch Methglin and Sir Alexander Carrondale. The hereditary feud was so intimately connected and so closely interwoven with all the traditions of the Inch Methglin family, that the Chief, in consenting to renounce it, evidently studied to perform his part with the least possible sacrifice of his own pride. He was to receive a sort of expiatory homage from Sir Alexander Carrondale, who was to make the first offer of the hand of friendship, and was to take a dozen paces towards Mr. Vennachar for every one that Mr. Vennachar was to take towards him. I must confess that, in my own heart, I was infinitely disgusted with the whole proceeding as laid down in the programme: but it was nevertheless cheering on the other hand to thin that I should witness the spectacle of a reconciliation between the representatives of two families which for ages past had been at daggers-drawn. Moreover I longed to behold this Sir Alexander Carrondale, of whom I had heard so much, and concerning whom my sympathies had been so profoundly excited.

"As a matter of course," said one of the domestics, while a group of us was engaged in reading the programme, "Mr. Stuart himself will not accompany Sir Alexander as one of his suite, although it is believed he is the Baronet's private secretary."

"Of course he can't come!" exclaimed Cameron, almost indignant at the idea of there being any doubt upon the subject.

"Why do you speak so positively, Cameron?" I asked, drawing him aside. "I am well aware that Mr. Stuart's proper feelings of delicacy will prevent him from intruding at Inch Methglin—and not merely his delicacy, but also his pride."

"Pride indeed!" ejaculated Cameron contemptuously: "what pride can such a beggar as he possess? I should like him to show his nose here: I think Mr. Lennox would very soon send him to the right-about! But you asked me how I could speak so positively on the point? Because I overheard the Chief say to Mr. Lennox that in the letter he had written to Sir Alexander Carrondale, he had intimated that Sir Alexander's suite, however numerous, would find hospitable accommodation at the castle—but that for certain reasons, it was requested Mr. Stuart might not be included in that suite."

"Well, Sir Alexander Carrondale's answer came this morning," I observed; "and it was immediately followed by the issue of the programme."

"Sir Alexander Carrondale's letter," continued Cameron, "assured the Chief that no person bearing the name of Stuart might be expected at Inch Methglin."

During the few days which were to elapse ere the grand one fixed for the meeting, immense preparations were made at the castle for the approaching ceremony. Messengers were despatched not merely to Perth, but likewise to Edinburgh, to procure all conceivable kinds of delicacies, to be served up at the banquet; the butler and his assistant passed hours in the cellar, selecting specimens from the choicest bins; the barge was fitted up with new cushions: the banqueting-room was decorated with all the insignia—shields, banners, and escutcheons—of the Inch Methglin family: in short, it was evident enough that Mr. Vennachar was resolved to display all the pomps and ostentations of his hospitality on a scale so splendid and stupendous as to produce what he hoped would be the grandest effect. He was in a measure indemnifying himself for the sacrifice of some portion of his family pride. His honour had not permitted him to refuse the boon Donald Stuart claimed at his hand; and therefore had he found himself compelled to renounce that traditionary antipathy—or at least its outward manifestations—which was as much a part of his heritage as the castle and domains themselves. But in making these concessions, he not merely modelled the etiquette of the meeting so as to give it the appearance of a superior potentate receiving the homage and the submission of a succumbing rival,—but he was now bent upon overwhelming that rival with the dazzling glare and splendid substantialities of his magnificent hospitality.

During the few days which elapsed since I had given Miss Vennachar Donald's note and received her answer to enclose for him, I had no opportunity of observing how she looked, nor of judging by her aspect to what extent she still entertained the hopes which her lover's communication had evidently encouraged. The castle was thronged with guests; and Emmeline, as the only lady of the Chief's household, had enough to do in performing the honours of the mansion.

The eventful day arrived. At that season of the year, the weather in the Highlands is seldom favourable, but for the most part raw and misty. Such too it had been for the last few days: but it appeared as if heaven itself purposed to smile upon the deeds of the one that now dawned. The morning mists were gradually dispersed by a fresh bracing breeze: the clouds rolled away from the face of the sky, leaving it the semblance of a canopy of purest blue. The sun shone with extraordinary power for that season; and the lake in its ripples seemed wreathing with smiles.

That the appearance of the programme posted about the premises, might not give offence to the expected visitor, it was everywhere removed in the morning of the memorable day: but its details were impressed on the minds of all who had any concern in obeying it. Soon after eleven o'clock the twelve bargemen entered the state-boat, at the head of which a flag was flying; and they rowed across the loch to the jetty on that bank. The Chief, Lennox, Emmeline, and the numerous company, not forgetting Ivor and Lochiel, were all arrayed in their best and gayest apparel: while

Dominie Clackmannan appeared in a bran new suit for the occasion. He had moreover taken into use for that day a gold snuff-box, which he informed the guests had been presented to him by his friend the Laird of Tintosquashdale; and he even endeavoured to describe the circumstances in which the gift was made—but he of course broke down as usual in the middle, and vainly tried to refresh his memory by a dozen pinches in succession. The greater portion of the domestics, with some fifty or sixty of the labourers belonging to the estate, were duly marshalled in their proper place; and the full-plumed piper had under his orders an excellent band procured expressly from Perth. It was really a most exciting and interesting scene—for many of the ladies were most magnificently apparelled: but as for personal beauty, Emmeline reigned infinitely superior above them all. Now for the first time during several days past, I had an opportunity of noticing her. There was a rich colour upon her cheeks, and a sunny light in her beautiful blue eyes. To the common observer it was the glow and the animation of the exciting scene: to myself, who knew the secret of her heart, it was all the effect of mingled suspense and hope—but the cause of which I could not possibly divine. That she expected to behold Donald Stuart in Sir Alexander Carrondale's suite, was out of the question. What then inspired her with those feelings that methought I could so well understand—feelings in which hope and fear were the elements of suspense?

On the opposite side of the lake there was also a gay and exciting scene. The villagers, in their best apparel, were all gathered there to await the arrival of Sir Alexander Carrondale and behold his departure in the barge. A flag had been hoisted on the church-steeple: it was evident that the general feeling was in favour of the forthcoming reconciliation between the expected Baronet and the Chief of Inch Methglin.

Precisely at twelve o'clock, a carriage, drawn by four horses, was discerned approaching the jetty at which the barge waited. From the spot where we were all stationed, we could not see how many persons alighted from the carriage to enter that barge: but the enthusiastic shouts of welcome sent forth by the villagers, were borne by the breeze across the loch and reached our ears. The barge moved away from the jetty: the twelve oarsmen kept admirable time—and the boat swept quickly along over the rippling waters. Nearer and nearer it came, until at length we were enabled to perceive that there were four persons seated in the barge, in addition to the rowers. Two of these occupied the velvet-covered cushions: the other two were in the space behind which was allotted for the use of domestics. It was therefore evident that Sir Alexander Carrondale was accompanied by only one friend. But who was that friend? I asked myself. Could it possibly be that the Baronet had brought Donald Stuart? I scarcely thought so: but I kept my straining eyes fixed upon the boat. Nearer still it came. It was now easy to perceive that one gentleman was enveloped in a cloak, and that he sat in such a way that his countenance could not be distinguished by those who were congregated on the bank whence the jetty projected. The other gentleman was gazing direct at us. Ah! I recognised him now!—that stout form, that large round face——who else could it be but the worthy writer to the signet Mr. Duncansby? Then I said to myself, "No, Donald Stuart is not here. Wherefore that feverish mingling of hope and apprehension on Emmeline's part?"

The barge reached the jetty—the rowers threw up their oars perpendicularly, so that they resembled a little forest of masts: a profound silence reigned amongst the throng assembled upon the bank. The steps of the jetty were so situated that we could not discern the forms of those who were now ascending: but in a few instants the foremost individual appeared upon the platform; and it seemed as if he were resolved that his countenance should all in a moment flash as it were upon the recognition of those who knew it. Good heavens, it was the countenance of Donald Stuart! But where, then, was Sir Alexander Carrondale? Stuart was accompanied by the lawyer only: the other two individuals were evidently valets in plain clothes—and they followed at a respectful distance. There was the thrill of a silent sensation on the part of all the domestics amongst whom I stood, as we simultaneously recognised Donald Stuart.

The Chief of Inch Methglin,—instead of advancing his measured pace or two, in proportion to each dozen to be taken by the expected Baronet,—strode forward in his haughtiest and most indignant manner, with Lennox by his side.

"What means this impertinence, sir?" he exclaimed, in a loud stern voice—thus addressing himself to Emmeline's lover, as he advanced upon the platform of the jetty.

"Sir Alexander Carrondale has contrived it all," ejaculated Lennox, evidently furious with rage, "as a studied insult. But he shall have to do with me!—for I will go to Edinburgh, or to his own castle—or wherever he may be—even to the land's end—to seek him out and demand satisfaction."

"You need not proceed to any such distance, Mr. Lennox Vennachar," replied Emmeline's lover, in a tone of calm dignity: "for Sir Alexander Carrondale is here to answer for himself."

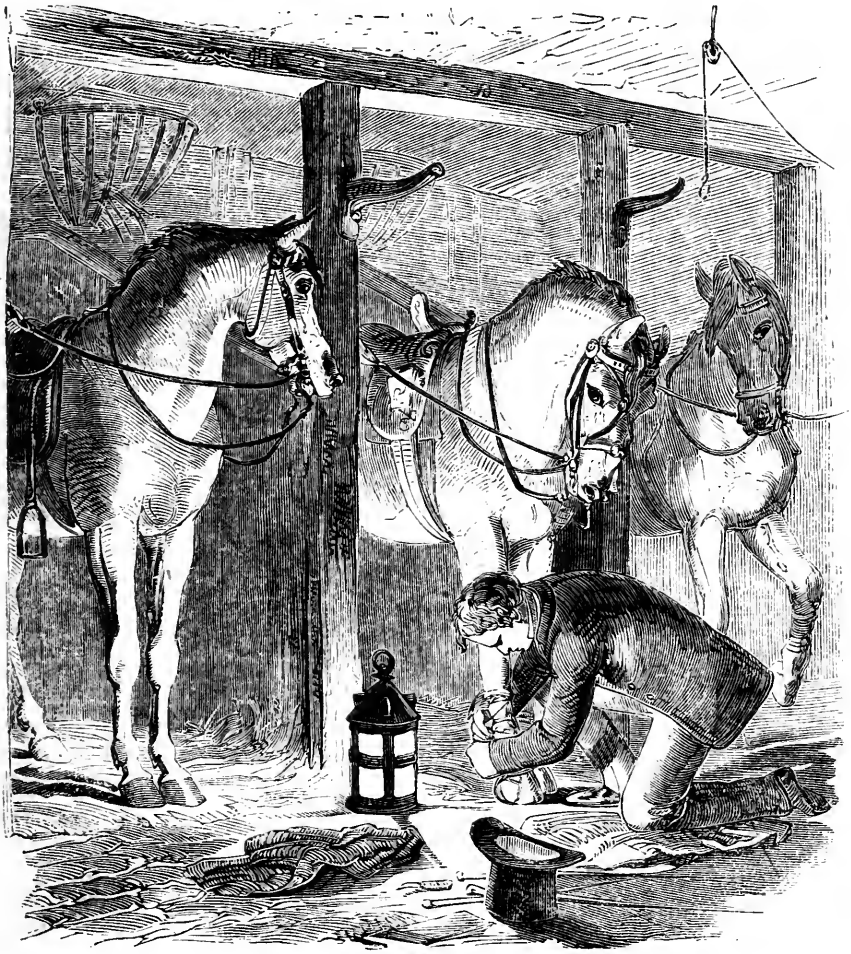
"Where?" demanded Lennox, in a quick excited tone. "At all events his conduct is ungenerous, after his pledge that no one bearing the name of Stuart should visit Inch Methglin this day."

"Nor is the pledge broken," responded Emmeline's lover. "There is no one here bearing the name of Stuart:" then after a few moments' pause he added, with the same calm dignity as before, "I am Sir Alexander Carrondale."

CHAPTER XLVI.

SIR ALEXANDER CARRONDALE.

Ejaculations of astonishment burst forth from all quarters: yet amidst them there was a cry of wild delight—a cry that was irrepressible—a cry that announced fears relieved and hopes fulfilled—a cry of love, and tenderness, and joy, which *my* ears failed not to distinguish in the



midst of all other sounds. And from whose lips could it come save those of Emmeline?

"Who would have thought it?" whispered Cameron hastily to me.

"Did I not tell you all along," I responded, "that he whom we took to be a poor tutor, was as much a gentleman as the Chief of Inch Methglin himself?"

"Sir Alexander Carrondale," said the Chief, when he had recovered from the almost stupified amazement into which the announcement made by the Baronet had thrown him, "I was not prepared for this——"

"I am sorry, Inch Methglin, that the surprise should be a disagreeable one," interrupted Sir Alexander: "but I am here to fulfil my portion of that compact the details of which were laid down by yourself. I take heaven to witness that I never for a moment entertained the slightest animosity towards yourself and your clan. My experience of the world has been too severe—in some sense too bitter—not to make me fly as if for relief to all the best feelings of which the human heart is susceptible. I have besought that the feud of clanships shall have an end: I repeat that demand—I will call it a prayer if you will: I ask it as a favour; and if my ancestors were in the wrong in respect to your's, I solicit your forgiveness as that of the living representative of a race which was so injured. What more can I say? Inch Methglin, I proffer you my hand."

The Chief,—whatever he might have thought or wished, or however darkly and deprecatingly his son Lennox might have regarded him at the time,—could not for very decency's sake fly from his word, ignore all his own arrangements, and stultify the entire proceedings the ceremonious etiquette of which had been elaborated by himself.

Besides, as I have already said, he was generous and noble-hearted after his own fashion. How was it possible to resist the frank and manly appeal that had emanated from the lips of Sir Alexander Carrondale? The Chief of Inch Methglin took the outstretched hand—the piper's wild Highland music instantaneously thrilled forth—the brass band struck up—and shouts of welcome pealed from numerous tongues in honour of Sir Alexander Carrondale.

Then, while this was being done, I observed that Sir Alexander advanced to take Emmeline's hand—while the Chief spoke a few hasty words aside to Lennox. Doubtless it was to bid his son assume a properly courteous demeanour, and not humiliate himself by any display of mean and paltry jealousy. Standing where I was, I could not catch a glimpse of Emmeline's countenance: but I had no difficulty in divining that she felt assured her love would be crowned with happiness, with or without the consent of her uncle and her cousin. But now followed a very interesting scene, and one which exemplified the goodness of Sir Alexander Carrondale's heart. Turning towards Ivor and Lochiel, he exclaimed in a fervid tone, "My dear boys, I am delighted to see you again! I have thought of you often!"—and he embraced them one after the other.

His kindness experienced its reward: for Ivor and Lochiel both exhibited an enthusiastic joy at beholding him whom as their tutor they had loved.

"Mr. Clackmannan," said the Baronet, grasping the old Dominie's hand, "I am glad also to see that you are in as good health as ever."

"It's just that, Sir Alexander," replied the Dominie. "And now I bethink me, you don't take snuff: but if you did, here's a pinch out of a box presented to me by the Laird of Tintosquashdale. My friend Saltcoats——"

"Inch Methglin," said the Baronet, "permit me to introduce my friend, Mr. Duncansby, who has indeed been the kindest and the best friend that a man in his misfortunes ever had in this world."

Greetings were exchanged between the worthy lawyer and Mr. Vennachar; and when Duncansby was presented to Emmeline, the young lady at once shook him cordially by the hand. Ah! she was thanking him, by that earnest welcome, for all his goodness towards the object of her heart's love. Meanwhile Lennox stood somewhat aside, and appeared to be in a state of mind very far from comfortable.

The Chief made a signal for the procession to be formed; and he took Sir Alexander's arm—evidently for the purpose of leaving Emmeline to the care of Lennox. The procession filed along the road towards the mansion,—on reaching which the Chief and his guests passed through the modern portico, while the domestics continued their way round to the servants' office.

I will pass over all the comments and observations which were now made in the servants' hall with regard to the astounding revelation which this day had brought forth: namely, that under the guise of a poor tutor the identity of Sir Alexander Carrondale had been concealed. I hasten on to state that being appointed to attend upon Mr. Duncansby, I went up, in the course of the afternoon, to the chamber allotted to this gentleman, for the purpose of unpacking his trunk. I was in the midst of this employment, when he made his appearance.

"Ah! Joseph!" he exclaimed, shaking me heartily by the hand; "I am right glad to see you."

"And I, sir, congratulate you with the utmost sincerity on the success of the lawsuit."

"God bless you, young man," cried the lawyer, "it would have been enough to make us suspect the justice of heaven itself if Sir Alexander's rights had been so cruelly ignored. Ah! you little suspected all along," he added with a merry laugh, "who Donald Stuart was. And when you told me at Carrondale that there was a tutor at Inch Methglin of that name, I could scarcely keep my countenance: for I could have told you that I not only knew it before you did, but that I had known him from his earliest infancy. I knew likewise that he was in love with Miss Vennachar: he never had any secrets from me——And by the bye, he has not failed to tell me how you generously assisted his courtship on three or four occasions."

"I hope, sir," I observed, "that there will arise no difficulty now in the consummation of his happiness—I mean through an alliance with Miss Vennachar."

"You shall see, young man," responded Mr. Duncansby. "Why, it is ridiculous to suppose that Emmeline Vennachar will bend to the stern will of her uncle in a matter so closely regarding her whole life's happiness; or that she will consent to sacrifice herself to her haughty cousin,—who, between you and me, would prove I think a greater tyrant than his father."

"And yet Sir Alexander's position at the castle," I said, "is an embarrassing one."

"Little enough, for a gentleman of his good manners and high intelligence. He will not outrage the Chief's hospitality by any marked attention to Emmeline during the few days of his visit: but on the morning of his departure, he will request a private interview with the Chief, and solicit Emmeline's hand in marriage."

"And if he be refused?" I said inquiringly.

"He will of course take his departure as if nothing had happened. Miss Emmeline must then decide what course *she* will adopt. There is no conjecture as to this. By the bye, Joseph, you did not see through the trick I played you——"

"Trick, sir?" I ejaculated in amazement.

"Yes: that letter I wrote from Edinburgh."

"A very kind trick, sir, to send me a handsome present—for which I wrote back and expressed my gratitude."

"Ah! but it was nevertheless a trick—though I availed myself of the same opportunity," continued the lawyer, "to forward you that little testimonial of my esteem. Why, you can't understand it even now! God bless you, young man,—you who were so sharp in discovering love's secrets——"

"There was no sharpness, sir," I observed, with a smile, "when I one day beheld Mr. Stuart——Sir Alexander Carrondale, I mean, and Miss Emmeline walking together."

"Ah! that was the origin, eh?" said Duncansby: "that was the way you found out the secret? Well, you kept it nobly, and sacrificed yourself to Lennox Vennachar's anger in order to extricate Emmeline from her scrape. But about

the trick. Don't you see, that after Sir Alexander left Inch Methglin, he was naturally anxious to correspond with Emmeline: and how could he do it except through you? But then arose the difficulty of ascertaining whether you yourself were still at Inch Methglin, or whether you had been sacrificed completely to Lennox Vennachar's jealous suspicion. So I suggested a plan, though not quite so learned in love as I am in law. Don't you see now? I wrote you that letter to ascertain whether you were still at Inch Methglin. I found that you were; and a few days afterwards you received a communication from Sir Alexander, then plain Mr. Stuart."

"I comprehend," I observed, with another smile. "But did Miss Vennachar know that it was her lover whom she was about to see this day in the person of Sir Alexander Carrondale?"

"No—not exactly," responded the lawyer. "You delivered to her a second note——"

"Yes—about a fortnight back."

"Well, that was to tell her that certain hopes which her lover had entertained, were amply fulfilled—that he felt himself to be now in a position justifying him to aspire to her hand—and that as Sir Alexander Carrondale proposed to pay a visit to Inch Methglin, she would receive a very important communication on the day of his coming."

"Then Miss Vennachar doubtless expected to receive letters from her lover, through Sir Alexander? and perhaps to find in Sir Alexander a friend to intercede with her uncle on behalf of Donald Stuart's suit?"

"No doubt, it was something of this sort that Miss Vennachar must have fancied," said Duncansby; "and likewise that Sir Alexander would take an opportunity of explaining to her what the hopes were on Donald Stuart's part that had been thus fulfilled. But now Donald Stuart merges into a wealthy Baronet, the representative of one of the finest families in Scotland."

"Yet methinks, Mr. Duncansby, if I were Sir Alexander Carrondale," I observed, "I should not have sustained the mystery until the very last moment, in respect to one who was loved so fondly. The instant the lawsuit was over, I should have written to communicate my real name—which there was no longer any necessity to conceal."

"What? and have thrown Miss Emmeline into such a flutter of excitement for several days previous to the intended visit, that her uncle and her jealous lynx-eyed cousin would have seen it—and perhaps suspecting something, might have guessed at the truth, or else have insisted that she should marry off-hand with only forty-eight hours' notice! No, no!—depend upon it, Joseph, Sir Alexander adopted the wisest course to keep the mystery unbroken until the very last instant. And, Ah! my young friend, can you not also conceive that even in the breast of the most high-minded and intelligent, there may be a certain little feeling of pride—a certain sentiment of satisfaction, in appearing with a sudden and startling effect in the capacity of rank, wealth, and importance, amidst those scenes where the individual had previously been known merely in his poverty, his humility, and his obscurity?"

"Yes, sir," I remarked; "it is human nature:" and then, as an idea struck me, I inquired, "Did you not, in writing to Sir Alexander Carrondale, when he was staying in this neighbourhood under the name of Stuart, mention to him that you had travelled with a young man who was on his way to the castle?"

"It happened, my young friend," responded Mr. Duncansby, "that I had no occasion to write to Sir Alexander Carrondale during the entire interval which took place between your first meeting with me and the time when we fell against each other in the little village of Methglin on the other side of the loch—you remember?"

"I remember perfectly well," I said: "it was the first time you discovered that I was in the Chief's service."

"Well," proceeded Mr. Duncansby, "you can now understand that I paid that visit to the village of Methglin for the purpose of having an interview with Sir Alexander. I did see him that same afternoon; and then, for the first time, I spoke to him of you. He eulogized you highly, I can assure you—and told me how you had most unaccountably made yourself a scapegoat on two or three occasions, to save Emmeline from her cousin's and uncle's wrath. By the bye, that very same afternoon you beheld a scene in the lane—— Sir Alexander perfectly well comprehended that you made your sudden appearance by leaping through the hedge, in order to give him and Miss Vennachar warning of some threatened danger. I can assure you, young man, we spoke a great deal of you on that particular evening."

"And I remember that the next morning," I said, "when I happened to encounter Sir Alexander Carrondale—then Donald Stuart—it occurred to me that his manner was kinder and more affable towards me than ever; and I could scarcely understand the reason."

"Now you know it," exclaimed Mr. Duncansby. "You must not think, Joseph, that when I wrote you that letter from Edinburgh, it was altogether for the selfish purpose of ascertaining if you were still at Inch Methglin, in order to make you a convenience for the exchange of correspondence between Sir Alexander and Miss Vennachar. I feared, from what Sir Alexander had told me, that even if you had not already left, the tenure of your situation was nevertheless somewhat precarious; and therefore I felt an anxiety to serve you if the opportunity should occur. I dare say Sir Alexander will speak to you to-morrow—I know that he wishes you well."

"I feel grateful for all this kind consideration," I said. "Might I venture to ask whether Sir Alexander has yet thought of putting that fine old castle into repair?"

"There are hundreds of workmen engaged upon the building and the grounds at this present moment," responded Mr. Duncansby. "God bless you, young man, we do not allow the grass to grow under our feet. It has been growing for too long a time already," he added seriously, "in the court-yards of Carrondale. The instant that the mortgagees were settled with, and the right of appeal was renounced, measures were taken to put the castle into repair. There is now plenty of money to accomplish all this; and money, you know, Joseph, is a talisman which can cause smiling scenes to take the places of havoc and desolation, and stately mansions to spring up

from the midst of piles of ruins. In a few weeks' time Carrondale Castle will be like a structure built by enchantment—so different will its aspect be from what it was when you visited it with me a few months back. Upholsterers from Edinburgh have been down to take the dimensions of all the rooms, for carpets, draperies, and so forth—in short, the power of money is exhibiting its magic in this particular instance as well as in all others."

Here the conversation between myself and Mr. Duncansby terminated; and I saw nothing more of him for the remainder of that day. On the two following ones, a deluging rain poured down incessantly; so that the family and the guests were completely confined to the castle. Then the weather cleared up again: but the ground was too damp for the ladies to walk out. An excursion in the carriages round the lake was the principal recreation of this particular day; and in the evening, when I repaired to Mr. Duncansby's chamber to see if he required anything while dressing for dinner, he bade me go to Sir Alexander Carrondale's room, as the Baronet wished to speak to me. Thither I accordingly repaired; and Sir Alexander, —making a sign for his principal valet who was with him, to retire,—addressed me in the kindest possible tone.

"Joseph," he said, "Mr. Duncansby has already told you that I am not unmindful of certain services which you rendered in a manner as delicate as it was generous. I need not allude to them farther: but I do not forget them. I remember that on two or three occasions you expressed to me your deep sympathy in the affairs of Sir Alexander Carrondale, when you little suspected that he of whom you spoke was before your eyes, veiled in the obscurity of the humble Donald Stuart. The sympathy you expressed for me, is reciprocated by the interest I feel in you. I am about to make you a proposition, which you must not think an unhandsome attempt on my part to withdraw you in a stealthy manner from Inch Methglin's service. But if you choose to enter mine, you are welcome to do so; and perhaps I may be enabled to place you in a better situation than even that which you hold here."

I expressed my deepest gratitude to Sir Alexander for his kindness: but I hesitated about accepting it, for two reasons—first, the one which I proceeded to explain, as will shortly be seen—second, because it occurred to me that the progress of the Baronet's love-affair might yet require some little degree of management on his own and Miss Vennachar's part; and that if this were the case, they would need an intermediate through whom their correspondence must pass as heretofore. I did not however give this second reason for the response which I proceeded to deliver to Sir Alexander Carrondale's proposition: but that was my principal motive at the time—for I felt so much interested in the lovers as to be even prepared to sacrifice myself to the continued ill-humour of Lennox Vennachar, rather than abandon the part which circumstances had led me to play in the delicate matter.

"I am deeply grateful," I said, "and should certainly be rejoiced to know that if I were compelled to leave Inch Methglin's service, there is so excellent an opportunity for me to earn my bread in your's. But inasmuch as from Mr. Vennachar himself I have received no unkindness—but, on the contrary, was liberally rewarded by him for saving Ivor—it might seem like ingratitude——"

"Enough, Joseph!" interrupted Sir Alexander: "I understand what you would say. Remain here while it suits you: but remember that at any time you wish to make a change, my doors will be open to you. And now you must suffer me to mark my sense of obligation by insisting on your acceptance of this."

With these words, the Baronet placed a pocket-book in my hand; and then, to stop the expressions of my gratitude for all his kindness, he good-humouredly pushed me out of the room. On retiring to my own chamber and opening the pocket-book, I found that it contained bank-notes to the amount of one hundred guineas—a larger sum than I had ever yet possessed in all my life. Nevertheless, a feeling of sorrow crept into my heart, that the little services I had rendered the lovers should thus be repaid by means of lucre. Yet on second thoughts I did not see very well how Sir Alexander could have acted otherwise; for if he had given me a watch, books, or presents of that sort, they would have been seen by my fellow-servants, who would naturally have wondered whence they came—and if I refused to tell, would think it strange indeed—whereas, if I did tell, suspicions of all kinds would be excited. Besides, Sir Alexander had tendered me the gift with as much delicacy as kindness; and I felt, after mature reflection, that it was verging upon a mawkish affectation to be distressed at his acknowledgment of my services having assumed a pecuniary shape.

The following day (the 30th of November) was the last of Sir Alexander's visit at Inch Methglin; and on the ensuing morning (December 1st) preparations were being made for the departure of himself and the worthy lawyer. This departure was to take place at noon, when the barge was to be in readiness. Shortly after eleven I repaired to Mr. Duncansby's chamber; and he said to me, "Well, Joseph, the demand has been made and is refused."

I knew to what Mr. Duncansby alluded: but I was not bold enough to put any direct questions.

"I had a private discourse with Sir Alexander," continued the lawyer, "a few minutes ago in his own room; and he told me all particulars. After breakfast he requested a private interview with Inch Methglin, who immediately granted it. I ought to tell you that during the four or five days we have been here, Lennox has studiously contrived to monopolize the society of his cousin; so that Sir Alexander has not obtained a single moment's opportunity to discourse with her in private. But yesterday he did manage to convey a note to her——And who do you think was the go-between? I, Joseph!"—and the worthy lawyer laughed heartily. "In that note," he continued, "Sir Alexander informed Emmeline that he meant to demand her hand of her uncle this morning —that he anticipated refusal—and that in this case he must leave Emmeline to decide his fate. That refusal has been given. The Chief was coldly polite; and in a few words he stated his reasons for declining the honour proposed by Sir Alexan-

der Carrondale. Those reasons were to the effect, that he was the guardian of his niece and had formed plans for the realization of which he trusted to her obedience—that his son was deeply enamoured of Miss Vennachar, and that he could not by an act of his own stamp that well-beloved son's unhappiness—that moreover, apart from all those considerations, he had his special reasons for wishing his niece to marry within the sphere of his own clan."

"Ah! I comprehend!" I exclaimed. "Inch Methglin has renounced the hereditary feud with the Carrondales—but merely in words: the spirit thereof continues to lurk in his heart—and he would not wish to behold a scion of Inch Methglin espouse a Carrondale!"

"There is something, no doubt, in all that," observed Mr. Duncansby. "God bless you, young man, these Highland Chiefs—or at least most of them—are inveterate and incorrigible in some of their hereditary prejudices. There is even that stupid old Dominie, who though no Chief at all, yet is as proud of being the nearest kinsman to—— what the deuce is the name?"

"Mr. Knockmedownarder, Laird of Clackmannanauchnish," I said with a smile.

"Heavens! how glibly all these terrible long words slip from your tongue, Joseph," exclaimed Mr. Duncansby: "you are half a Highlander already. But to return to the topic from which I have wandered somewhat. The Chief stated his reasons to the effect which I have described, in refusing Sir Alexander's proposal: whereupon Sir Alexander bowed — and the interview, having lasted but a few minutes, came to an end. What the Baronet's views now are, must be guided by Miss Vennachar herself; and I dare say," added Mr. Duncansby, with a significant look and a smile at me, "she will discover a medium for communicating her sentiments."

At this moment a domestic knocked at the door to announce that Sir Alexander Carrondale was in readiness to depart; and Mr. Duncansby, having shaken me warmly by the hand, issued forth from the chamber. I followed with his cloak, as an excuse to witness the embarkation; and on descending to the hall, found Sir Alexander, with the Chief and Lennox, the Dominie, and the male members of the clan. The ground was still too damp for the ladies to walk forth; and therefore they remained in the drawing-room. The party proceeded towards the jetty,—Sir Alexander walking between the Chief and Lennox, with all the well-bred ease and calm dignity as if nothing disagreeable had taken place that forenoon. The jetty was reached; and as I gave Mr. Duncansby his cloak, he threw upon me another farewell look of kindness. Sir Alexander shook hands with the Chief, with Lennox, and with the Dominie—bowed cordially to the male members of the clan—and descended into the barge, followed by the lawyer and the valets.

"When I bethink me," the Dominie called out from the top of the jetty, "I forgot to write those letters of introduction which I promised you, Sir Alexander, to my friend Saltcoats and the Laird of Tintosquashdale——who is not Tintosquashdale any longer, but Shankspindles. How was it I forgot them?——I shall recollect presently——and I will write, Sir Alexander, and let you know all about it."

The Baronet nodded good-naturedly to the old Dominie, as he sat down in the boat with Mr. Duncansby by his side, and his two valets behind: the bargemen let their oars fall from a perpendicular position into the water with the nicest accord —and the boat sped away from the jetty. The Baronet's equipage was waiting on the opposite side, it having been sent round thither from the castle an hour previously; and the Chief's party lingered on the jetty and the bank, until the boat reached the other shore and the carriage dashed away.

"The bargemen keep time admirably," said the Chief, while the boat was as yet progressing across the loch.

"It's just that, Inch Methglin," said the Dominie. "But really now, if you would only consider my proposition for a bridge——By the bye, I forgot to show you that letter which I received from Saltcoats, to whom I wrote to ask his opinion about the bridge——"

"Mr. Clackmannan," said the Chief proudly, "with whatsoever degree of patience I may listen to *your* suggestions, not all the Saltcoats on the face of the earth shall induce me to ruin the beauty of this scene——"

"It's not just that, Inch Methglin," interposed the Dominie, as he took a huge pinch of snuff. "It's a matter of convenience. Saltcoats would have been here to see me long ago, only that he has dreaded the water ever since he tumbled legs foremost——no, it must have been head first—into the Widow Glenbucket's water tank. I will tell you how it was——But first about the bridge——"

The Chief turned away haughtily, disdaining any farther discussion on the subject.

In the forenoon of that very day, Cameron drew me aside, and said with a sort of mysterious joy, "Well, Joseph, it's to take place next week!"

"What is to take place?" I asked, though at once smitten with an idea of the intelligence which was about to be communicated.

"What is to take place?" he ejaculated. "But of course you can't know or guess till I tell you. Why, the marriage, to be sure! The Chief told me so just now; and I dare say that by to-morrow it will be no secret——"

"Not if you, Cameron, draw every one aside in succession, to buzz it in their ears," I said. "But don't be offended—I meant no harm. Is it really fixed?"

"It is to take place on the eighth of December," responded Cameron, "as sure as you are alive. Don't you see? the Chief naturally avails himself of the presence of all the clan here, for the purpose of solemnizing the nuptials. Immense preparations are to be made: we shall have a glorious time of it. I don't think that Miss Vennachar cares any more about Sir Alexander, even if she really ever did; and after all, the suspicions of Mr. Lennox might have been unfounded——You remember that scene on the day of the excursion?"

"Yes. But why do you fancy that Miss Vennachar cares nothing for Sir Alexander?"

"Oh! simply because while he was here she was constantly seated by the side of Mr. Lennox."

"Ah! that's a great proof," I observed, scarcely able to repress a smile of irony, as I recollected that Mr. Duncansby had described how Mr. Len-

nox had monopolized his cousin's society throughout the period of Sir Alexander's visit.

"Of course, it is an excellent proof," rejoined Cameron gravely: and here our conversation ceased.

So the marriage was resolved upon—and it was to be thus precipitated! I understood perfectly well why both the Chief and Mr. Lennox were determined to immolate Emmeline to their own selfish views, while she was yet completely in their power. And this was the kind way in which the Chief acted as a guardian to his niece!—and this was the strength of his son's love, which could not sacrifice itself to the young lady's happiness! That they both knew full well Emmeline was attached to Sir Alexander, there could be no doubt: it must have been plain to them, even apart from previous causes for suspicion of love in that quarter, that the Baronet would not have demanded her hand in marriage unless confident that the proceeding was agreeable to herself. I saw that the young lady was to be rendered the object of a vile piece of family tyranny—and that, surrounded by all the members of the clan, she even stood a chance of being literally dragged to the altar, despite whatsoever remonstrances her lips might frame. But I was resolved, so far as it depended upon me, to assist the cause of the lovers; and I rejoiced unfeignedly that I had remained at Inch Methglin. It was too late for that day's post—and yet time was so precious! But on the following day I wrote two letters—one to Sir Alexander at Carrondale Castle, the other to Mr. Duncansby at Edinburgh; for I knew not, when the Baronet left Inch Methglin, whither it was his immediate purpose to proceed.

On the day that I sent off my despatches, it became generally known amongst the domestics that the marriage was fixed for the 8th of December; and this was the 2nd. There were but five clear days between the present moment and the one fixed for the consummation of the sacrifice. Oh! if by any chance Sir Alexander should not receive timely notice! But then, I said to myself, "Emmeline loves him—and her own energies will be worked up to a pitch that must impel her to the adoption of some measure to frustrate the selfish views of her relatives and to save herself."

CHAPTER XLVII.

A DECISIVE STEP.

It soon became evident enough to me that Miss Vennachar was closely watched. A hard frost now set in after the late rain: the soil being therefore admirable for walking, the family and the guests frequently rambled through the grounds. Emmeline was with them on these occasions—for the most part with Lennox by her side, or else in the midst of a bevy of the ladies of the clan, who no doubt formed a sort of guard for the safe custody of the intended victim. Thus five whole days passed, during which Emmeline never once came forth alone into the gardens. This circumstance it was that convinced me she was watched, espied, hemmed in all around as it were, by those who were bent on making her the wife of her cousin Lennox. I did not for an instant suppose that she had yielded her assent and was resigned passively to submit: a secret voice appeared to tell me that she anxiously and eagerly sought an opportunity to deliver a letter to me to be forwarded to Sir Alexander.

It was the morning of the 7th—and in the meantime the preparations for the wedding, which was fixed for the ensuing day, had progressed on the grandest scale. I had received no answers to my letters to Mr. Duncansby and Sir Alexander. I began to fear that, after all, the sacrifice would be accomplished—that Emmeline was unable to act for herself—and that succour from other quarters would come too late. I knew not what to do. I had so identified myself in the progress of this love-affair, that I deemed it almost a point of honour to raise whatsoever obstacle I could to baffle the Chief's designs. But what power, means, or influence had I at my disposal—a humble domestic!

The day advanced—hour after hour passed: there was a walking-party in the afternoon—the dusk set in at three o'clock—and there was now no longer a chance of Emmeline being enabled to come forth into the grounds, where I loitered about, in the hope of seeing her, after the return of the party to the castle. I felt sadly desponding on behalf of the lovers—and indeed had well nigh given up all hope,—when at about six o'clock in the evening, Emmeline's principal lady's-maid, descending into the servants' hall after having attended on the young lady's dinner-toilet, took an opportunity to make me a sign of intelligence. Most of the domestics were in the hall at the time; and therefore it was scarcely possible for me and Grace (which was the lady's-maid Christian name) to hold any whispering conversation together: but I saw that she had something to communicate—and from the bottom of my heart I hoped she had been won over to the cause of her young mistress. At the expiration of a few minutes after I had seen that sign of intelligence, I rose from my seat, and issued forth from the servants' hall: but ere closing the door, I darted a rapid glance towards Grace. I lingered in the passage for some little time until the door of the servants' hall was again opened, and Grace made her appearance.

She was a woman of about thirty—by no means good-looking, nor even with an agreeable expression of countenance: on the contrary, her aspect was saturnine and reserved; and this indeed was her character. I had always heard her speak in those same terms of devotion and obedience to the interests of the Chief, as the domestics generally were wont to adopt; and thus, as I had remained deliberating with myself in the passage, I felt somewhat surprised and alarmed at the idea that Miss Vennachar should have made a confidante of Grace: for the first flush of hope being past, I became fearful of treachery at the hands of this woman. However, I was of course resolved to hear what she might have to say to me,—when I should be better enabled to judge as to her sincerity or the reverse.

She joined me in the passage, as I have said; and opening the door leading forth into the grounds, she requested me to follow her. We reached a convenient spot for conversation; and

then she said in a low voice, which seemed earnest enough, "Joseph, I am resolved to help my poor mistress. Will you assist her?"

"Who bade you ask me the question?" I inquired, straining my eyes with all their power to examine the woman's features well: but it was too dark for me to judge by her looks whether or not there were any indications of latent treachery.

"Miss Vennachar herself," she replied confidently.

"And did Miss Vennachar," I next asked, "give you any sign or token, by which I might be assured that you are empowered thus to address me?"

"Miss Vennachar informed me," rejoined Grace, "that you had already been kind enough to receive and transmit correspondence between herself and Sir Alexander, at the time he was known only as Mr. Stuart."

"Good!" I observed. "You will pardon me for having exercised so much caution: but your own good sense will tell you it was for the best."

"I am not offended," said the lady's-maid. "And now tell me, will you assist my mistress?"

"I will," was my response. "But how?"

"Nothing can be done till some time after the household has retired," resumed Grace. "This will be shortly after eleven o'clock. Will you and can you have three horses ready—two with side-saddles, the other for yourself—punctually at half-an-hour after midnight?"

"I will. Where are the horses to be stationed?"

"Between this and the road:"—meaning the one that led over the isthmus to the mainland.

"Very good," I answered: "it shall be done."

"You speak confidently, Joseph," said the lady's-maid: "have you well weighed all the difficulties attending the part you have to perform?"

"Yes. In the first place, one of the grooms sleeps over the stable; and I shall have to quiet him: but Sandie is fond of 'mountain dew'—and I know how to deal with him. In the second place, the trampling of the horses' hoofs might be heard as I lead them out from the stable: I will guard against that. There is no other difficulty that I am aware of. But on your side, what have you to do? what obstacles to overcome?"

"Nothing of any importance," answered Grace. "I sleep in an ante-room communicating with Miss Vennachar's chamber; and we can both steal down together without making the slightest noise."

"Then at half-past twelve o'clock punctually," I said, "the horses shall be in readiness. I pledge myself to this. When was it that Miss Vennachar first spoke to you upon the subject?"

"Not till just now, when I was helping her to dress for dinner," answered Grace. "For some days past—indeed ever since Sir Alexander Carrondale left—I have observed, when alone with my young mistress, that she was very dull and desponding, and that she seemed as if desirous to speak to me on some point, but did not like to do so. Neither did I like to make any remark: but I secretly resolved to render poor Miss Vennachar a service if it lay in my power. I saw very well that this contemplated marriage was hateful to her; and after all I had heard, I had no difficulty in guessing that she loved another, and who that other was. So, this evening I did pluck up courage to say something—explanations ensued—you may imagine the rest."

"I suppose that Miss Vennachar has been a sort of prisoner for some days past?"

"Decidedly so," responded the maid. "And to tell you the truth, it was something which one of the ladies who are now staying at the castle, said to me that inspired me with disgust at the conduct pursued towards my mistress."

"And what did the lady say to you?" I asked.

"She plainly told me that I was to watch all Miss Vennachar's movements, and that I should be rewarded. Now, Joseph, you have perhaps heard me at different times declare that the will of the Chief is a law which we are all compelled blindly to obey: but when this will exhibits itself in such an unnatural fashion——"

"Right, Grace!" I exclaimed, no longer suspecting the lady's-maid's sincerity—and even sorry that I had doubted her. "You argue nobly. Miss Vennachar must be saved. We had better not remain here together any longer: you perform your part—and rest assured that I will accomplish mine."

We then separated,—I returning to the servants' hall, and Grace proceeding to some other part of the house.

I have stated in an earlier chapter, that some of the domestics at Inch Methglin had been very fond of questioning me about all the "fine sights," as they called them, which the English capital contained; and it happened that the particular groom who slept over the stables, was more than all the rest curious for information on those topics. I took care to sit next to him at supper; and turning the conversation upon London, quickly riveted his attention. I kept him in discourse until ten o'clock which was the time for him to retire. Then I followed him out into the back premises; and as if quite in a casual way, I said, "Some of these evenings, Sandie, I will come up and take a glass of mountain dew with you in your snug little quarters; and then I will tell you a very strange legend connected with London Bridge, but which I could not very well recite in the presence of the females."

"Oh, do!" exclaimed Sandie, already burning with curiosity to hear the promised narrative. "Why not to-night? I just happen to have a stone bottle full of the right sort."

"Well then," I said, "be it so. I will join you in about five minutes. But don't have anybody else: let us be alone together."

"So we will," said the groom: and away he sped to his quarters to make preparations for my reception.

I ascended to my chamber to make my own preparations. In the first place I secured about my person all the money that I possessed—and likewise took a few toilet-necessaries. Then I threw all my effects pell-mell into my box,—locking it and taking away the key. These proceedings scarcely occupied ten minutes: I stole down stairs, and issued forth unperceived from the back door of the premises which was not yet locked, as the butler, whose duty it was to see all right ere he retired, had not yet even begun to make his usual round. Sandie was ready to receive me in his quarters: the bottle of whisky, with glasses

and so forth, was upon the table; and he was already half-way through his first jorum.

I at once began to narrate some marvellous tale which I invented as I went on; and though he kept telling me that I myself did not drink, yet he made the best use of the time, and appeared resolved to drink for himself and for me likewise. But as the interval was short for the accomplishment of my purpose—not more than two hours—I was compelled to have recourse to stratagem. Stopping suddenly short in my narrative, I vowed that I heard the noise of some one entering the stables below. Sandie went down to see; and during his absence I poured a quantity of spirit into his half-finished glass,—this being his third. He came up, saying it was all right; and I continued the tale. As he sipped his toddy, his eyes watered, and he remarked that it was very strong: but what with tasting and tasting, he drank so deep down as to render it not worth while to put in more water for the small quantity that remained. During his temporary absence, I had thrown away the contents of my own glass; and I now officiously insisted on taking my turn to brew a couple more. I took very good care to make the groom's of exceeding potency; and somehow or another he liked my brewing so well, and drank his glass so quickly, that in ten minutes he was ready for another. Thus we went on until past twelve o'clock,—by which time my friend Sandie was so intoxicated as to be scarcely able to retain his seat. I had then no difficulty in persuading him to get to bed; and my proffered assistance in the process of disapparelling him, was accepted with much hiccoughing thankfulness. It was done:—and scarcely had the man's head touched the bolster, when he fell into a sound sleep.

It was now twenty minutes past twelve; and I had only ten clear minutes to accomplish the rest. Taking the lantern, I descended into the stable; and with all possible despatch, saddled and bridled three horses. Then, with a knife which I had about me, I cut up each of the three horse-cloths into four pieces; and by the help of some twine, enveloped the animals' feet in the muffling fragments of the cloths. This process was a longer one than I had anticipated; and when I stole up into Sandie's chamber once more, to assure myself that he still slept, I perceived by his watch—which he had left upon the table—that it was a quarter to one. However, the delay arose from no fault of mine; and as the groom slept so soundly that methought a cannon fired off close by his ear, would scarcely awaken him,—I lost not a moment in accomplishing the remainder of my work.

I led forth the horses; but despite of the muffling stockings which I had invented for them, they made a sufficient noise to alarm me considerably,—not so much with the idea that Sandie himself would awake, as that the sounds would be heard by those whose bed-rooms overlooked the stable-yard. And then, too, I had the misfortune to let a gate bang with considerable violence, as I conducted the animals out of that yard. A window was intantaneously thrown open at the back of the house; and the well-known voice of Cameron demanded if any one was about the premises. I remained perfectly motionless, holding the three horses in such a way as to keep them quiet also: but I trembled with suspense—for the least trampling on the part of the animals would inevitably have made Cameron raise an immediate alarm. Fortunately however, it was too dark for him to distinguish what was going on; and the horses remained perfectly still. The window was closed; and I lost no time in conducting the steeds towards the meandering carriage-road.

The castle clock now proclaimed one in the morning. I was therefore exactly half-an-hour behind my time. Again however I must observe that it was not my fault: but I began to be sadly afraid that Emmeline and Grace would think that I had failed from some unexpected obstacle, and perhaps be either flying on foot, or else retracing their way back to the castle by the shortest cut. These apprehensions were however speedily set at rest, as two female figures, habited in riding-dresses, suddenly emerged from the surrounding darkness.

"Heaven be thanked, you have come, Joseph!" said the sweet but now tremulous voice of Emmeline. "A thousand, thousand thanks for your generous zeal!"

I said a few hasty words to account for my delay—and also to assure the young lady and Grace that there was little to fear on Cameron's account; for they had heard his voice crying forth from the window. I made all possible haste to take off the wrappers from the horses' feet: but scarcely was this accomplished, when the sounds of footsteps reached our ears—and the next moment a man emerged from the surrounding obscurity.

"Ah! thieves! robbers!" he ejaculated forth, the instant he caught a glimpse of the horses and of human forms: and he was turning to fly precipitately and raise an alarm, when I sprang upon him and hurled him to the ground.

"Silence, Cameron!" I said, having recognised his voice. "Not a word—or it will be all the worse for you!"

My knee was upon his chest—my hand upon his mouth; and he was no doubt more than half stunned by the violence with which he had been thrown down—for his struggles were feeble and easily overcome. Already were Emmeline and Grace giving way to low and bitter laments,—when I called to them, if they valued their safety, to get upon their horses and leave the rest to me. My words inspired them with instantaneous fortitude—or at least startled them into a sense of the necessity of exercising all their self-possession: my directions were obeyed in a few moments;—and then I said to Cameron, who was now beginning to struggle more desperately with me, "By heaven! it will be a life and death affair if you offer the least resistance to my proceedings! I have a dagger here:"—and I thrust my hand into my breast, as if to grasp the deadly weapon.

"You would not murder me, Joseph?" he said, in a voice of terror: for his continuous struggle had for the instant rid his mouth of my left hand, which was placed upon it.

"Will you be quiet, then?" I asked: and without waiting for a reply, I sprang to my feet—leapt upon the steed that was in readiness for myself—and ejaculated, "Away!"

The horses bounded along the road: Cameron rent the air with his cries of "Help! help! they

are gone! Murder! to horse! to horse!—they are gone! they are gone!"—and his voice was heard for some moments, as he was evidently rushing frantically back to the castle, while we dashed on towards the isthmus.

Hitherto a deep obscurity had prevailed: but it seemed as if heaven itself meant now to succour the young lady's flight; for the moon suddenly burst forth from behind a cloud—and our way, otherwise difficult, became completely lighted. Miss Vennachar was a skilful rider; but Grace was far from equally expert; she however possessed courage—and that was the essential. Fortunately, too, I had by accident chosen for her a steady good-tempered horse, the docile qualities of which were known to Emmeline; and the assurances she gave her dependant on this point, encouraged the latter in her equestrian experiment.

The road across the isthmus was gained: in a few minutes the neck of land itself was threaded; and as we passed up the ascent over which the route wound on the main-land, we glanced for a moment towards the castle. An alarm had evidently been raised there—no doubt by Cameron's cries. Through many windows of rooms and passages, lights were seen moving quickly about—but too plainly indicative of the hurry and excitement of those whose hands bore them.

"There will be a pursuit, Miss Vennachar!" I said. "We must ride fast—and Grace must keep up her courage? Which direction do you choose to take?"

"I know not!" exclaimed Emmeline, almost wildly: "I know not!"

"We had better make straight for Edinburgh," I said; "where you are certain of experiencing a hearty welcome from Mr. Duncansby. We must go by way of Perth: our road will lie through

Carrondale; and—pardon the allusion—but if Sir Alexander should happen to be in the village, he will at once afford us his protection and his counsel."

"Be it so, Joseph," murmured Emmeline: and I could judge that she was violently agitated at the danger of pursuit.

On Grace's account we were unable to ride at the stretch of speed which we should otherwise have made our animals put forth: but for delicacy's sake, as well as for that of the maid herself, I could not possibly propose that we should outstrip her and leave her behind. The road skirted the lake; and from every point a complete view of the castle on the Inch might be obtained. The lights grew more numerous—they were springing up in all directions throughout the vast structure: it was evident that all the inmates of the establishment were about, and that the flight was fully known. The extremity of the loch was reached; and just as we were rounding it—near that very spot where the scene in the tent took place on the day of the excursion some months back—my ear caught the sounds of horses' hoofs coming from behind.

"We are pursued!" I said: "we must go faster! There are several after us!" I instantaneously added, as the sounds grew more plain, and I was enabled to distinguish that at least three or four horsemen were on our track.

"*Can* you go faster, Grace?" inquired Emmeline, her voice trembling with nervous excitement.

"Yes, Miss," responded the maid. "I will keep up with you. Don't mind me—nor fear on my account!"

On we dashed. I kept watching Grace to assure myself that she incurred no danger from the rapidity of our flight; and I was gradually relieved from all apprehension on that score. She retained her seat admirably; and it was difficult to believe that she was unaccustomed to ride on horseback. The sounds from behind were no longer audible: but as the road was somewhat tortuous, the dread idea flashed to my mind that our pursuers might have taken a cut across the fields to intercept us some way ahead;—and this I felt assured they would do, if they had not already done it—supposing that they had caught the sounds of our horses' feet, and had thus acquired the certainty that they were on the right track. In this case our capture would be certain: what was to be done?

"Miss Vennachar," I said, in a hurried voice, "we cannot keep this road—we shall be taken beyond all doubt!"

"Good heavens, Joseph! Then what do you advise?" she asked, full of feverish agitation. "It is for you to say——Good heavens! I would sooner die than be borne back to the castle!"

"We must throw them off the scent, Miss Vennachar!" I exclaimed.

"But how, Joseph?" she demanded, still in feverish agitation.

"Let us turn into the fields——Ah! an idea strikes me. It is a bold stroke! We will take the direction of Methglin itself:"—alluding to the village; for, as the reader will understand, having rounded the point of the loch, we were now on the same side as that village. "They will never think of pursuing us thither!"

"Be it so! We are in your hands," said Miss Vennachar.

We accordingly diverged at once from the main road: the moonlight guided us completely—and we pursued a narrow bridle-path running through the fields. I felt assured that we were in complete safety for the present; and we had also leisure on our hands to decide on the course which we should take anon. Every now and then we halted to listen: but no sounds of pursuit reached our ears. The lights in the castle, about a mile and a half distant, gradually beamed upon our view: those lights were numerous—and it was therefore evident that the best portion of the inmates, if not all, were up; and I could picture to myself the excitement which prevailed amongst them. That the Chief would send off pursuers in every direction, I had not the least doubt; and therefore I saw that when we should again resume a route in some definite manner, after this strategetic divergence, perils would again beset us. I did not however communicate my fears—but deliberated with myself most earnestly upon the best means for preventing their realization.

We advanced to within half-a-mile of the village of Methglin. It was unsafe to proceed farther in that direction: we therefore diverged away from the vicinage of the loch,—still continuing our course through the fields. Some miles were thus accomplished: two hours had elapsed since the moment of our flight: it was now three in the morning. The chill was nipping: my hands were so numbed that I could scarcely hold the bridle. I was cold indeed all over: for I had no great-coat; and pursuing our way through the fields, we were frequently compelled to walk the horses. Often, too, was I forced to dismount and open gates, or to examine the facilities of fording a brook or passing a ditch. Thus we were delayed and chilled. It however would be several hours before the dawn in that deep wintry season; and the obscurity of night was to us favourable to a certain degree. The moon was waning; and as we were threatened by an interval of total darkness, I proposed that we should at all hazards get into the road which led from Methglin into the main one passing through Carrondale. Miss Vennachar and Grace—both of whom did their best to keep up their spirits—left themselves entirely in my hands; and we accordingly gained the road in about another half-hour. We now pushed quickly along once more. Grace had by this time become as habituated to her steed as if she were previously well skilled in equestrian exercises; and she rode fearlessly. On we went without interruption—also without the slightest sounds of pursuit—until we reached a village, which from the singular shape of the church-tower, just dimly visible through the obscurity, I immediately recognised, and knew to be about fifteen miles from Methglin.

"We are only five miles from Carrondale," I said. "There we may make inquiries relative to Sir Alexander; or at all events we may bait our horses, and likewise learn whether our pursuers have passed that way. Then on to Perth, if circumstances compel us! It is fifteen miles from Carrondale to Perth——Can you accomplish it? We ought to be there before the dawn?"

"I can accomplish anything," answered Miss

Vennachar, earnestly, "so long as it will save me from the chance of being conveyed back to the castle!"

The five miles to Carrondale were speedily accomplished; and we rode up to the front of the inn. The village was entombed in silence: not a light was visible in any one of the dwellings: the inhabitants were no doubt locked in the arms of slumber. Leaping from the horse, I thundered away at the door of the *Carrondale Arms*—and then hastened to assist Miss Vennachar and Grace to alight. The limbs of both were so stiff, that they sank down in exhaustion upon a bench placed in front of the little hostelry for the accommodation of wayfarers. I held the three steeds; and in a few moments an upper window was opened, and the landlord inquired who we were. But before I had leisure to utter a syllable of response, the sounds of horses' hoofs galloping along the road, reached our ears.

"We must away!" I exclaimed, now all alive with a feverish excitement, but not for an instant losing my presence of mind. "Mount! mount!"

Emmeline and Grace, galvanized into sudden activity again, sprang forward. The sounds came nearer; and it was easy to distinguish that they approached from the direction of Perth, and *not* from that of Inch Methglin. But then at the same time it struck me that they were nevertheless our pursuers, who having already passed through the village, had turned back and were retracing their way.

Emmeline was in her saddle in a moment: I hastened forward to assist Grace—but scarcely was she mounted, when two horsemen galloped up to the spot. A low half-stifled shriek of terror burst from the lips of Emmeline: but an ejaculation of joy escaped mine, as I at once recognised Sir Alexander Carrondale.

Emmeline, suddenly reassured by that cry on my part, glanced towards the foremost horseman; and beholding her lover, gave vent to an ejaculation of joy likewise.

"Good heavens! Emmeline?" exclaimed the Baronet: and he sprang from his steed.

That same instant I stretched out my hand for Miss Vennachar to alight; and the next moment the lovers were in each other's arms. Oh, the bliss of that meeting for them!—Oh, the relief that it was for the faithful Grace and for myself! My heart swelled with exultation: I knew that all peril was now over; for that if need were, the inhabitants of the whole village would rise to protect Emmeline from being torn away from the arms of her well-beloved Alexander.

A few hasty words afforded mutual explanations. The Baronet was first informed of the particulars of our flight; and on his side he proceeded to state how it was that my letters had failed to reach him at once. It appeared that after leaving Inch Methglin, he and Mr. Duncansby had got as far as Perth on their way to Edinburgh,—when the worthy lawyer was seized with a sudden illness that assumed a most dangerous complexion. Sir Alexander would not think of leaving the best and kindest friend he had on the face of the earth—the man who had reared him from his infancy, paid for his education, expended thousands on the speculation of his lawsuit, and conducted it to a successful issue. For several days Mr. Duncansby remained in a state of unconsciousness: but when the crisis was past, and he recovered his reasoning faculties, his first solicitude was relative to any letters which might have arrived at his house in Edinburgh during his absence. One of Sir Alexander's valets was at once despatched for them; and when they came to the hotel at Perth, mine was found amongst them. Sir Alexander at once took horse, accompanied by one of his body-servants; and being now able to leave the lawyer without fear of relapse, he at once set off—though in the dead of night, or rather at an early hour in the morning—with the determination of proceeding to Inch Methglin, to insist that Miss Vennachar should be left to her own choice. Happily however he was saved all this troublous uncertainty, by encountering Emmeline at Carrondale in the manner described.

While these hurried explanations were being given, the landlord and landlady of the inn—on discovering that Sir Alexander was amongst the arrivals—had hastily dressed themselves, aroused their servant, and opened the door. The landlord, who acted as his own hostler, came forth to take the steeds: the landlady was lighting a fire in the parlour. Thither we proceeded: for Sir Alexander would not suffer me and Grace to remain where there was no fire. Refreshments—which were really most necessary—were speedily brought in; and I must candidly confess that the cold night air had so sharpened my appetite, I ate till I was almost ashamed. I need hardly observe that from Sir Alexander Carrondale both Grace and myself received the warmest thanks for the part we had performed.

Emmeline and her maid retired together to a bed-chamber: another was provided for me;—but before I withdrew, I asked Sir Alexander whether he would take any precaution in case of the pursuers from the castle coming to the village?

"They have no doubt long ago reached Perth," replied the Baronet, with a smile. "Three or four persons on horseback passed me on the road midway between this village and Perth: but they were riding too rapidly—and so indeed were I and my servant—to allow the possibility of mutual recognition. I thought little of the incident at the time: I was too much engaged in my own reflections. But now you speak of pursuers, there can be no doubt those horsemen whom I thus passed were they. As for precaution," he added, "I defy them——aye, and the whole Inch Methglin clan—to harm a single hair of whomsoever I may choose to protect in the midst of my own people. Go you up to bed, Joseph: you must stand in need of rest. You have acted most generously—most gallantly—and likewise most prudently: for Miss Vennachar has told me of your encounter with Cameron, and of your policy in diverging from the route so as to baffle the pursuers."

Sir Alexander Carrondale shook me by the hand; and I ascended to the chamber prepared for me. I slept soundly until nine o'clock; and on descending, found Sir Alexander and Emmeline, attended by the valet and Grace, about to issue forth. Miss Vennachar was still clad in her riding-dress—for she had no change of raiment; and it was the same with her maid. There was a blushing confusion in the young lady's looks—a

confusion in which joy and anxiety were likewise commingled.

"We would not let you be disturbed, Joseph," said Sir Alexander, "after your fatigues of last night: but now that you are up, you can follow us. We will return to breakfast presently."

Having thus spoken, the Baronet gave his arm to Miss Vennachar; and they walked forth from the tavern, followed by the valet, Grace, and myself. I half understood the meaning of what was to take place: I was not however certain, and did not like to inquire of Grace—much less of the valet. But the maid, though naturally reserved and taciturn, could not help speaking on this occasion; and in a low hurried whisper she gave me to understand that the marriage was to be at once solemnized. I was rejoiced at this intelligence, which confirmed the half-suspicion I had already entertained;—I was rejoiced, I say, because I felt that in another half-hour Emmeline would be altogether beyond the sphere of the overbearing tyranny of her uncle and cousin.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

THE HOTEL AT PERTH.

The marriage was solemnized—Emmeline was now Lady Carrondale—the lovers were rewarded for their faith and constancy; and I was infinitely rejoiced at beholding this triumph and this happiness. We returned to the little inn; and after breakfast, Sir Alexander Carrondale took me aside, and spoke to me in the following terms:—

"You are aware, Joseph, that Mr. Duncansby is lying ill at Perth. Though sufficiently recovered to be out of danger, and even to be beyond the fear of a relapse—or at least I sincerely hope so—yet some days must still pass by ere he will be convalescent. Were he in any real peril, rest assured that I should not think of abandoning him: but as he is in a condition which leaves no farther apprehension in my mind, I may safely entrust him to the care of one towards whom he himself entertains a kind feeling, and who I am sure reciprocates the sentiment. That person is yourself, Joseph. Of course you have no thought of returning to Inch Methglin; and it now becomes a duty as well as a pleasure on my part, to provide for you. I propose in the first instance that you shall be the bearer to Mr. Duncansby of the happy intelligence that Miss Vennachar has this morning become Lady Carrondale. You," continued the Baronet, with a friendly smile, "who have so generously and so enthusiastically borne a part in the circumstances which have led to this crowning of my happiness, are the most proper person to convey the glad tidings to one who will rejoice to receive them."

"It will indeed afford me, sir, great pleasure," I said, "to convey this intelligence."

"I was sure that such would be your feeling," observed Sir Alexander. "You will give this letter to Mr. Duncansby. I therein tell that worthy gentleman that you will remain with him at Perth until he shall be entirely convalescent. When he is able to return to Edinburgh, you will retrace your way to Carrondale, and take up your abode at the castle. Some of the rooms are already fitted up—several domestics whom I have engaged are there; and you will present this letter"—at the same time handing me another—"to my intendant. You will find, Joseph, that I have appointed you his deputy: for henceforth you shall no longer fill a menial position, nor wear the badge of servitude. Your duty will be to assist the intendant in supervising the proceedings of the work-people engaged in the repair of the castle, and in overlooking the domestics while putting the rooms in order. Your salary shall be liberal; and you may rest assured that I shall always have a regard for your welfare."

I thanked the Baronet in suitable terms for his kindness and handsome conduct towards me; but he rapidly cut me short, and proceeded as follows:—

"I am about to proceed with her ladyship to England, by way of Glasgow; and we shall probably remain in the southern kingdom for two or three months—as her ladyship would naturally seek to avoid the chance of falling in with her relatives of Inch Methglin, until their first feelings of resentment shall have subsided, and perhaps the way for a reconciliation paved. I have already sent for a couple of grooms from the castle, to take back the three horses to Inch Methglin; and they shall have instructions to bring your boxes with them on their return."

In the meanwhile a post-chaise and four, which had been sent for from a town about five miles distant, arrived at the village of Carrondale: and Sir Alexander, accompanied by his lovely bride, and attended by his valet and Grace, took his immediate departure for Glasgow. I mounted the horse which the valet had ridden during the past night from Perth; and set out towards that town. The distance was soon accomplished: and on arriving at the hotel, my prompt inquiry was relative to Mr. Duncansby's health. I received a satisfactory response, and ascended to that gentleman's chamber. He was lying in bed, propped up with pillows; and his countenance showed that he had indeed been dangerously ill. His features however expressed a real pleasure when he beheld me; and they became animated with infinite delight when I imparted the intelligence of the bridal.

"God bless you, young man," said Mr. Duncansby, "I all along knew that Inch Methglin would be outwitted, and that so much love on the part of the Baronet and Emmeline would have their reward. And so you aided and managed the flight? It was gallantly and nobly done! You have proved faithful throughout—and you will have your recompense. But let us see what Sir Alexander says in his letter to me:"—then having read the communication, the lawyer went on to observe, "To be sure! it is much better that they should go and spend the honeymoon afar from the chances of annoyance on the part of the Inch Methglins. Depend upon it, the Chief will forgive his niece in the long run: but even if he should not, it will be of no consequence, after all his tyranny and selfishness. As for Lennox, I have no doubt he will rave like a madman when he hears of his cousin's marriage. And so you are going to remain with me until I am convalescent? Well, I accept your services: indeed I am glad to have you with me. You can read

my business-letters as they are transmitted from Edinburgh, and act as my secretary in answering them."

This office I cheerfully accepted; and at the lawyer's request, proceeded to give him a detailed account of all the circumstances of the flight—whereat he was highly amused. He was strong enough to converse somewhat; and indeed was in such excellent spirits, that his physical condition improved proportionately.

"How was it," I asked—for by his discourse he encouraged me thus to question him,—"that Sir Alexander Carrondale became originally introduced into Inch Methglin's family under the name of Donald Stuart?"

"Donald Stuart," answered Mr. Duncansby, "was the name which he assumed some time ago on leaving the University at Glasgow where he was educated. You are already aware of the reasons which induced him, even when quite a youth—of only seventeen indeed—to adopt a feigned name instead of his real one. He felt that it was ridiculous to play the part of the Baronet without the means of sustaining his rank, and perhaps to be for ever excluded from the possession of his estates. But that same lofty spirit which thus prompted him, likewise prevented him from remaining in complete dependence upon my purse. Accordingly, when his twentieth year was accomplished—that is about three years ago—he intimated to me his intention of doing something to earn his own livelihood: and I offered to purchase him a commission in the Army. Indeed I insisted upon doing so, and lodged the money for the purpose with the principal Army-agents in London. Some months passed; and Sir Alexander, who still continued to reside at Glasgow, was seized with an inclination to visit those estates which were his birthright, but which had from his childhood been alienated from him. Of course retaining his assumed name, he did pay that visit, and it being in the summer time, he amused himself by roaming from place to place on foot—thus making himself acquainted with all the most remarkable features of Perthshire scenery. Under these circumstances was it that his wandering steps led him to the little village of Methglin; and so delighted was he with the scenery of the Inch, the loch, and indeed all that portion of Mr. Vennachar's estate, that he took lodgings in the village with the intention of passing a few weeks there and making sketches."

"I have seen some of his performances with the pencil," I observed, "and was highly delighted with the taste, the beauty, and the accuracy of his drawings."

"God bless you, young man," exclaimed Mr. Duncansby, "Sir Alexander possesses genius and talent, as well as every other ennobling qualification. Well, it was one day that as he sat sketching on the shore of the lake, he beheld Miss Vennachar for the first time. I suppose they got into conversation—which was natural enough, you know, under such circumstances: but very certain it is that Sir Alexander was so struck by the young lady's beauty, manners, and intelligence, that he prolonged his stay at the village, and was always sketching somewhere in the neighbourhood at the very hours that Miss Vennachar was accustomed to take her walks or visit the school. So they came to love each other. It happened about this time that the Chief was looking out for a tutor for his two young sons, instead of the stupid old Dominie who had become superannuated. Sir Alexander applied for the situation, and obtained it. I need not tell you, Joseph, what was the attraction which kept him in that neighbourhood and rendered him desirous to obtain an introduction to the castle. I should add, however, that he wrote to me, saying he had altered his mind about the Army—or at all events there was no hurry—and that he preferred performing the part of a tutor to wearing a red coat. Ah, the rogue! I soon discovered what the attraction was which kept him at Methglin; and he candidly confessed the truth. Now you know all."

I thanked Mr. Duncansby for these explanations, which filled up the only gap that had remained in respect to my knowledge of the love-affairs of Sir Alexander Carrondale and the Chief of Inch Methglin's niece.

The following morning's post brought Mr. Duncansby's letters from Edinburgh. He bade me read them to him; and amongst them was one from his head clerk, stating that from a previous communication received, a visit might be shortly expected at the lawyer's office in Edinburgh, from Sir Alexander's "English creditor," and the clerk furthermore requested to be favoured with instructions as to the course which he was to pursue.

"I will tell you what this means, Joseph," said Mr. Duncansby; "and then you shall write the reply to my dictation. The death of one of the original mortgagees—which only happened about three weeks back—has given his property to his nearest relative, who is an Englishman of the name of Dobble, or Dobbie, or some such denomination—I forget exactly what. So this Mr. Dobble, having been apprized of all the circumstances, is either coming, or else will send some trustworthy person, to receive the amount due from Sir Alexander Carrondale's estate. But my clerk cannot settle the business with him: so we must write off at once to say that Mr. Dobble, or whoever comes on his behalf, must be sent on to Perth to confer with me. We must also bid my head clerk send the packet of papers which specifically regard this individual's claim."

I sat down and wrote to Mr. Duncansby's head clerk, according to the terms of the lawyer's instructions. I likewise wrote several other letters to his dictation; and when I was about to set off to take them to the post-office, he bade me amuse myself for two or three hours by walking about the town and viewing whatsoever there was to be seen, as during that interval he would refresh himself with sleep.

On the following day I received a note from one of Sir Alexander Carrondale's servants who had taken the horses back to Inch Methglin; and this note was to inform me that my boxes had been brought from the castle, and were at the *Carrondale Arms*, awaiting any farther instructions I might give concerning them. I had purchased a few necessaries at Perth; and as there was every prospect of Mr. Duncansby being well enough in a few more days to return to Edinburgh—at which time I should set off to Carrondale Castle—I of course did not think it worth

while to have my boxes forwarded to me. On the following morning the post brought its fresh supply of letters from Edinburgh for Mr. Duncansby; and amongst them was one from the head clerk, stating that a person had arrived on behalf of Sir Alexander Carrondale's English creditor, and that according to Mr. Duncansby's instructions this person was coming on to Perth.

"Then I dare say he will be here presently," said the lawyer. "Just give me that packet of papers which my clerk has sent."

I did so: and Mr. Duncansby, sitting up in bed, looked over the documents,—arranging them in such a way as to be in readiness against the expected visit of the individual who was coming on behalf of Sir Alexander's English creditor.

"And now, Joseph, put my cheque-book on the table," continued Mr. Duncansby; "so that I may fill up a draft in the proper name when the man does come. But let me see!—these papers will tell us what the name is: for I know that it is not Dobble—nor yet Dobbie—though something like it."

At this moment there was a knock at the chamber door; and I hastened to see who was there. It was a chambermaid,—who said, "Will you be kind enough to tell Mr. Duncansby that a gentleman wishes to speak to him? He says he has been sent on to Perth by Mr. Duncansby's clerk in Edinburgh——"

"It's all right, Joseph," said the lawyer from his bed: "let the gentleman come up."

The chambermaid accordingly departed to deliver this message; and Mr. Duncansby, who continued looking over the papers, suddenly ejaculated, "Ah, Dobbins, to be sure! that's the name!"

Dobbins!—the name was familiar enough to me; for everything at all connected with the dearly beloved Annabel was indelibly impressed upon my memory. The reader will recollect that Dobbins was the name of the linendraper at Exeter, at whose door I had fallen in with Annabel, and of whom she spoke in the letter which she left for my perusal after my severe illness at Dr. Pomfret's. The mention of that name sent a sudden chill through my form, inasmuch as it vividly conjured up all in a moment the dreadful image of Mr. Lanover: and yet I said to myself at the same time, that Dobbins was by no means an uncommon name. Nevertheless, a sort of vague terror and trembling curiosity made me observe to Mr. Duncansby, "Might I inquire in what part of England this Mr. Dobbins resides?"

But scarcely was the question put, and before the lawyer had time to answer it, the door opened—I glanced round—and Mr. Lanover made his appearance.

He remained riveted to the spot in perfect astonishment on beholding me. And well he might!—for he had no doubt hitherto hugged the belief that I had perished along with all the other unfortunate victims of the wrecked emigrant-ship. But quickly recovering his self-possession, he advanced towards me with outstretched hand,—exclaiming, with as much affability as he could possibly throw into his harsh jarring voice or into his hideous looks, "What, Joseph! my dear nephew!—is it possible?"

"No, no!" I shudderingly ejaculated, as I shrank back in utter loathing: "I will not take your hand!"

"God bless the young man," cried Mr. Duncansby, now putting back the curtain and looking forth from the bed: "what is the matter?"

"Joseph," said Mr. Lanover, in a low hurried voice, "if you love Annabel——" and he placed his finger to his lip.

"I will leave you to settle your business together," I murmured quickly: and snatching up my hat, abruptly quitted the room.

Not heeding Mr. Duncansby's ejaculation to the effect that the business was not private, and that I might remain, I sped away. Mr. Lanover immediately followed me, and called out, "Joseph, one word!—for Annabel's sake, only one word!"

I stopped short at the end of the passage. Mingled terror, abhorrence, and disgust had prompted me to that abrupt flight from the lawyer's chamber: but now the terror passed away in a moment, as the thought struck me that in the midst of a large and crowded hotel, as well as in the broad daylight, it was scarcely possible that the miscreant Lanover would attempt any outrage against me. The sentiment of abhorrence and loathing still remained—and naturally so, for it was unconquerable: but the fear having subsided, I suddenly felt anxious to know what he could have to say to me. Therefore was it that I stopped short, as just described. The vile hump-back—who was dressed just as usual, in black garments—approached me, and said, "You have nothing to fear, Joseph. I have acted with apparent harshness towards you——But pray give me a few minutes' private interview."

"Yes," I answered: and throwing open the door of my own chamber, which was close by, I led the way into it. "And now, Mr. Lanover," I continued, "what do you want with me?"

"I have no doubt, Joseph," he went on to say, assuming a profoundly deprecating look—by which however I was not to be duped or thrown off my guard,—"you are much embittered against me—and reasonably so; because you cannot understand that it was all for your own good I acted towards you——"

"In a manner, sir," I sternly interrupted him, "which, if I gave information to the authorities, would transport you beyond the seas——those seas," I added, "in which you doubtless believed I was engulfed."

"But, my dear nephew," said Mr. Lanover, who for the instant had looked frightened at the threat implied by my words, "you would not——"

"No, sir," I interrupted him, "it is not my intention to molest you, if you fully and satisfactorily explain your motives for pursuing me with such remorseless atrocity and unrelenting hate. Moreover, you must furnish some guarantee against any future attempt——"

"My dear nephew——"

"No, no—I cannot be your nephew!" I ejaculated, indignantly and excitedly. "It is impossible! If the same family-blood rolled in our veins, your conduct would be something so monstrous, so frightfully unnatural——At all events, I will not call you *uncle:* I will not acknowledge that you have the authority or the power of a relative over me!"

"I see, Joseph, that you are very, very angry with me," said Mr. Lanover, still wearing that assumed demeanour of friendly deprecation, and

addressing me in a coaxing, cajoling style; "but when you come to learn my motives, you will perhaps think less harshly of me."

"And those motives, sir?" I inquired curtly.

"Look you, Joseph," continued Mr. Lanover; "I am a gentleman—you are perhaps aware that I was once a partner in an eminent banking firm——And you too are a gentleman by birth. Think you, therefore, that it was very pleasant for me to reflect that my own nephew—for such indeed you are—had sunk into the degradation of a lacquey wearing the livery of servitude? But I saw that you were obstinate—that you had conceived a prejudice against me—and that as you would not live beneath the roof of that home which I offered you, you had indeed no alternative, if thus abandoned to yourself, but to earn your bread by such means. Well, then, what was I do, in order to snatch you away from a course of life which it pained, afflicted, and humiliated me to behold you pursuing? I resolved to send you out to New South Wales, where I have influential friends and connexions. To their charge would you have been consigned: they would have given you a respectable, a confidential, and a lucrative situation in their immense mercantile establishment. You would have had an opportunity of paving the way towards the acquirement of an independence—perhaps of wealth. These were my views, Joseph. But how could I deal with such an obstinate, headstrong, perverse, and self-willed young man as you had proved yourself to be, except by stratagem and violence? Now you comprehend what my motives were; and instead of entertaining this bitter rancour against me, you ought to view my conduct in a generous light and express your gratitude."

I listened to this long tirade with some degree of impatience: for not a single syllable of it did I believe. I had it on the tip of my tongue to tell him that I was aware of the murderous purpose which he had on a former occasion entertained towards me: but the same consideration which had sealed my lips on the point when I met him in Aldersgate Street about ten months back, still rendered me silent: for I saw that if I betrayed my knowledge of his assassin-purpose at the time when I fled from his house, it would be at once making him aware that Annabel must have listened to what was then going on between himself and Taddy, and that she had communicated everything to me.

"Mr. Lanover," I said, "you have told me a long tale: but not for a moment will I so stultify myself, or consent to appear so ridiculously insensate and credulous in your eyes, as to even seem to believe it. No, sir—I believe not a single word of all you have told me!"

A devilish expression for a moment flitted over the humpback's horrible countenance: but it instantaneously vanished under the powerful effort which he evidently made to curb his hateful feelings; and he said in a voice more coaxing and cajoling than even his previous tones had been, "Joseph, will you come home with me—and I pledge you my soul that you shall be married to Annabel."

The bare idea of such happiness conjured up a quick glow of animation to my countenance: but its expression instantaneously grew sad and stern again, as the remembrance flashed to me of the deeply insidious wiles with which the wicked humpback had inveigled me to the den where I was plunged into a dungeon and thence removed on board the emigrant-ship. This same recollection, so vividly brought back to my mind, made me shudder with apprehension lest even at the present moment I was incurring some new danger at Mr. Lanover's hands. A voice seemed to be whispering in my soul that I must beware of him—that I must shun him—that I must place myself in security against his machinations; for that he was a man who would leave no stone unturned in the endeavour to carry out his detestable projects.

"Mr. Lanover," I said, as all these thoughts swept like a hurricane through my brain, "I will reflect upon what you have proposed, and will give you my decision presently. Go and transact your business with Mr. Duncansby: but beware how you breathe a syllable to that gentleman which shall be calculated to prejudice me in his estimation."

"And you, on your part, Joseph," replied Mr. Lanover, "will keep silence——"

"Yes. Have I not already done so?" I interrupted him. "Have I not endured more at your hands than any other being on the face of the earth would have done?—and have I not suffered it all in silence? Now go to Mr. Duncansby; and when you have finished with that gentleman, come to me here."

Mr. Lanover lingered for a few moments, as if somehow or another he did not altogether like the arrangement and would have much preferred that we should not be separated even though for a few minutes: but he offered no verbal remonstrance. Perhaps he thought it better not to betray a fear which would be to me in the light of a suggestion. He accordingly issued from the chamber: but my own thoughts had already proven amply suggestive. Scarcely had I heard the door of Mr. Duncansby's room close behind the humpback, when I hastened down to the stable and ordered the groom to saddle immediately the horse that had brought me thither, telling him that I was bound at once for Edinburgh on urgent business at Mr. Duncansby's command. Mounting the horse, I galloped away from the hotel: but instead of taking the road to Edinburgh, struck into that which led towards Carrondale.

While thus speeding along, I reconsidered all the motives which had urged me to this precipitate flight. I knew that Mr. Lanover had on one occasion sought my life: on another occasion he had kidnapped me and placed me on board an emigrant-ship bound to the nethermost parts of the earth; and on this present occasion, at the hotel at Perth, I had seen enough in the cajolery of his language, the ingenious but nevertheless incredible explanations he had given of his past conduct, and the fiend-like expression which had flitted over his countenance—as well as in his offer that I should accompany him to London, and his reluctance to lose sight of me,—I beheld in all these evidences, I say, sufficient to convince me that he meditated fresh treacheries. The motives for his past persecutions, mysterious and incomprehensible though they were, nevertheless still undoubtedly remained not merely in existence, but in all their pristine force; and I knew

him to be a man who would hesitate at nothing to carry out his ends. I felt that it would be vain for me to trust to the ordinary circumstances of security, or to rely upon my own means of self-defence or upon the protection of friends. If he thirsted for my blood—or if it suited him to become the arbiter of my freedom—he would watch my movements, he would employ agents to entrap me, and sooner or later I should be certain to fall into his snares. It was all very fine to think that as I was now a young man of nearly nineteen, I could protect myself in a way that I could not do when I was a boy: but I had received so many proofs of Mr. Lanover's frightful aptitude for crime and terrible ingenuity in working out his mischievous purposes, that I felt neither my life nor my liberty was safe so long as that miscreant knew where to pounce upon me. I therefore had to decide betwixt two alternatives—either to appeal to the authorities, or else to take to flight. The reader is aware that for Annabel's sake I could not adopt the former: I therefore had recourse to the latter. With some of my readers my conduct may perhaps savour of cowardice: but let any young man of between eighteen and nineteen fancy himself in my position, and he will readily acquit me of a dastard pusillanimity on the present occasion.

The fifteen miles between Perth and the village of Carrondale, were accomplished in about an hour and a half; and when I reached the inn, I sat down to write two letters. The first was to Mr. Duncansby, beseeching him not to be offended nor think ill of me on account of my sudden flight—but to believe the assurance that I had reasons of the most vital importance for shielding myself from the power of Mr. Lanover. The other letter was to Sir Alexander Carrondale, referring him to Mr. Duncansby for an explanation of the circumstances under which I had abruptly left Perth—expressing my deep regret at being compelled to withdraw myself from the Baronet's service—and entreating him likewise not to suffer his good opinion of me to undergo diminution, for I was to be pitied as the victim of mysterious influences, and not to be blamed for any misdeeds, which I should scorn to perpetrate. The letter to Sir Alexander I enclosed unsealed in that to Mr. Duncansby; and as a public conveyance for Perth passed through the village of Carrondale at the moment I had terminated my correspondence, I gave the packet to the coachman to deliver at the hotel where the lawyer had his temporary quarters. I should here observe that the reason I had told the hostler at that hotel that I was bound for Edinburgh, was not so much to account for the abruptness of my departure, as to throw Mr. Lanover off the scent, when, on discovering my flight, he should make the inquiries which I knew he was certain to institute.

And now what were my plans? what were my projects? I had nothing settled: but I had plenty of money in my possession. My wages while I was at Inch Methglin—the fifty guineas given to me by the Chief for rescuing Ivor—the ten pounds from Mr. Duncansby—and the hundred guineas from Sir Alexander, had altogether combined (the remittance to the Dutch Captain being deducted) to make me the possessor of a very handsome amount. My boxes were at the *Carrondale Arms;* and that was the reason I had come hither. Putting off Inch Methglin's livery, which I still wore, I did it up in a parcel, addressed it to the Chief, and left it to be forwarded by the next conveyance to Methglin. I then inquired of the landlord of the inn whether I could have a chaise or light cart to convey myself and my luggage to the nearest town, which was only a few miles distant. A light spring-cart was obtained; and I took my departure. On reaching the town, I took another conveyance to Glasgow; and still fearful that Mr. Lanover might have obtained a clue to my track and be perseveringly following it up, I pushed on to Carlisle, and thence to Manchester, where I considered myself in safety, the trail being sufficiently broken.

CHAPTER XLIX.

MR. DORCHESTER.

I NOW began seriously to reflect upon the propriety and possibility of effecting some change in my social position. I examined the state of my funds, and perceived that I had altogether one hundred and fifty pounds in my possession. I had been well educated; and with certain intellectual qualifications, a genteel appearance, good manners, and a little sum of ready money, I thought that I might strike into some career more elevated than that of menial servitude. But of what nature should this career be? If I obtained a situation as a clerk in some office, I might furnish a comfortable little dwelling with my ready money: but then I reflected that without proper testimonials I should find it difficult to obtain a clerkship,—the certificates I had with me being merely in recognition of my good character as a domestic. Next I thought of opening a school: but my youthfulness was an obstacle in the way of success, as parents would not like to entrust their children to a young man not nineteen years of age; and though by my height and my appearance I might safely have passed myself off as a couple of years older, still even that age was too juvenile to be consistent with the gravity and experience indispensable on the part of a preceptor.

While I was thus deliberating upon my future plans, during the first few days of my residence in Manchester, I happened to notice in one of the local papers an advertisement which I thought would suit me. It was to the effect that there was an eligible opening for a young man of steady habits, mental qualifications, and true Church of England principles, to embark a hundred or two of pounds in joining a clergyman in establishing a select school. Applications in answer to this advertisement were to be made, either personally or by letter, to a certain address at Oldham—a manufacturing town at no great distance from Manchester. Thither I accordingly repaired: but while on my way, I earnestly deliberated whether I should do well, considering the circumstances in which I was situated with regard to Mr. Lanover, thus to embark all my little capital in a venture which would necessarily chain me to a particular spot. But to confess the truth, I had already begun more than half to regret the step I had taken

in yielding to my terrors and fleeing from the excellent situation guaranteed to me by Sir Alexander Carrondale. It was however too late to retract; and now I reflected that if I continuously yielded to my fears of Lanover, I should always be a wanderer on the face of the earth, not daring to settle down in any particular spot. Besides, it occurred to me that I might possibly make such arrangements with the clergyman whom I was going to visit, that would enable me to receive back at least some portion of my money, if circumstances should at any time arise to compel me to sever the projected partnership.

Having thus well weighed all my views and prospects, I arrived at Oldham, and proceeded to the house specified in the advertisement in the Manchester paper. It was a respectable looking habitation; and the door was opened by a cleanly, neatly dressed servant-girl.

"I have called," I said, "in respect to an advertisement with the initials B. D."

"Walk in, sir," said the girl: "it is all right. The Rev. Mr. Dorchester is up-stairs."

Thus speaking, she led the way to a neatly-furnished parlour on the first floor, and where I found an elderly gentleman, of most respectable appearance, seated at a table on which lay a number of letters. His age was about sixty: his hair was gray—he was tall and thin—and wore a massive pair of silver spectacles. He was dressed in black, with a white cravat: his linen was scrupulously clean. His manners were affable, though his bearing was somewhat grave: his voice was pleasing—his language good and well chosen. Rising from his seat, he requested me to take a chair; and when he had resumed his own, I communicated my business,—mentioning my name, stating that I had a little ready money at my command,

but not informing him that I had hitherto filled menial positions.

"I am exceedingly obliged to you for having done me the honour of calling, Mr. Wilmot," said the clergyman, "but equally sorry that you should have given yourself the trouble: for I am very much afraid that I am more than half pledged to a gentleman who was with me this morning, and who has merely to seek his friends to ascertain whether they will advance the requisite amount."

"But perhaps, sir," I said, "there is a possibility of this gentleman not coming to terms after all."

"There is truly that possibility, Mr. Wilmot," answered Mr. Dorchester; "and without wishing to pay you a compliment, I should not be sorry if such were the case. Your appearance pleases me; and I think that we should agree very well together: but I am in honour bound to keep the matter open for the final decision of the gentleman to whom I have alluded."

"I respect your motives, sir," I observed, glad to find that I had to deal with so well-principled an individual; "and would not for the world endeavour to supplant any one who has been fortunate enough to seek you beforehand. At the same time, as I have come from Manchester for the purpose——"

"I understand you, Mr. Wilmot," said the clergyman blandly; "you would like to go a little into the business, so that in case the gentleman of whom I have spoken should not be able or willing to conclude with me, your journey will not have been vainly undertaken, and you will at least be made acquainted with my views and prospects."

"That is precisely what I had in my mind," I observed.

"Then be so good as to give me your attention," said the clergyman. "I will be very candid with you, Mr. Wilmot, and explain at once that I was formerly a rich man, holding two livings, and keeping a large scholastic establishment at Enfield, near London."

"I know Enfield well, sir," I exclaimed. "How long——"

"Oh! it is some years since unfortunate circumstances deprived me of my livings and broke up my seminary," answered Mr. Dorchester.

"Doubtless you were acquainted, sir, with the Delmar family?" I said.

"The Delmar family!" he repeated, at first with a sudden start as if astonished that I should be acquainted with them, and then shaking his head mournfully,—"I was on most intimate terms with the Delmars. Ah! Mr. Wilmot, it cut me to the very soul when I read in the newspapers, between three and four years back, of that most atrocious and mysterious deed which deprived society of one of its noblest ornaments. Yes, Mr. Wilmot, I was acquainted with them all. Edith, the youngest girl, has often been dandled on this knee. I was present at the marriage of Mr. Mulgrave and Clara: I read the funeral service over several of Mr. Delmar's children, who, prematurely cut off, went down to their early tomb. And so *you* are also acquainted with the Delmars?"

"I was, sir," was my response; and if there had been any doubt on my mind as to the complete respectability of Mr. Dorchester, it would have been cleared up by all that he had just told me.

"You are aware perhaps that Edith is married."

"No," he exclaimed. "Some years have elapsed—indeed many, many years—since I was in that neighbourhood. Whom has she married?"

"A young gentleman of your own profession—the Rev. Mr. Howard of Charlton in Devonshire."

"I knew him when he was a child," said Mr. Dorchester. "Yes: Henry Howard was the nephew of the late Mrs. Delmar—consequently Edith's cousin. But as I was observing just now, circumstances compelled me to give up my livings and my school. I mean to be frank with you, Mr. Wilmot; and I hope that because I have experienced misfortunes, you will not think the worse of me."

"Oh! no, sir," I exclaimed, with enthusiastic sympathy, as the faltering voice of Mr. Dorchester seemed to betray a deep inward emotion.

"I was once comparatively rich, as I have already hinted," he went on to say: "but I possess too yielding a heart, Mr. Wilmot. It may be a weakness—it may even be a fault; and if so, I must plead guilty thereto. The circumstances were truly distressing. My wife was an angel upon earth: she has long been a saint in heaven!"

Here again the clergyman's voice was tremulous: he paused for a few moments—lifted his spectacles to wipe his eyes—and then continued as follows:—

"Mrs. Dorchester had a brother who was a merchant of the City of London. He came to me one day—spoke of temporary pressure in money-matters—and requested my assistance. I had fifteen thousand pounds in the Bank of England, the fruits of economy and industry combined; and I at once placed that sum at my brother-in-law's disposal. But it was not sufficient for his purposes; and he requested me to join him as security in raising twenty-five thousand more. I believed him honourable, Mr. Wilmot: I imagined that his embarrassment was as transitory and as little really serious as he represented it. For the sake, too, of my adored wife's memory—the memory of his departed sister—I cheerfully fell into his views. I gave him bills for that large amount. In a few months he failed—he became bankrupt. The holders of those securities came upon me for the amount: they persecuted me severely—but I forgive them as a true Christian is bound to pardon all his enemies. They were however pitiless: my furniture was seized and sold—my livings were sequestrated—my school was broken up. This happened long years ago. Since that lamentable era I have been engaged as a curate in Lincolnshire: but the recent death of my patron has thrown me again upon my own resources. I am in possession of about seven hundred pounds, the accumulations of small savings—the results of strictest economies. I seek to embark this amount in a manner that will give me a provision for my old age; and I am desirous to associate myself in the formation of a school with a steady, active, intelligent, and genteel young man, who will lighten my share of the burden in the duties of tuition. When I propose that such an individual shall contribute one hundred and

fifty, or a couple of hundred pounds, to this enterprise, it is rather for the purpose of obtaining a suitable guarantee for his own respectability, and to rivet his interest as it were in the welfare of the establishment, than that the amount is of any real consequence to the success of the speculation."

"I thank you most sincerely, Mr. Dorchester," I said, "for these frank explanations. Assuming, therefore, that the gentleman who is already in treaty with you, should fail to fulfil his share of the bargain, I shall most cheerfully embark in the enterprise—with this condition, however, that if at any time circumstances should transpire——"

"You are only about to anticipate, Mr. Wilmot," interrupted the clergyman, "the very remark which I was on the point of making as an addition to my previous explanations. It is this—that if at any time the gentleman associating himself with me in this undertaking, whoever he may be, should wish to retire, he may do so, and shall at once receive back the amount which he may have originally disbursed. For I repeat that such amount is regarded by me as a substantial guarantee for his own good qualities, rather than as an absolutely necessary addition to my own resources."

"Nothing can be fairer," I observed; "and I am only sorry that the previous application of another should stand in the way of my own success."

At this moment the maid-servant entered the room, and presented a letter to Mr. Dorchester. I was rising to take my departure, thinking that I had already sufficiently intruded upon his time—when, as he glanced at the writing of the address, he said, "Wait awhile, Mr. Wilmot: this comes from the very gentleman of whom we have been speaking."

Mr. Dorchester read the letter with grave and business-like attention; while I resumed my seat with some little degree of suspense: for after all I had heard from that gentleman's lips, and from what I saw of him, I was indeed most anxious to become his partner in the contemplated enterprise. He laid down the letter; and with a benevolent smile, said, "It seems destined, Mr. Wilmot, that you and I are to co-operate. The gentleman to whom I have alluded, is unable to raise the requisite sum of money. Those relations on whom he depended, are unwilling to assist him in the matter. Now, it occurs to me that I have perhaps had a somewhat fortunate escape: for he frankly admitted to me that he had been a little extravagant and wild, but gave me the assurance that he was anxious to settle down in an honourable and respectable mode of life: therefore, in a true Christian spirit did I believe him. But this refusal on the part of his friends to advance him a comparatively small sum of money, appears to argue a total want of confidence in his promised reformation: and hence is it that I begin to suspect his unsteadiness has been greater than he chose to admit, and that I have experienced a fortunate escape."

"There being no farther obstacle, Mr. Dorchester, to an arrangement with me," I exclaimed, "perhaps you will now seriously consider my application."

"I will at once give you a definitive response," answered the reverend gentleman; "and that is in the affirmative. My funds are all in the hands of the leading banker in this town; and it would be as well that your money should be paid into the same account."

"I have it not with me," I said,—"but will call upon you to-morrow with one hundred and fifty pounds—which sum constitutes the whole of my means."

"Be it so," rejoined Mr. Dorchester. "Perhaps you will make arrangements to dine with me; and we can employ an hour or two in looking at a house which I have already agreed to take, and which, I think, will answer our purpose. It belongs to Mr. Pointer, a leading manufacturer in this town, whose friendship I have the good fortune and honour to enjoy; and he has not merely promised his own three sons as pupils for my opening, but has so generously interested himself that he has secured me nine or ten others from amongst his friends: so that with a dozen pupils as a commencement, you perceive, Mr. Wilmot, it is no very hazardous speculation."

I was delighted with this intelligence, and promised to be with Mr. Dorchester by noon on the following day. I was rising to take my leave, when he insisted on offering me refreshments; and ringing the bell, ordered the maid to bring up a tray for luncheon,—adding in a blandly grave tone, "You may furnish malt-liquor, and wine also: but forget not the spring-water for myself."

In a few minutes the maid returned, bearing a tray containing refreshments, together with the drinkables to which Mr. Dorchester had alluded. I partook of the malt-liquor: I did not however touch the wine—for my habits were remarkably temperate: but it appeared that those of Mr. Dorchester were far more so. He drank water only,—informing me that for the last twenty years of his life alcoholic fluid had never passed his lips. I further observed that while I was eating cold meat, pickles, and so forth, Mr. Dorchester partook of nothing more substantial than a crust of bread and a few water-cresses; so that I judged his habits to be frugal to a degree. I was all the more satisfied with these demonstrations of the simplicity of his taste, and thence derived additional good auguries for the success of our scholastic speculations.

I returned to Manchester, well pleased with the result of my journey to Oldham; and on the following morning I packed up my trunks and repaired to the latter town. Leaving my boxes at an inn, I bent my way to Mr. Dorchester's abode, and found him dressed in readiness to receive me: but on this occasion, instead of being busied with his letters and papers, he was profoundly engaged in the study of Drelincourt's work on Death. I certainly thought the employment a somewhat melancholy one: but its effect on Mr. Dorchester appeared to be beneficent, inasmuch as he assured me that it inspired him with a holy and pious resignation when he thought that he might full soon be called upon to meet the Destroyer face to face. Closing the book however as I made my appearance, he put on his hat; and we walked forth together. He conducted me to a house situated in the environs,—having a nice garden (so far as I could judge of it in the winter-time) and a large space in the rear fitted for a playground. The dwelling was in good repair, and

spacious—for it contained about four-and-twenty rooms. Altogether it seemed most eligible for the purpose which we had in view; and I was as much astonished as delighted when I learnt that the rent was only forty pounds a-year. But then, as Mr. Dorchester informed me, his friend the manufacturer wished to give him all the material encouragement possible in the carrying out of his speculation.

Having viewed the house—and having agreed together upon certain little alterations which Mr. Dorchester suggested, and the propriety of which at once struck me—we began to retrace our way towards his own dwelling. A handsome carriage dashed past us: Mr. Dorchester bowed to the lady and gentleman who were seated inside—and informed me that those were the parents of two of the pupils whom he had already obtained through the interest of his friend Mr. Pointer. A little farther on he bowed to a gentleman in a gig; and this gentleman, he told me, was the guardian of three young orphans who were likewise to be our scholars. He offered to take and introduce me to his kind friend the manufacturer; and presently we stopped at a handsome and imposing-looking house in the neighbourhood of a large factory. Mr. Dorchester knocked at the front door—while I remained standing at a little distance: for, the truth is, I began to be rather frightened at my own conduct in having put myself on a footing with Mr. Dorchester, and at not having told him that I had filled menial situations. It struck me I was doing wrong to allow him to present me to persons who might be highly indignant if they came to discover that I had so recently worn a livery. I was however relieved from this sudden anxiety: for having exchanged a few words with the domestic who opened the front door of the manufacturer's house, Mr. Dorchester came towards me expressing his regret that his kind friend was not within.

He conducted me back to his dwelling; and on ascending to the sitting-room, I found the cloth laid for dinner. Mr. Dorchester looked at his watch; and perceiving that it was four o'clock, observed, "We forgot to call at my bankers! It will be as well if your money, Mr. Wilmot, were paid in to-day."

"I have it with me, sir," I answered, "in this pocket-book, and should certainly wish it to be deposited at once in a place of security. But before we proceed another step I deem it my duty to inform you of something which I begin to fear may possibly induce you to pause——perhaps to break off the negotiation altogether."

"Young man," answered Mr. Dorchester, with a mild and mournful severity, "if you have done anything wrong—if this money of your's have been dishonourably acquired——"

"Oh, no!" I exclaimed, with a flush upon my cheeks: "I can lay my hand upon my heart and declare that I never performed a dishonourable action!"

"Excellent young man!" said the reverend gentleman, stretching forth his hand: "forgive me if for a moment I wronged you. But what is the information which you have hitherto omitted to impart?"

"It is, sir," I responded, "that I have recently filled menial positions——"

"Enough, my dear Mr. Wilmot!" interrupted Mr. Dorchester, with a kindness that appeared to me truly paternal. "If by your own merits you raise yourself to a higher position—and if by your honourable economies you have accumulated certain little resources—it is entirely to your credit; and I am all the more delighted to complete the negotiation with you. Therefore, in order that there may be no farther discussion on the point, I will at once proceed to the bank to pay in your money; and in the interval you can perform your ablutions in my bed-chamber adjoining."

Infinitely rejoiced to think that the avowal I had just made, tended to cement instead of to destroy Mr. Dorchester's friendly feeling towards me, I counted down my bank-notes to the amount of one hundred and fifty pounds; while the clergyman drew up a receipt, expressing the object for which the money was advanced, and pledging himself to restore it upon due notice from me for a separation of partnership. I assured him that no such document was necessary: but he insisted upon carrying out the transaction in a business-like manner; and I of course let him have his own way. He went forth to lodge the amount in his banker's hand; while I passed into his bedroom to perform my ablutions preparatory to dinner. In about twenty minutes he returned; and the repast was then served up. It consisted of a roast fowl and a couple of mutton chops, with vegetables. He helped me bounteously to the prime parts of the chicken, but made his own dinner off a single mutton chop. He drank nothing but water—yet insisted that I should partake of a glass of wine,—observing that though his own habits were so simple, he was by no means inclined to enforce the example of such rigid abstemiousness in respect to so young a man as myself. To be brief, the evening passed away agreeably enough; and the more I saw of Mr. Dorchester, the better did I like his manners and the more highly could I appreciate his intellectual qualifications. At about half-past eight I rose to take my leave; and it was understood that I should be with him at eleven in the forenoon of the ensuing day, so that we might at once commence the purchase of the furniture for the new house.

During the few days I was at Manchester, I had felt deeply but painfully interested in observing the condition of the factory-workers; and now that I was at Oldham, I experienced an inclination to pursue the same study. At the period of which I am writing, there were few or no restrictions upon the hours of labour in the mills; and thus the machinery was kept running in some factories till late hours. On issuing forth from Mr. Dorchester's abode, I wandered through the town to see the factory-slaves,—for *slaves* they assuredly are, and plunged too into the very worst degree of slavery, —turn out from the mills. It was also interesting to contemplate the enormous structures themselves, blazing with light in every window. The time slipped rapidly away as I pursued my ramble, stopping at frequent intervals to observe the human tide pouring out from each successive factory as the day's labours were at length brought to a close; and, in short, it was half-past ten o'clock when from the remotest part of the town I began to

retrace my way towards the inn at which I had secured a bed. As I was passing through a narrow street almost completely lined with huge towering factories, my attention was suddenly drawn to a terrific disturbance which exploded as it were all in a moment from a public-house. Two men rushed out and began to engage in a furious battle, —the same door vomiting forth a dozen half-drunken creatures of both sexes—who, with shouts, and yells, and cries of wild savage delight, encouraged the combatants. Half-a-dozen police-constables were soon upon the spot; and there was a general rush of spectators and combatants back into the public-house. I got mingled with the throng and was irresistibly borne thither in their midst. Order was however soon restored: but one of the pugilists had received so severe a blow from his opponent, that he fell down senseless. At first it was thought the man had been stricken with apoplexy, and that he was dead. He was laid upon a bench in front of the bar: restoratives were administered, and I lingered to ascertain the result,—being naturally anxious on account of a fellow-creature whose life appeared to be in such jeopardy. He began to recover slowly; and just at the instant that he unclosed his eyelids, the door of the public-house parlour was thrown open. A half-tipsy individual, having the air of a small tradesman, came forth, with a pipe in his mouth; and in a thick voice inquired "what the devil all the disturbance was about?"

Glancing towards him, I was on the point of retreating in disgust from the entire scene, when methought that within the room on the threshold of which the half-tipsy individual had halted, I caught a glimpse of Mr. Dorchester. But if so, his appearance was assuredly very different from that of the grave and sedate gentleman whose drink was water and who for twenty years had never suffered alcohol to pass his lips. It was a drunken, brawling, furious vociferator, vehemently denouncing—and with no small quantity of imprecations too—some individual with whom it appeared he was holding an argument. I remained riveted to the spot in speechless amazement: the half-tipsy tradesman with the pipe retreated into the room—and the door was closed. My first impulse was now to rush towards the door—fling it open again—and satisfy myself whether my suspicions were true or false: but on a second thought I turned abruptly away and quitted the house.

"No," I said to myself, "it is as ridiculous, as it is insulting to the character of that excellent clergyman! I should have sunk immeasurably in my own esteem if I had yielded to an idea so dishonouring to a worthy man, and if I had suffered a momentary illusion to hurry me on to the taking of a step which on convincing me of my mistake would have filled me with humiliation."

Thus reasoning, I gained the tavern where I was to sleep—and retired to rest. But slumber did not immediately visit my eyes; and notwithstanding my endeavour to persuade myself that it was *not* Mr. Dorchester whom I had seen, my misgivings became strengthened. If it were not he, the individual of whom I had caught a glimpse, bore a remarkable resemblance to the reverend gentleman. Was it possible, I asked myself, that he could be a dissembler in public but a debauchee in private?—and was it possible that I had been swindled out of my money? No: I could not—I dared not come to such a conclusion. Had he not behaved most honourably? had he not taken me to the house which was to be hired for this scholastic speculation? had he not purposed to introduce me to his friend Mr. Pointer? had he not bowed to the occupants of a carriage and to a gentleman in his gig? Thus did I strain and strive to reason myself out of my apprehensions: but the longer I reflected, the more serious they grew. I was now bitterly annoyed with myself that I had not penetrated into the public-house parlour to clear up the uncertainty: I felt that I had yielded to a sentiment of generous confidence which was unnecessarily and even foolishly punctilious. However, it was now too late to take any step; and I must await the morning for the solution of all my doubts.

I slept but little that night; and the few brief intervals of slumber which I did snatch, were troubled and uneasy. I rose early—indeed before it was light; and issuing forth, sought the street in which Mr. Dorchester dwelt. My hand was upon the knocker—but I withdrew it. What was I about to do? It was now scarcely eight o'clock, and I was not to be with him till eleven:—what excuse could I make for this untimely visit? If all my suspicions were unfounded, how was I to explain my motives for knocking at the door thus early? and how could I question the maid-servant as to the manner in which Mr. Dorchester had spent the previous evening? I hastened back to the tavern — ordered my breakfast — and endeavoured to tranquillize myself to the utmost of my power. But still I was not easy; and when the meal was over, I sauntered again into the street where Mr. Dorchester dwelt. It was now nine o'clock; and the maid-servant was at the moment entering the house with a bunch of water-cresses in her hand. Ah! assuredly these were to form a portion of the clergyman's frugal meal; and it could not possibly be he of whom I had caught a glimpse in that low pot-house. Such was my reflection; and at the instant I caught the look of surprise which the maid flung upon me. I sped away again—and wandered about the town until ten minutes to eleven. *Then* I thought I might venture to knock at the door of the clergyman's abode. I did so; and while waiting for my summons to be answered, I felt my heart palpitating violently. The trim, neat-looking servant-girl soon made her appearance; and with a still deeper degree of suspense, I said, "Is Mr. Dorchester within?"

"Oh, no, sir!" she replied, with an air of amazement: "he went away last night."

"Went away last night?" I ejaculated, fury in my brain and sickness at my heart: for now all in a moment my worst fears were confirmed.

"To be sure, sir," continued the maid; "and I understood that you were going with Mr. Dorchester. He told me so; and therefore I was quite surprised to see you passing up the street at about nine o'clock, when I went out to fetch something for missus's breakfast."

"And who is your mistress?" I asked impatiently.

"Why, the landlady of the house, to be sure," responded the girl, somewhat distantly, as if she

did not like to be questioned in this imperious manner. "Mr. Dorchester was only a lodger here: I suppose you knew that?"

"What is it all about?" asked a short, fat, stout, middle-aged dame, who now came forth into the passage from the ground-floor room.

"Why," I exclaimed, half in a rage, and half in humiliation at the ease with which I had suffered myself to be robbed, "I have been swindled by that sanctimonious scoundrel——"

"Swindled?" ejaculated both the landlady and the maid-servant, at first in an astonishment that was evidently unfeigned,—and then with a light appearing to break in simultaneously upon their minds. "Ah—all those letters which he used to receive!"

"And the advertisements that he put into the papers!" added the maid.

"Step in, sir—step in," cried the landlady: then, as I walked into her little parlour, she went on to observe in a hurried and excited manner, "I can assure you that this is a most respectable house: I have kept it for the last twenty years—paid my rent and taxes regularly, and never had the water cut off in my life——"

"I do not for a moment," I said, "accuse you of any complicity in the villain's schemes; but it is not the less a fact—and a very painful one for me too—that I am robbed of one hundred and fifty pounds."

"Oh, the rascal!" ejaculated the landlady, holding up her hands in astonishment. "And I who used to think him such a pink of piety!"

"But, ma'am, don't you recollect," interrupted the maid-servant, "that I told you on two or three occasions that I thought Mr. Dorchester came home at night a little the worse for liquor, when he said that he had been by the bed-side of a poor invalid and was so overcome by his feelings——"

"Where was he last night? when did he leave? Tell me all about it," I exclaimed, "and I will run off to the Mayor."

"He went away at half-past nine o'clock last night," responded the landlady. "He said you and he were about to open a school at Manchester, and that you were going there together at once on very particular business indeed. He paid his rent and his bills quite honourable—and I thought it was all right."

"And I saw him at a public-house as tipsy as he could be: so that you see it was all wrong. Ah, the villain!—he who had never touched alcoholic liquor for twenty years, to go and get so frightfully drunk!"

"The vile hypocrite!" exclaimed the servant-girl indignantly: "he used to scold me for not going to church on a Sunday, and had a cold dinner on purpose that I should have nothing to cook for him."

"All these pretences, you see," I observed with bitter vexation, "were to throw persons off their guard when they came in answer to his advertisements; so that if they addressed themselves to you," I added, speaking to the landlady of the house, "you would have given the reverend gentleman a most excellent character. And then, too, those persons to whom he bowed—that lady and gentleman in the carriage—that gentleman in the gig——Ah! it is so easy to affect an acquaintance where none really exists! The villain! But how did he go? who took away his trunks? Perhaps he is still in the town——"

"Don't excite yourself, my poor young gentleman," said the laudlady, evidently compassionating me much: "and I will tell you all about it. The moment you left last night, Mr. Dorchester rang the bell and called me up—paid his rent—and said he was going away directly. Of course I had no suspicion of anything wrong; and if I had, I could have done nothing. He ordered the girl to pack up his box; and then he set hard to work to arrange his writing-desk. He tore up a lot of papers and letters before he went, and the fragments are still all lying about the room, because we hav'n't had time yet to do the place out. But come up-stairs and see what a mass of papers he destroyed before he went!"

The landlady hurried me up the staircase; and we entered the room,—the maid following. As she had said, the carpet was strown with the fragments of the letters. I had the curiosity to pick up three or four of the largest pieces, and found that they belonged to the correspondence he had received in respect to the advertisements which had beguiled me. I was about to turn away, when my eyes settled on a paper of a different description: it was crumpled up, but had not the appearance of a letter. I stooped down and picked it up; when to my surprise I found it to be a leaf out of some registry of marriages: it was not torn and every entry was perfectly legible. As I glanced over it, I caught sight of a name which riveted my attention to the particular entry to which it belonged; and to my infinite surprise I found that it was the record of the marriage of the Hon. Augustus Mulgrave and Clara Delmar, whose union appeared to have taken place on the 10th of September, 1820.

"What have you got there, sir?" inquired the landlady of the lodging-house, as both she and the maid saw with what attention I was contemplating the document which I held in my hand.

"Something," I responded curtly, "which may perhaps afford a clue to the discovery of the scoundrel."

I thereupon hastily folded up the document—put it into my pocket—and quitted the house. The answer I had given the landlady was not precisely consistent with truth, inasmuch as the mere finding of a leaf of a register could not possibly afford any such clue as that which I described. But conceiving it to be of more or less importance, I had thus taken possession of it. I recollected full well Mr. Dorchester had told me that he was many years back the incumbent of livings either at or near Enfield; and it naturally struck me that for some reason or another—assuredly not an honest one—he had abstracted a leaf from the register of one of the churches where he officiated at the time. If this were the case,—as indeed there was sufficient evidence to justify the suspicion, if not to prove the fact,—family interests might have been injured and persons wronged; and I resolved to take some opportunity to repair the mischief (if such had really been done) by the restoration of the abstracted leaf.

But in the meantime what course was I to adopt to discover the sanctimonious swindler and get back my money? I had but two or three

pounds left in my pocket; and the loss of my little treasure naturally afflicted me much. Unless I regained it, all my hopes of improving my social condition were for the instant destroyed; and there was no alternative but to return to a state of servitude. I wandered through the streets of Oldham, dolefully ruminating on my misfortunes,—when I recollected that I had not tarried to glean from the landlady by what means Mr. Dorchester's trunks had been removed, and whither they were conveyed. I was about to retrace my steps, when I found myself in front of the house of Mr. Pointer, the great manufacturer whom my swindling acquaintance had vaunted as his friend. I was determined to ascertain whether there were any shadow of truth in that boasted friendship; and I knocked at the door. The footman answering the summons, was the same to whom Mr. Dorchester had spoken on the previous day.

"Did you know that gentleman," I inquired, "who called here yesterday?"

"I only know," answered the footman, "that he had been here once or twice before to see Mr. Pointer about a house which he wanted to take. But my master did not like his tales, and refused him as a tenant. However, if you step round to the counting house in the factory, master will give you all the particulars."

I thanked the man for his civility, but had already learnt enough to convince me that the story of the manufacturer's kind friendship was a mere fabrication. I retraced my way to the lodging-house; but the landlady could give me no satisfactory intelligence in respect to Mr. Dorchester's movements after he left on the preceding evening; for it appeared that he himself had gone out to fetch a porter to carry away his luggage, and neither the landlady nor the maid had learnt whither it was thus borne. As a last forlorn hope, I found my way to the public-house where the disturbance had taken place; and there I received information which led me to abandon any farther attempt to trace out the impostor. He had arrived there with his boxes a little before ten o'clock on the previous evening—he passed the night there—and at six o'clock in the morning went away in a hired chaise, the landlord knew not whither.

CHAPTER L.

MANCHESTER.

It was out of the question for me to think of expending my little remaining resources in travelling to Enfield, for the mere purpose of placing the leaf of the register in the hands of the clergyman to whom I should have to address myself for the purpose. At first I thought of sealing it in an envelope and transmitting it to the minister at Enfield: but then I knew not exactly that it belonged to the Enfield parish registers at all. Next I thought of enclosing it to Mr. Mulgrave: but I had no certainty that he was still an inhabitant of Delmar Manor; and as there was the entry of his marriage on the leaf, I considered it to be of too important a nature to trust to the post unless with the conviction that it would reach his hands direct. Moreover, I was too much bewildered and troubled with the circumstance of my own unfortunate position, to be able to devote my mind to deliberate reflection on the point: therefore, on returning to the tavern where I was sojourning, I secured the document in my box, and then sat down to meditate upon the course which I ought now to pursue.

I was more than half determined to write to Mr. Duncansby or Sir Alexander Carrondale, and give such explanations as might have the effect of restoring me to the service of the Baronet: but I was fearful that my conduct might be regarded as capricious and whimsical, and that though I should possibly be received back into Sir Alexander's employment, I should find myself looked upon with coldness, if not with mistrust. I therefore sallied forth, and adopted the usual course of inquiring at the principal shops whether the tradesmen knew of any family who required a domestic. The answers were universally in the negative; and I returned in the evening to the tavern, wearied in body and depressed in mind. For several successive days I pursued my inquiries: I heard of two or three places—but when I applied for them, I found that I was either too young or too old, and therefore experienced disappointment.

I returned to Manchester, and made inquiries there—but was still unsuccessful. In the meantime my little funds had been slipping away, notwithstanding all my economy; and it was with a species of consternation that I found myself close upon the end of my pecuniary resources. Then, in a fit of desperation, I wrote off to Mr. Duncansby, expressing my deep regret for having fled so precipitately from Perth—assuring him that if I had an opportunity, I would in confidence give him such explanations as would vindicate me from any charge of whimsicality or ingratitude—and concluding with a prayer that he would use his influence with Sir Alexander Carrondale to obtain my restoration to that gentleman's service. I awaited the return of post with the utmost anxiety: but it brought me no letter. Another day passed, and still no response: another and another—but my appeal remained unnoticed! I am not ashamed to confess that I wept at the thought of having lost those friends whom my good conduct had originally procured for me, and whose kindness would have proved so incalculably conducive to my interests.

But I was now completely at the end of my pecuniary resources. On returning to Manchester after my misfortune at Oldham, I had taken a cheap lodging—a small room at three and sixpence a week. I could no longer pay even this moderate rent,—I who but a short time previously had a well filled purse in my possession! I had to make away with some of my wearing apparel to raise money; and no tongue can tell the bitter, bitter feelings with which for the first time in my life I found myself forced to cross the threshold of a pawnbroker's shop. I continued unremitting in my inquiries for a place—but still without success in obtaining one. I heard of several and applied for them; but it appeared as if a thousand difficulties had combined at this epoch of my life to justify the old proverb that misfortunes never come alone. The great obstacle was that I had merely written testimonials, and could not give personal references to individuals in the neigh-

bourhood. Thus day after day passed—three or four weeks went by—and my position was rapidly growing more and more deplorable. The contents of my trunks went piecemeal to the pawnbroker's: yet I lived on bread and water in order to eke out the resources thus raised. But that bread was eaten in bitterness: for sweet as is the bread of industry, proportionately bitter is that which is procured by the sacrifice of other necessaries. Bread, bought by the making away of one's very garments, sustains life, it is true—but affords not a wholesome nor a healthy, much less a happy existence. At length the day came when my trunks were empty—when I had no earthly possession left but the clothes in which I stood upright—when I had not the means of raising another shilling—no, nor another penny,—and when a severe landlady bade me surrender up my poor chamber to some one who *could* pay the rent. On that day therefore I found myself a houseless wanderer—foodless and friendless—in the streets of Manchester. Ah, I remember it well—that day! It was a bleak and a bitter one in the month of February, 1840: but the state of my own feelings sent a keener chill to the very marrow of my bones than even the nipping atmosphere itself was able to impart. Good heavens! was it possible? It appeared to me like a dream, although it had not come suddenly upon me, but poverty and destitution had been advancing for days and weeks through all those phases which the course of ruin invariably takes.

Yes—I was a homeless, foodless, friendless wanderer in the streets of Manchester. The very condition of those factory-slaves whom I had so much compassionated, now appeared to me a perfect paradise in comparison with my own miserable and wretched state, though their's still was deplorable enough. Ah, was Annabel thinking of me at that time? Good heavens! if that generous-hearted girl knew that he whom she loved was dragging himself along with a bleeding, almost broken heart, through that wilderness of dingy dwellings, huge factories, and narrow thoroughfares, in the midst of the chill wintry atmosphere, —what would *her* feelings be? And Calanthe too, —if *she* who had loved me with so intense a passion and made such tremendous sacrifices for my sake—if she knew to what a position I was reduced—how pained, how shocked would her noble heart be! Ah, and if Emmeline, who owed to me all the happiness which had crowned her faithful love—who was indebted to me for the accomplishment of that flight which had saved her from being dragged to the altar to bestow her hand upon her tyrant cousin Lennox at the will of her imperious Chieftain-uncle,—if *she* were at that moment aware that the young man who had so disinterestedly succoured her, was in a state verging upon beggary, would she not have shed tears of sympathy on his behalf?

I was well nigh distracted by all these thoughts. Oh, vile Lanover—the author of all my miseries—the ill-omened wretch whose presence at Perth had scared me away from a position of comfort, of happiness, and of promise! Ah, I thought to myself that I was suffering much for the pure and devoted love which I experienced for Annabel—that love which had prevented me from securing my safety by punishing her father for his misdeeds towards me. Yet amidst all the bitterness of my reflections—amidst all the agonizing thoughts and horrible apprehensions which were gnawing like vultures at my brain—I did not for a single moment regret the course I had pursued in respect to Lanover for Annabel's sake.

Yet what was to become of me? For hours and hours I wandered about the streets of Manchester, hunger gnawing at my very vitals. I now knew what it was to want a morsel of bread: I could understand how it was that poor ragged, shoeless boys and shivering half-naked girls stood at the windows of eating-houses and cook's shops devouring with their eyes those provisions which could in no other way be reached by their greedy cravings. I too looked wistfully in at the steaming viands; and I should have been thankful for the greasiest lump of pudding which at other times would have made my heart heave at the bare idea of touching it. I wandered on until the cravings of hunger passed away, leaving behind a sinking sensation as if life itself were succumbing beneath the gaunt sharp rigid arm of famine. What was I to do? Oh, that I had written while I had yet money to pay the postage, to those who would perhaps have succoured me—to Mr. Howard at Charlton, or to Mrs. Robinson in the Isle of Wight. It was too cruel, I thought, of Mr. Duncansby not to answer my letter. He had once sent me ten pounds when I did not want it: if he had only remitted me as many shillings when I addressed him in that humble manner of plaintive entreaty, he might have prolonged a life which now appeared to be destined to ebb away under the influence of total destitution.

I wandered on. Night came—twenty-four hours had elapsed since my fast was broken; and I had not even a bed of straw whereon to stretch my wearied limbs. The shops were being shut up—the streets were thinning of their passengers, save and except the daughters of crime of all grades, from those in their flaunting tawdriness down to the most degraded and ragged wretches of the class. There was no prospect for me but to wander throughout the night—or else to find some shed where I could repose myself. There was a bitter chill in the atmosphere; and it searched me to the very marrow of my bones. But I dragged myself along, though painfully—for I was weak almost to complete exhaustion. I should not have cared for life, were it not that the image of Annabel was ever present to my mental vision; and I could not willingly lay me down and die so long as my gaze from within was thus fixed upon a star which beamed with the only hope I now had upon earth. Time was passing on—the church-clocks proclaimed midnight—and no longer able to advance another pace, I sank down on the steps of a private dwelling.

I had not been there many minutes, when a carriage came rolling along the street; and it stopped at the very house at the entrance of which I was thus resting my weary limbs. A tall livery-servant sprang down from behind, and was hastening to knock and ring at the door, when he stumbled over me, as I was crouched up shivering with cold upon the stone steps. The horrible idea of being given into custody as a vagrant, flashed to my mind: I rose up and was endeavouring to drag myself away,—when the servant said, "My poor

young man, you appear to be very ill?"—and at the same time he knocked and rang at the door.

"What is it, Thomas?" inquired an elderly gentleman, looking out from the carriage window.

"A poor young man, sir," was the response, "who was sitting on the steps:"—then, on obtaining a better view of me as I stood in the light of the carriage-lamp, the good-hearted domestic exclaimed, "But he is no common mendicant: he evidently has seen much better days."

At this moment the house door was opened—the old gentleman alighted from the carriage—and assisted an elderly lady to descend. The equipage drove away; and the old gentleman, putting his hand into his pocket, began to question me. I explained in a few hurried words that I had been in service in excellent families—that I had testimonials about me—that I had been robbed of my savings by a swindler at Oldham—and that I had vainly endeavoured to procure another situation. The gentleman and lady, as well as the man-servant, surveyed me with a deepening compassion as I told my tale; and when it was finished the gentleman drew out his purse—but the lady whispered something in his ears.

"To be sure—to be sure, my dear!" said the gentleman: "it will be much better. My poor young man," he continued, again addressing himself to me, "step inside: you shall have some food, and a bed for the night, To-morrow we will see what can be done for you."

Tears started into my eyes as I expressed my gratitude; and on entering the house, I was at once consigned to the care of Thomas, who appeared delighted at the charitable resolve which his master and mistress had formed with regard to me. I was conducted down into the kitchen:—a house-maid only had been sitting up to open

the door, the other servants having retired to rest: and she, who had witnessed the little scene in the street and had heard my explanations, exhibited as kind a sympathy as Thomas himself. The table was quickly spread with the contents of the larder—and I ate somewhat; but there was such a sickness at my stomach that it seemed rather to do me harm than good. A little warm wine-and-water however revived me; and I was conducted to a bed-chamber. Oh, how thankful was I for this sudden and most unexpected change in my wretched circumstances! Heaven itself seemed to have interposed on my behalf, to raise me up friends: and tears of gratitude moistened my pillow. I slept, through sheer exhaustion, till a late hour in the morning; and when I awoke, I counted ten by a neighbouring church clock. I rose and dressed myself. Scarcely had I finished, when Thomas entered the room; and he kindly bade me accompany him down stairs to partake of breakfast. The other servants of the household—seven in number altogether—were in the kitchen, and I found myself the object of the most generous sympathy. I now learnt that I was in the dwelling of a retired merchant of the name of Rowland—and that he, as well as his wife, were of the most benevolent dispositions. That such was the fact, I had already experienced; and I was telling the domestics my adventure with Mr. Dorchester in all its details, when a bell rang, and Thomas having answered it, bade me follow him up to the parlour.

On entering the room, I found my benefactor and benefactress seated near the fire. They were dressed in half-mourning; but in respect to their personal appearance, I need say nothing more than that their countenances were indicative of the generosity of their character. They bade me sit down, and tell them at greater length than I had done on the previous evening, the circumstances which had reduced me to so deplorable a condition. I named the families in whose service I had been—but without entering into any purely personal details: I showed them the testimonials I possessed from Lord Ravenshill's steward, and from Mr. Tiverton of Myrtle Lodge; and I gave them to understand that on leaving Sir Alexander Carrondale's service, it was with the object of improving my position by aid of the funds in my purse. Then I narrated at length the history of my transactions with Mr. Dorchester—my return to Manchester—and the rapid descent which I had experienced into the destitute condition whence Mr. and Mrs. Rowland had relieved me.

"Your narrative bears all the impress of truth," said the retired merchant, when I had done speaking; "but still you will not think me ungenerous if I examine a little more deeply into your circumstances, so as to assure myself that you have really become reduced through the villany of another, and not through any misconduct of your own. If the result be satisfactory, rest assured that something shall be done for you: and indeed, it does happen that at this present moment I have the means of providing you with a situation."

I expressed my gratitude,—declaring that I cheerfully courted inquiry and would give every information to facilitate it. Mr. Rowland sent to a neighbouring coffee-house to borrow a file of the paper in which I told him that I had seen Mr. Dorchester's advertisement; and I quickly pointed it out to him.

"So far so good," he observed. "My nephew has just stepped out for a few minutes: he will be in presently—and I will get him to go across to Oldham to see the landlady of the house where the swindler dwelt."

Scarcely had he done speaking, when the door opened and a young gentleman, also dressed in half-mourning, made his appearance. He was about three-and-twenty years of age—exceedingly good looking, though with somewhat delicate features—of slender shape, and tall: indeed, so far as his figure went, it was the counterpart of my own. He was dressed elegantly, but with no affected dandyism: his manners were frank and pleasing:—in every respect he appeared to be a worthy nephew of such generous, kind-hearted relatives. The instant he entered the room, his fine blue eyes settled upon me; and as they expressed a genuine sympathy, he said, "I suppose, uncle, this is the poor young man whom you met last night in returning from the party."

"Yes, Stephen—it is the same," answered Mr. Rowland: "and if everything should turn out as he has given us to understand, and as I have no doubt that it will, he is just the very one who will suit."

"Do you think, my dear," said Mrs. Rowland, in a low gentle voice, "that it is necessary to make any farther inquiries at all?"

"Yes: for the young man's sake I will do so," responded the old gentleman: "for if it be possible to discover a clue to the villain who has robbed him——But you can retire now, Joseph," he said, interrupting himself; "and rest assured that you will be properly cared for."

I returned to the kitchen; and young Mr. Rowland immediately set off for Oldham. While in conversation with the servants, I gleaned some particulars relative to the Rowland family, which it is here requisite I should mention. Mr. Rowland, as already stated, was a retired merchant, who had made his fortune at Liverpool and had recently removed thence to Manchester, his native town, where he proposed to pass the remainder of his days. He had been married many years to the lady whose kindness, as well as his own, I had so much reason to appreciate: but their union had never been blessed with children. Mr. Rowland had a younger brother, who was also a merchant but established in London. That brother was improvident and extravagant: he had been bankrupt twice; and from this and other circumstances, there had been a great coolness between himself and his relatives. For many years he had been a widower with an only son. Some fifteen or sixteen months prior to the date of which I am now writing, he had died, leaving his affairs in a most disordered condition, and his orphan son entirely dependent on Mr. and Mrs. Rowland at Manchester. This worthy couple at once adopted the young man, whose disposition had not been spoilt by the evil example of his father; and he was the nephew Stephen whom I have introduced to my readers. It was for his father's death that himself and his kind relatives were now in half-mourning. I moreover learnt that Mr. Stephen Rowland was about to marry the young and beautiful Lady

Lester, eldest daughter of the Marquis of Chilham; and that the wedding was to be celebrated very shortly. It was likewise hinted that Mr. and Mrs. Rowland were about to allow their nephew the appendage of a valet—which situation was now probably destined for me, if all the inquiries that were making should turn out to be satisfactory.

And satisfactory they were; for when Mr. Stephen Rowland came back from Oldham in the evening, I was sent for into the parlour; and his uncle informed me that the principal points of my story had been fully corroborated by the landlady and her servant at the house where Mr. Dorchester had resided. No clue had however been obtained to the whereabouts of that sanctimonious scoundrel. The hint which I had received in the kitchen, was now fulfilled by the formal offer that I should attach myself to the service of young Mr. Rowland: very liberal wages were mentioned; —and I gratefully accepted the proposal. Mr. Rowland lost no time in giving me additional proofs of his generosity: he advanced me a sufficient sum to redeem all my clothes from the pawnbrokers, as well as to pay the arrears of rent I had left due at the lodging-house whence I was ejected. I was not to be put into livery, but was to wear plain apparel; and the tailor was sent for to equip me for my new situation. Thus my experience of utter misery had been short, though poignant—brief in space, though excruciating in its tortures. Again it appeared to me as if I had been whirled through the phases of a troubled dream, and that I had abruptly experienced a blissful awakening from a horrible nightmare. It was with a light heart that I bent my way to the lodging-house, to pay the arrears and regain possession of my boxes. The landlady—as cringing now as she had been sternly implacable when turning me forth friendless and foodless—expected that I was going to continue her lodger: but it was with a feeling of satisfaction—amounting, I am bound to admit, almost to vindictiveness, that I gave her a curt negative. My garments and other little property were quickly redeemed from the pawnbroker's and replaced in my boxes, which were then removed to Mr. Rowland's house. Thinking it possible that Mr. Duncansby might yet answer my letter, I gave my new address to the landlady, so that if any correspondence came it might be forwarded to me.

The very next morning I received the following communication:—

"Edinburgh, February 24th, 1840.

"My young friend,

"By some unaccountable circumstance, your letter got mislaid before it was opened, and has only just turned up; or else you may rest assured that it would have been at once replied to. I certainly was much astonished at your precipitate flight,—concerning which however I received no explanations from your uncle Mr Lanover, who the moment he heard of it, set off in pursuit. But the note you addressed me from Carrondale, enclosing one for Sir Alexander relieved me of some cruel apprehensions which I entertained concerning your safety. I accept your excuses, and think I know a little too much of you to suspect that they are otherwise than founded upon truth. At the same time, if you really do stand in any degree of terror of Mr. Lanover, it would be perhaps better for you to avoid, at least for the present, all those parts of the country where he would be likely to search for you. Nevertheless, if you wish to return into the service of Sir Alexander Carrondale, I will take it upon myself to reinstate you therein at once: for my good opinion of you is unaltered—and you know the Baronet's generosity of heart too well to imagine for an instant that he would object. You can act as you think fit: but for your present wants I enclose you a small sum. I hope however that long ere this reaches you, your circumstances will be improved: but in any case you are enjoined to accept the enclosed as a tribute of esteem from

"Your well-wisher,
"DUNCAN DUNCANSBY."

The remittance forwarded me by the worthy lawyer, consisted of a bank-note for twenty pounds. I did not long deliberate upon the course which I ought to pursue; for though my inclination prompted me to return to Carrondale, yet on the other hand there was not merely Mr. Duncansby's warning advice against the step, but also a sense of duty and of gratitude towards the Rowlands. I therefore penned a letter to the kind-hearted writer to the signet, frankly explaining how I had been lifted up from utter misery by Mr. Rowland, and how I had been inducted into a situation in his family. I concluded by observing that being no longer in a necessitous position, I should have returned the amount Mr. Duncansby had so generously sent me, were it not for his special injunction to the contrary.

I must here pause for a brief space to record my impressions of the factory population of Manchester. And first in respect to the dwellings of this class,—it is impossible to speak in terms too deploring or too indignant. The better sorts of work-people reside in little cottages of from three to six rooms each; and though the rents are high, yet they are absolutely without drainage and without supplies of pure water. The streets in which these cottage-houses are situated, are filled with filth, offal, and refuse,—the feculence of which is absorbed by the atmosphere, to be breathed by the unfortunate inhabitants. Then there are the lodging-houses in which the poorer classes of the work-people herd and throng together; so that they pass from the heated atmosphere of the factory to the still more foully unwholesome air of their wretched dwellings. No wonder that a stranger, arriving for the first time in Manchester, is struck by the universal pallor of the industrial population! —no wonder that he shrinks aghast from the evidences of squalor, wretchedness, and human degradation, which meet his eye at every step! Hundreds and hundreds of boys and girls, of all ages—and many grown-up persons likewise, of both sexes too—may be seen walking barefoot. Thousands of females of the factory class, from twelve years of age upward, may be seen hastening bareheaded to the factories when the bells are ringing, or turning out of them at meal times or when the work is over. In short, the entire aspect of the factory population tells a hideous, horrible, frightful tale of uncared-for morals and of a deplorably neglected condition. The human frame is there overworked to a scandalous extent: yet this excess of toil receives but the poorest reward;—and as the industrial population sinks lower and lower into the slough of penury, the manufacturers themselves grow richer and richer. Handsome dwellings and fine equipages, together with the enjoy-

ment of all the luxuries and elegancies of life, are the happy lot of the employers; while the employed go barefooted and in rags. The tables of the manufacturers groan beneath the weight of accumulated dainties; while those whose labour produces all, eke out a wretched miserable existence on potatoes, buttermilk, and oatmeal porridge. I could extend the picture—I could speak of how the factory slaves (for such indeed they are in every sense of the term) are plundered, scorned, insulted, and oppressed by their bloated intolerant masters—I might tell how female virtue is considered to be as much at the disposal of the employers or their overlookers as the bones, sinews, and fibres of the unfortunate beings themselves,—I could, in short, enter upon hideous and revolting details in respect to the tyranny of the rich over the helplessness of the poor: but it does not come within the province of my autobiography to expatiate at too great length upon these monstrous social evils. But *this* I will say—that if Manchester with its manufactures is the boast and pride of England, yet on the other hand, with its frightful social wrongs, it is the shame and the curse!

I must now continue my narrative. A few days after I had entered my new place, I had a conversation with Thomas, the good-hearted man-servant, relative to the matrimonial arrangements and prospects of my young master Mr. Stephen: for Thomas had been many years in the service of Mr. Rowland, senior, and was more or less in his confidence—at all events sufficiently so to have learnt such particulars as in this conversation he imparted to me.

"You must understand, Joseph," he said, "that Mr. Stephen and Lady Lester have loved each other for a long time—perhaps two or three years or so; though when their attachment commenced, I cannot precisely say. You see, we never knew much of Mr. Stephen until after his father's death, when he came to reside altogether with his uncle and aunt. He was brought up in his father's office; and as his father managed somehow or another to get into the best society in London—I suppose by keeping up extravagant appearances and cutting a great dash—Mr. Stephen of course moved in the same sphere. I presume, therefore, that it was at those fashionable parties Mr. Stephen and Lady Lester met: but I am very sure, from what my master has told me, that their love was long unknown and unsuspected by the Marquis of Chilham and the other members of Lady Lester's family."

"But now," I observed, "the Marquis has given his consent to the alliance—has he not?"

"Of course, since the marriage is resolved upon. Ah! I hope it will be a happy one," continued Thomas, with a sigh: "for Mr. Stephen is really a very nice young man; and it is really a wonder that he should have been uncontaminated by his father's evil example."

"And wherefore have you any doubts," I inquired, "as to the marriage being a happy one?—for, from what you have told me to-day and on former occasions, Mr. Stephen and Lady Lester are devoted to each other: while as for fortune, if her ladyship have none, Mr. Stephen will doubtless possess ample."

"Ah! but, my young friend, neither love nor wealth are always alone sufficient to ensure happiness," continued Thomas, with another sigh. "The Chilhams are as proud as proud can be; and this aristocratic pride of their's makes them look down with scorn and contempt upon the Rowlands. Of course, Lady Lester must be regarded as an exception; but then it will be galling enough for her to see her husband only just tolerated by her family, and not regularly received into it."

"Is this indeed the case?" I asked sadly: "for it would grieve me much to think that our kind-hearted master and mistress, and the generous-spirited Mr. Stephen, are compelled to endure so much aristocratic haughtiness."

"It is indeed so," answered Thomas; "and it makes my blood boil to think of it. Why, would you believe it?—master, and mistress, and Mr. Stephen are only just invited to the Chilhams' residence in Gloucestershire for the mere ceremony of the bridal; and the Marquis's letter to Mr. Rowland, specifying the arrangements, was worded in such a way as to give him plainly to understand that his presence and that of Mrs. Rowland were only expected for the actual ceremony itself, and for not an hour longer."

"But that was downright insulting," I exclaimed indignantly: for I felt much on behalf of those whose conduct had been so generous towards myself.

"You may well call it insulting," responded Thomas. "Master and mistress however mean to sacrifice their own pride somewhat, for the sake of their nephew, whose happiness is involved in this marriage. They will accordingly be present at the ceremony: but they will take good care to reach the Marquis of Chilham's residence at a late hour in the evening which precedes the bridal morning. The ceremony is to take place in comparatively a private manner; and immediately it is over, the bride and bridegroom will go off somewhere to spend the honeymoon—while at the same time Mr. and Mrs. Rowland will set out on their return to Manchester."

"Then, from all you have told me," I remarked, "it is to be inferred that the Marquis of Chilham has bestowed but a reluctant assent upon this alliance?"

"Evidently so," rejoined Thomas. "I suppose that now Mr. Stephen's prospects have changed since his father's death, and that his adoption by his uncle guarantees him to be the heir of all that uncle's wealth, the Marquis has thought a little better of the subject—though *only* a little: for you see that while yielding his concurrence, he does so in the most churlish manner possible. For my part I don't like the auspices under which this marriage is to be contracted."

"They certainly are not of the brightest description," I observed. "And yet love and riches are the two main essentials to matrimonial happiness."

"I hope that your words, Joseph, may prove true in the present instance," answered Thomas. "I should tell you that our excellent master has acted in the kindest way towards Mr. Stephen, by at once settling on him fifteen hundred a year—without which I do not think for a moment the Marquis would have yielded his assent: for though his lordship is rich, it does not appear that Lady Lester is to receive a single farthing of dowry. Altogether, Joseph, it is by no means the

most cheerful marriage-prospect that I ever had to contemplate."

"And you say that the ceremony is to be performed at the residence of the Marquis in Gloucestershire? In which part of that county is his dwelling situated?"

Thomas was about to reply, when the parlour-bell rang suddenly; and thus our conversation was cut short.

I was saddened to a certain extent at much of what I had just heard. I was afflicted at the thought that the kind hearts of Mr. and Mrs. Rowland should be wounded by the insufferable pride and arrogance of the Chilham family—and that the fine spirit of Mr. Stephen should be chafed and galled by the same influences. The young gentleman was in every respect one to be admired and esteemed. He was not only remarkably handsome, as I have already said—but though the son and the nephew of merchants, his manners were as good as those of any scion of an aristocratic race with a genealogical tree ample enough to contain all the birds of the air. He was intellectual too—well informed—and had evidently found time to cultivate literature and the arts. It was no wonder that a beautiful patrician lady should have become enamoured of him:—especially was it a subject of no marvel to me, who in a much humbler sphere had become the object of a high-born damsel's fervent and devoted love. Mr. Stephen was tall, slender, and well made: his dark brown hair, curling naturally, clustered around a high open forehead;—and there was something inexpressibly frank and ingenuous in his clear blue eyes.

The very day after that conversation which I had with Thomas, preparations were commenced for the journey into Gloucestershire. Myself and the lady's-maid were to accompany Mr. and Mrs. Rowland and their nephew; and it was intended that they should travel in their own carriage, but with post-horses. The distance between Manchester and our destination was, I learnt, about one hundred and thirty miles; and this could easily be performed in a couple of days. The larger portion however was reserved for the second day, inasmuch as the Rowlands purposely prearranged matters so that they might reach the Marquis of Chilham's residence at a late hour in the evening preceding the bridal morn: for not merely had his invitation been rudely specific upon the point, but their own pride naturally led them to trespass for as brief a space as possible upon the hospitality—if such it could be called—of the haughty, arrogant family with which they were about to become connected.

The journey was commenced about nine o'clock in the morning—Mr. and Mrs. Rowland, with their nephew, occupying the interior of the vehicle—myself and Helen (the lady's-maid) riding together in the rumble behind. Up to this moment I had remained in ignorance of the place of our destination, inasmuch as it had not been hitherto mentioned to me, and in the bustle of the preparations for departure I had not thought of renewing the inquiry towards Thomas. While seated by Helen's side in our place behind the carriage, I put the question.

"What!" she exclaimed, laughing, "is it possible you do not know where we are going? and you have not had curiosity enough to inquire before. Now, for my part, I am always so interested in everything that relates to weddings, there is not a single point I should have omitted to ask about. I have a very great mind to tantalise you, and not suffer you to know until we are close at our journey's end."

"Do so, if you please," I responded, entering into her good-humoured mischievousness. "I dare say you think I shall persecute you with questions and conjectures until I worm the secret out of you——"

"I am sure you will!" cried Helen, still laughing: "because it is human nature. Come, begin with your guesses."

"In the first place," I resumed, "I know very well that our destination is somewhere in Gloucestershire."

"Ah! you have already learnt that much?" exclaimed my companion. "But remember, Gloucestershire is of some extent—and there are many, many towns in that county. Have you ever been into Gloucestershire?"

"Yes—I was there for a short time, the year before last."

"And where, may I ask?"

"At Cheltenham," was my response.

"Ah, Cheltenham!" echoed my companion, with a roguish smile, which at once made me suspect that the town just named was our destination—the more especially as it was so fashionable a place. "Well, go on with your guesses."

"I think I have guessed already: it is Cheltenham."

"Well then, now your curiosity is satisfied," exclaimed Helen.

"And our destination is really Cheltenham?" I rejoined, with a feeling of surprise, which however escaped the notice of the lady's-maid.

How many recollections did the name of that town suddenly conjure up in my mind!—my meeting with Lady Calanthe—our interview in her father's garden—and the singular adventures in connexion with the room wherein I had beholden that terrible picture of the man in the embrace of the serpent. It was now upwards of eighteen months since those occurrences; and when I had quitted Cheltenham in the service of Mrs. Robinson, I had little expected to revisit it after so comparatively brief an interval. These reflections led me to think of the manifold adventures through which I had passed during that space; and then, extending the range of my retrospection, as I looked back upon all that had occurred to me since I left the school at Leicester, I thought that I had already seen enough of life to embody my experiences in a volume of no ordinary interest.

But to continue my narrative. On the first day of the journey we accomplished sixty miles, leaving about seventy for the following one. I should observe that as it grew towards evening, Mrs. Rowland desired the maid to take the hitherto vacant seat inside the carriage, as the March wind blew chill and strong. An offer was even proposed by the kind-hearted Rowlands to make room for me: but to this I responded firmly in the negative,—declaring that I was well wrapped up, and that I rather enjoyed the freshness of the breeze than experienced any inconvenience from it. On the second day the journey was not re-

sumed until a later hour than it was commenced on the preceding one,—time and distance being computed so that we might arrive at our destination at about nine o'clock in the evening. But scarcely was the last stage commenced, when, the wind having gone down, the rain began to pour in torrents: it descended like a deluge—and even before I could get up an umbrella I was half drenched. Mr. Stephen looked out of the carriage-window, ordered the postilions to stop, and insisted that I should come inside. I was forced to obey, even at the risk of inconveniencing those who were already there: but the carriage being a somewhat old-fashioned one, was more roomy than modern vehicles—and as Mr. Stephen, Helen, and myself were all three of slender figures and occupied the same seat, no want of accommodation was experienced.

The windows were of course closed; and the evening was dark as pitch. It was a darkness which seemed to hang like sable cloth or a funeral pall against the panes of glass; so that not a single object could be discerned on either side of the road. At length the equipage stopped: we heard the sounds of gates opening—the carriage turned into some enclosure, and finally drew up at the main entrance. Lamps were burning there—but so dimly in the deluging torrents of rain, that they only glimmered as if seen through a mist. I leapt out, and hastened to get up an umbrella—while a couple of tall footmen in splendid liveries, who came forth from the entrance-hall, put up others. In a few moments Mr. and Mrs. Rowland, Stephen, and Helen, were safely landed and under shelter. There was no one besides the domestics to receive the bridegroom and his relatives; and I observed for a moment that Mr. Stephen bit his lip, while his countenance was flushed with indignation: but a glance from his uncle, and a smiling look from his aunt, quickly tranquillized the incensed and wounded feelings which were so naturally excited and so easily fathomed. One of the lacqueys conducted them into an apartment opening from the hall; and I heard him say, "I will at once inform my lord and lady of your arrival."

The other lacquey who was in attendance, conducted Helen and myself to the servants' hall, where *we* at least experienced a hospitable welcome. The table was spread for supper, to which we were fully prepared to do justice; and when the repast was over, a female servant volunteered to show Helen where was situate the chamber that was allotted for her use. A page was directed by a superior domestic to perform the same office towards me; and I accordingly followed him out of the servants' hall. This hall, I should observe, was on the ground floor, completely at the back of the premises; and from these premises a passage led into the entrance-hall where we had landed on our arrival. At the very point where the passage joined the entrance-hall, there was a diverging corridor at right angles, and whence several apartments opened. It was into one of these rooms that the page led me; and I found it to be an ante-chamber belonging to a much larger sleeping-apartment. Both were well furnished; and a heavy curtain covered the door of communication between the two.

"This is the chamber," said the page, indicating the larger room, "where your master Mr. Stephen Rowland is to sleep to-night; and you are of course to occupy the ante-chamber. The mansion, though a spacious one, is not extensive enough for my lord's family and household; and therefore, as you perceive, some of the ground-floor rooms have been converted into bed-chambers. But in the daytime, and when the weather is fine, this room which your master is to occupy, is the pleasantest in the entire dwelling: for the casements open upon the garden at the side of the house; and in the summer, when the flowers are blooming, the view is perfectly delightful. But perhaps you had better begin unpacking your master's portmanteau, which I see has been already brought in here."

I at once addressed myself to the task suggested, the page good-naturedly assisting me. In a few minutes the trunk was unpacked: we then returned to the ante-chamber; and opening my own box, I put out such necessaries as I required.

"This is to be a curious wedding, isn't it?" said the page, in a low voice and with a mysterious manner. "None of us servants ever heard a syllable about it till a few days back: we never even knew that Lady Lester had a suitor at all. We can't understand it. It seems as if it was all arranged and settled by a sort of magic. Not one of us ever recollects having seen your young master Mr. Stephen before to-night, and at all events we are very certain that he never visited his lordship's family either at Cheltenham or in London."

I could have thrown some little light upon the matter—but did not consider it to be one on which I ought to volunteer explanations, nor to gratify a mere feeling of curiosity. I therefore affected as much ignorance on the point as the page himself evidently experienced.

"Now come," he said, when I had finished unpacking, "let us go back to the servants' hall for half-an-hour or so; as I know that the butler has ordered some punch to be made, and has given out some wine, that we may celebrate to-morrow's wedding. For I tell you what—if they don't choose to enjoy themselves in the parlour, it's no reason why we should not do so amongst ourselves."

I followed the page out of the ante-room; and we reached the end of the corridor where it joined the entrance-hall. At that moment two young ladies, having evidently emerged from one of the ground-floor rooms opening from the hall, were just beginning the ascent of the great marble staircase; and the page, clutching me by the arm, hastily whispered, "The one farthest off is Lady Lester: the one nearest is her sister Lady Wilhelmina."

I could not obtain more than a swiftly transient glimpse of their countenances: but still that glimpse was sufficient to make me fancy that I had seen Lady Lester before. The next instant however the idea became extinct in my mind, as I could not possibly recollect where or under what circumstances I had ever previously set eyes upon her. The two young ladies were both exquisitely formed,—their rich dresses of dark velvet setting off the sylphid symmetry of their shapes; and they had light hair, showering in myriads of ringlets upon their bare shoulders. The page hurried

me away—so that altogether my eyes rested not on them for more than a few seconds. We returned to the servants' hall, where a couple of bowls of punch and several bottles of wine, together with cakes and dried fruits, were placed upon the table. Good humour and harmless mirth prevailed; and I only wished that as much genuine hilarity was experienced in the drawing-room as that which was then passing around me.

CHAPTER LI.

THE MARQUIS OF CHILHAM.

It was verging towards eleven o'clock when one of the footmen, having been absent from the servants' hall for a few minutes, returned; and bending over my chair, he said to me, "Your young master has already retired to his chamber. I have conducted him thither; and he bade me inform you that he did not need your presence any more to-night. So you may remain here and enjoy yourself a little longer."

At the same time a female domestic, who had likewise been absent in answer to a summoning bell, intimated to Helen that she was wanted to assist at Mrs. Rowland's night-toilet; and she accordingly retired. I was much fatigued with the two days' travelling; and knowing that I had to be up early, speedily followed Helen's example by withdrawing from the servants' hall.

"There is a lamp burning on the table in your chamber," said the domestic who had borne Mr. Stephen's message to me: "so you need not take one with you. Do you think you are able to find your way?"

"I have not the slightest doubt of it," I responded: and bidding the servants all good night, I issued forth from their presence, leaving them to finish the punch and the wine, which they appeared pertectly disposed and able to do.

I threaded my way along the passage, and turned into the corridor, which was lighted with lamps held in the hands of statues. But it now occurred to me that I had spoken somewhat too quickly and too confidently, when I had declared that I could with such ease find my own chamber. Perhaps too, if the truth must be told, I had taken one more glass of wine than was proper for me: but I had been so pressed by the servants of the Marquis that their hospitality had overpowered my abstemious inclinations. Indeed, I was habitually so averse to strong drink, and was accustomed to take it so sparingly, that the most trifling departure from this rule was to me an excess. Thus my ideas were somewhat confused by what I had partaken of; and I was actually bewildered by the array of doors on either side of the corridor.

"This must be it," I at length said to myself; and catching with a sort of desperate resolve at the handle of one of them, I entered.

It was dark—but not completely so—within the room: there was the feeblest glimmering of a lamp which stood upon a table. The light however was close upon extinction; and its last dying rays only just served to redeem the place from utter obscurity. It was much too sickly and faint to throw out any objects into a relief sufficient for the eye to be enabled at once to seize upon them:—it was too feeble likewise to define the dimensions of the apartment, or to show its nature, whether sitting-room or bed-chamber. But I knew that there was a table in the middle of the room where I was to sleep: I had learnt also that a lamp had been left burning on it;—and moreover, methought that through the obscurity I beheld the bed in the spot where it ought to be. Nevertheless, there was still in my mind a vague suspicion that I was in error and that I had found my way into the wrong room.

"If this be it," I said to myself, "the door of Mr. Stephen's apartment must be in *this* direction:"—and thither I accordingly groped my way.

My hands encountered a curtain. I drew it aside, now feeling convinced that I was right: for, as the reader will recollect, there was a curtain in the doorway between my ante-chamber and Mr. Stephen's apartment. I stretched out my hands: one of them encountered the handle of a door—but on turning it, I found that it was fastened. I was about to knock, to inquire whether Mr. Stephen wanted anything—when my other hand encountered window-panes instead of wood-work. Thus groping at the door, I discovered that it was a glass one. Ah! a glass-door, with a curtain over it!——what strange idea was it that now entered my head? I turned rapidly round: the lamp was still feebly glimmering upon the table—but the position of the table itself in respect to that of the glass-door strengthened my suspicion. A cold terror crept over me as I looked towards the wall on the other side of the table. A large square black space seemed to be enclosed in something that dimly and feebly reflected the dying glimmer of the lamp. I drew nearer, and came in contact with the table,—which I thus found to be a large one; for I thought that I should have cleared it while so advancing. The concussion with the table was sufficient to shake the lamp somewhat; and for a moment it flickered up the least thing more brightly than before. Again were my looks flung shudderingly upon that large black space against the wall; and my eyes literally expanded in terror as I discovered an enormous picture in its massive gilt frame. This frame-work was it that reflected, though so dimly and feebly, the dull misty glimmering of the light. I drew nearer:—again did the lamp flicker up for a moment, but sufficiently to reveal the horrible outlines of that picture's hideous subject—an enormous snake circling with its huge coils the form of a man on horseback!

"Good heavens!" I murmured audibly, as a sickening terror seized upon me—for there was something fearful and vaguely ominous in the coincidences and accidental circumstances which had thus brought me once more to a room where upwards of eighteen months back I had passed through so frightful a scene.

At the same instant that those words fell from my lips—and while with the flashing of an inspiration, the mysteries of that eventful scene to which I have just alluded were cleared up in a moment—my ear caught the sound of some one moving close by; and as I quickly glanced in that direction, I distinctly perceived a pair of eyes fixed upon me. Oh, those eyes!—it might have

been fancy, but it struck me at the moment it was the reality, that they seemed to stare upon me with that fixed glassy gaze which had made the blood turn cold in my veins on the memorable evening of my previous adventure in this same place.

"Eugene," is that you?" said the same chill stern voice which I had heard before within those very walls and which was horribly familiar to me. "I had fallen asleep—the fire has gone out—the lamp is close upon extinction. Ah, I was overpowered by the agitation of my own thoughts—and slumber stole upon me. Ring for a light, Eugene —— Wherefore do you not speak to me?"

"My lord," I answered, trembling from head to foot, "it is not he for whom you take me——"

"Good heavens—that voice!" ejaculated the old nobleman, who was indeed none other than the Marquis of Chilham. "Surely, surely I have heard it before!——Who are you? Speak!"—and the next instant a firm rigid grasp was laid upon the collar of my coat.

At that same moment too the lamp went out; and we were enveloped in utter darkness. I must candidly confess that I was under the influence of a numbing terror, bordering almost upon horror. It struck me that there was something awfully strange and even ominous in the coincidences which had thus brought me back to that room, all my recollections of which, both with regard to the fearful picture and the scene which had taken place there eighteen months before, were but too well calculated to inspire such a feeling. And there I was, too, in the clutch of that old nobleman with the glassy eyes, the stare of which seemed to be riveted chillingly on me through the utter darkness that prevailed.

"My lord," I stammered out, tremulously and with difficulty, "it was an accident——"

"Good heavens, it *is* the same! the voice is unmistakable!" ejaculated the Marquis of Chilham: then the next instant he added, with cold sternness, "Remain here, young man—move not at your peril!"

His hand quitted my coat-collar, and the next moment I heard a clicking sound like that of a pistol. I was on the very point of springing upon him to disarm him, as I thought, of a murderous weapon—when the sound was repeated more audibly than before; and I instantaneously recognised it to be that of a bell-wire. Ashamed of my fears, I remained stationary—but hastened to observe in a far more collected manner than I had previously been able to command, "I assure your lordship that I am innocent of any impertinent curiosity, and that it is a mere coincidence which has brought me beneath this roof."

"Silence, sirrah, for the present!" was the nobleman's stern interjection.

In a few moments the door opened; and by the light which was burning in the corridor, a footman was discernible on the threshold.

"Bring another lamp," said the Marquis, "and tell Lord Lester to come hither."

The domestic instantaneously disappeared,—leaving the door partially open, doubtless that the room might not remain altogether without a light during his absence. Not another word was spoken until he had brought a lamp and Lord Lester made his appearance. This nobleman was, as I had expected, none other than the Marquis's son Eugene—the one who had brought me to the house on that memorable evening when I was mistaken for another. And that other for whom I had been so mistaken, was now no longer unknown to me: all mysteries were cleared up to my comprehension—and I had no difficulty in understanding that Stephen Rowland was the individual for whom I was taken on the occasion referred to.

The domestic retired, having placed another lamp upon the table; and Lord Lester advancing into the room, at once recognised me. He stopped short in amazement: but the next instant his eyes seemed to flash fire.

"Joseph Wilmot—here!" he ejaculated: and then, as a visible trouble mingled with rage upon his haughtily handsome countenance, he advanced towards me. "By heaven! for this violation of your sacred pledge—for this intrusion——"

"My lord," I interrupted him, speaking firmly, and not altogether without a certain defiance in my tone, look, and manner,—"you would perhaps do well to hear what I have to say. Do so, or refuse, just as you think fit: but rest assured that I am neither to be browbeaten by your arrogance, nor to be easily overpowered if you attempt violence."

"This insolence!" exclaimed Lord Lester, with a menacing movement; and again his eyes flashed with the fire of rage.

"Patience, Eugene!" said the old Marquis, in a peremptory tone. "And now, sir," he added, turning towards me, "what explanation have you to give of your intrusion here?"

"Simply this, my lord," I answered firmly, though with a becoming respect,—"that I mistook the way to my chamber——"

"*Your* chamber?" echoed both father and son, in unfeigned astonishment.

"Yes, my lord," I continued; "accident has rendered me a temporary inmate of your mansion."

"What mean you?" demanded the Marquis, still in complete bewilderment.

"Is it possible that you have come hither," exclaimed Eugene, "with those plebeian money-grubbers——"

"I have come hither," I interrupted Lord Lester in a dignified and disdainful manner, "with persons who are as worthy of consideration and esteem as the proudest nobles in the land, not even excepting your own haughty self."

"A truce to this insolence," exclaimed Eugene. "There is some vile trickery in all this!"

"Do let him explain," said the Marquis, sternly impatient: and his glassy eyes, for a moment bent upon his son, reverted towards me. "Proceed. What have you to say?"

"Accident brought me into the service of Mr. Stephen Rowland——"

"Stephen Rowland!" muttered Eugene between his grinding teeth: and a hateful expression passed over his naturally handsome features.

"Silence, Eugene!" said the Marquis peremptorily: and again he bade me proceed.

"It is as I am explaining to your lordship," I went on to say; "and though but a humble individual, I have my own feelings as well as your son

there. If he interrupts me again in a menacing manner, I will not speak another word: I will rather lie under the imputation of having sought to gratify a sentiment of base curiosity, which in truth I should scorn to entertain. My lord," I continued, still addressing myself entirely to the Marquis, while the quick glance which I flung upon Eugene showed me that he was biting his lip with ill-suppressed rage at my firmly uttered rebuke, "I can assure you that the pledge I gave your lordship when last I stood before you here, has been faithfully kept. Never did I seek to ascertain to whose mansion I was brought on that memorable night:—never did I suspect whose dwelling it was until within the last quarter of an hour! Accident, as I have already stated, led me into the service of Mr. Stephen Rowland; and it was only natural that he should bid me accompany him on his journey. Even when I learnt that his destination was Cheltenham, no suspicion of the real truth entered my mind. For the last stage I travelled inside the carriage, thanks to the kindness of those whom I serve. I did not therefore recognise the house: but just now, when endeavouring to find the chamber which was allotted to me, I mistook the door and entered this room, thinking it to be the one I was in search of."

"And this story you swear to be the true one?" said the Marquis, fixing his glassy eyes searchingly upon me.

"Ten thousand asseverations, my lord," I responded, "could not render my narrative more truthful than it is."

The Marquis glanced towards his son, who was devouring me with his regards—but these were full of anger.

"What are we to do?" said the Marquis, after a brief pause. "Young man," he added, his

voice now becoming low and tremulous, "the honour of one of the noblest families of England is in your keeping!"

"I am aware of it, my lord—and it will be kept. Did you ever hear it whispered," I went on to ask,—"did you ever hear the faintest rumour breathed, that I had even so much as hinted at what took place in this room a year and a half back?"

"It is true! you must have kept your promise!" said the Marquis. "But circumstances have become more grave—and everything has doubtless been already conjectured by you, even if it be not completely clear to your comprehension. Are you specially attached to—to——Mr. Stephen Rowland?"—and it appeared to cost the Marquis a strong effort to give utterance to a name which was evidently hated by him.

"I am specially attached to that gentleman," was my response.

"And after the marriage," continued the Marquis, "you are doubtless to accompany him whithersoever he and my daughter may go to pass their honeymoon?"

"Such is the arrangement, my lord."

"But it cannot be!" he ejaculated, in a paroxysm of strong agitation. "My daughter will recognise you—she will remember that she met you here—and she will be overwhelmed with shame."

"What matter Gertrude's feelings?" cried Eugene bitterly. "Shame indeed!—she has none."

"Silence!" interrupted the Marquis: "this is an affair which a father, and not a brother, can best manage. Joseph Wilmot, I have still sufficient regard for my daughter—if not in one sense, at least in another—to induce me to express the wish that she may not continuously have to blush before the world whenever she encounters your look. It is impossible therefore that you can remain in attendance upon Mr. Stephen Rowland——"

"And yet, father," interrupted Eugene vehemently, "it is not for you to humiliate yourself so far as to confer privately with Stephen Rowland!—it is not for you to explain to him how this young man came to learn the fatal secret of my sister's dishonour!—it is not for you to express the desire that *he*," alluding to myself, "should no longer remain attached to the person of Gertrude's intended husband!"

"What is to be done?" said the Marquis: and he raised his hand in a sort of agonized embarrassment to his pale, wrinkled, care-worn forehead.

"Let this young man depart hence suddenly and secretly," suggested Eugene: "give him a sum of money—or do something for him——"

"I require no money, Lord Lester," I indignantly interrupted the Marquis's son: "and as for decamping stealthily from my present service, I will not do it. Not for worlds would I incur the imputation of the blackest ingratitude where I owe every obligation of thankfulness! But at the same time I *do* recognise all the inconvenience of my remaining attached to Mr. Stephen Rowland's person. I can full well understand," I added somewhat bitterly, "that you do not wish *him* to learn the incidents which occurred in this room the year before last, and how you sought at the pistol's muzzle to compel one whom you took to be Stephen Rowland himself, to espouse Lady Lester. Doubtless had you at the time succeeded in encountering Mr. Stephen Rowland, instead of me, he would have joyously led Lady Lester to the altar. I know that you would both look little enough in his eyes if he were acquainted with the scene to which I have alluded. I know also that if Lady Lester, when she becomes his wife, were to behold and recognise me, she would naturally exhibit a degree of emotion which would induce him to ask for explanations——"

"Gertrude has sworn," cried Eugene, vehemently, "never to reveal what took place here that night!"

"Let the young man speak," said the Marquis. "He acknowledges—and with some degree of generosity too—that it would be inconvenient for him to be recognised——"

"Yes," I interrupted the nobleman: "and I have too much esteem for Mr. Stephen Rowland to suffer his feelings to be wounded by the knowledge that past circumstances in respect to his intended bride, are known to me. Nor would I have that young bride and bridegroom blush in each other's presence when I stood before them and when they would have to say to themselves, 'He is acquainted with our secret!'"

"Then what do you propose?" inquired the Marquis, with nervous haste: "what do you suggest? what will you do? I have a recollection of your high-minded and independent conduct on the former occasion, when you refused the money I offered; and I have no reason to fear that you will now behave in a contrary spirit."

"No, my lord," I answered: "for many reasons I am incapable of acting ungenerously——But time presses, and a decision must be arrived at. Permit me to suggest a plan; and though to a certain degree it involves a feature which may be painful to you both, I see no other way of extricating ourselves from the embarrassments which enmesh us all."

"But your plan, Joseph Wilmot?" cried the Marquis of Chillham anxiously.

"Old Mr. Rowland is a kind, warm-hearted man," I went on to say; "and if he be made acquainted with all these facts, he will bear himself considerately—he will do his best——"

"What! make him a confidant?" cried Eugene vehemently. "It will be as bad as letting Stephen Rowland himself know everything."

"Then, my lord," I said, speaking coldly to the younger nobleman, "adopt your own course, for I have nothing better to suggest:"—and I was moving towards the door.

"Stop, Joseph—for heaven's sake stop!" cried the Marquis. "And you, Eugene, remain silent, I command you! We can but hear what Joseph has to suggest."

"Once more then, my lord," I responded, "I will endeavour to make myself understood: but if I be again interrupted in a scornful manner that would seem to convey the impression that I am some open and avowed enemy, I will withdraw from the business, leaving it to take its own course."

"Proceed, Joseph," said the Marquis.

"I propose, my lord," I accordingly resumed, "that I should make a confidant of the elder Mr. Rowland—that I should tell him everything; and he will then devise a befitting excuse in order to

prevent me from accompanying his nephew and the bride. Then, inasmuch as that nephew and his bride will of course in due time visit, or be visited by, Mr. and Mrs. Rowland, it is necessary that I should altogether withdraw from Mr. Rowland's service. Such is the plan which I am prepared to carry out, if your lordship gives me permission to enter into full explanations with Mr. Rowland. By those means all will be accomplished. I will take care to keep my own room as much as possible to-morrow morning, until after Lady Lester shall, as a bride, have taken her departure—so that there may be no danger of an encounter, nor of a disagreeable recognition on her ladyship's part."

"I see no other course to be adopted," said the Marquis, "inasmuch as you have an insuperable objection to withdraw suddenly from the Rowlands' service without explanations of some sort."

"I would not think of doing it, my lord," I answered.

"Then it must be as you have suggested," replied the Marquis of Chilham: and he glanced towards his son, as if to ascertain what Eugene now thought of the project.

"I will leave you, father, to settle this matter with Joseph Wilmot in your own way:"—and with these words Lord Lester abruptly quitted the room.

"I agree to your proposition," said the Marquis of Chilham, who appeared to be relieved from the constraint of his son's presence, rather than to be displeased at his withdrawal. "When will you speak to Mr. Rowland?"

"The very first thing in the morning, my lord. But remember, I shall tell him everything—that adventure of the year before last, when I was brought hither——"

"Yes, yes—I comprehend!" said the nobleman: "I see the necessity for the fullest explanations. But are you certain that he will put the seal of secrecy upon his lips—that he will not feel indignant at the intelligence of an outrage which, though it fell upon *you* at the time, was intended for his nephew——"

"Mr. Rowland is a man of justice and of honour, my lord," I answered,—"of humanity and of generosity likewise; and I will stake my existence upon his forbearance as well as upon his good offices in the matter which we have in hand. Yet perhaps he may insist upon knowing everything; and there are certain details with which I myself am unacquainted. Is he to seek them from your lordship's lips?"

"No, Joseph," returned the Marquis: "I thought by your language that you took the whole business entirely upon yourself."

"I will, my lord, if it be your pleasure. And therefore, perhaps, as I am already acquainted with so much, you will have no hesitation in filling up whatsoever gaps there may be in the somewhat painful history of the past."

"What is it that you seek to know?" inquired the Marquis.

"Your lordship does not require to be reminded that in the month of August, 1838, I was seized upon by your son and brought hither. At the pistol's muzzle was it demanded of me——"

"You were taken for Stephen Rowland," said the Marquis, evidently referring with infinite repugnance to the painful topic. "A letter stealthily conveyed from him, and intended for my daughter, fell into her mother's hands. Then the wretched Gertrude confessed everything!—she confessed her love for Stephen Rowland, and that in this love her honour had succumbed to the strength of their mutual passion. Fearful of the consequences, and having at the time but a poor idea of Stephen Rowland's character—though we knew him not by sight,—myself and my son resolved to enforce, if force should prove necessary, an instantaneous marriage with the degraded Gertrude——"

"And afterwards, my lord," I said, "how was it that you adopted not other measures to carry out a project which was temporarily frustrated by the error committed in respect to myself?"

"It appears," replied the Marquis, "from what Gertrude has recently informed us, that on that night when she had an appointment at a particular spot with Stephen Rowland, he repaired to that spot; and on observing two individuals who seemed to be watching there, he naturally concluded that everything was discovered—and he therefore fled. Those two individuals must have been Eugene and yourself. The result of that memorable evening's error was a severe illness on my daughter's part; and for some weeks she raved in the fever of delirium. There was consequently no opportunity for Eugene and myself to carry out our views; and as time passed, and it was ascertained that the dreaded consequences of Gertrude's frailty had not really ensued, and that there would be no evidence to betray her shame to the world,—we resolved that Stephen Rowland should be thought of no more."

"Then his father died," I interjected; "and——"

"Yes: he died, as we learnt, in perfectly insolvent circumstances——"

"And subsequently the intelligence reached your lordship that Mr. Stephen had been adopted by his uncle, and would yet become a rich man."

"True," responded the Marquis; "and perceiving that Gertrude, though recovered from her illness, was pining away,—trembling likewise as we were, lest secret meetings should again be plotted, and love again get the better of prudence——"

"Your lordship need say no more," I interrupted him. "I now fully comprehend how it was that eventually, but still with a certain degree of reluctance, your lordship consented to this marriage. It is not for me to offer comments: but still I cannot withhold an observation, to the effect that if your lordship had exhibited less pride and more love with regard to your daughter, the incidents you deplore might never have taken place. No: for when first she conceived an affection towards Stephen Rowland, she might have avowed it in confidence to her parents——"

"Enough, young man!" interrupted the Marquis, with a sudden air of dignified sternness. "You must not avail yourself of the peculiar position in which you are placed, for the purpose of lecturing me."

"No, my lord," I answered coldly: "I can safely leave your lordship to your own reflections upon the subject."

I then bowed respectfully, and quitted the room. Retiring to my own chamber—which I

had now no longer any difficulty in finding—I hastened to seek the rest of which I stood in need. But it was a long time ere slumber visited my eyes. I could not help reviewing again and again all the strange incidents which had occurred, and which accident had brought to my knowledge. But at length I sank into repose; and awakened at an early hour, in order to fulfil the task which I had in hand. The services I had to render Mr. Stephen in respect to his own toilet, were light and speedily concluded. I then sought Helen in the servants' hall, and requested her to find an immediate opportunity of whispering to Mr. Rowland, senior, that I craved a few minutes' private conversation with him. She naturally looked surprised: but I had some pretext in readiness, with which I need not trouble the reader, but which completely satisfied the lady's-maid. A few minutes afterwards she returned to inform me that Mr. Rowland was waiting to receive me in a sitting-room adjoining the bedchamber which had been allotted to himself and his wife. Thither I hastily proceeded; and as it was in the same corridor whence opened the chambers where Mr. Stephen and myself had slept, there was no necessity to ascend the stairs, on which I might have risked an encounter with Lady Lester.

Mr. Rowland had himself been somewhat astonished at the message so cautiously delivered to him by Helen, and which she had taken care neither his wife nor nephew should overhear, nor even observe its delivery at all. With some few prefatory remarks—so that the intelligence might not seize too suddenly on the old gentleman—I narrated all those incidents which are now so well known to the reader. He listened with continued surprise,—but a surprise which became blended with various other feelings. He sorrowed at the thought that Lady Lester's honour should have been sacrificed, ere marriage, to his nephew's passion; and he could not repress a look of indignation at the additional proofs which were now afforded of how completely the consent of the Marquis had been yielded from motives of expediency, and in antagonism with his pride, to an alliance which he regarded as being tinctured with plebeian degradation. He however fully appreciated my motives in pursuing the course which I had adopted, and with which he expressed his concurrence.

"The secret you have revealed to me, Joseph," he said, "shall never pass my lips. Not even my own wife shall be made acquainted with it—much less shall my nephew learn that the past is known to me; and never shall a look of mine cause his bride to blush with the fear that her secret is in my keeping. No—nothing shall transpire to throw a cloud upon the happiness which God grant they may enjoy! I will undertake to induce my nephew to renounce the idea of retaining you specially devoted to his own service: I will represent that I have thought better of it, and that I cannot spare you. You will therefore return with me to Manchester; and in the course of a few weeks you shall be otherwise provided for. For that change I will likewise use some pretext that may avert suspicion of any secret intelligence between us, and which shall at the same time be creditable and honourable to yourself. Keep your own chamber, Joseph, until the bride and bridegroom have taken their departure: we shall then likewise depart—and rest assured that I shall not be unmindful of your generous and self-sacrificing conduct on the present occasion."

The arrangements were carried out precisely as they were thus laid down: but it is not worth while to enter into minute details. It will therefore be sufficient for the reader to learn that the marriage-cermony took place—that the bride and bridegroom departed almost immediately afterwards—and that I accompanied my master and mistress, together with Helen, back to Manchester.

About three weeks after the incidents just related, Mr. Rowland one day sent for me into the parlour, and addressed me in the following terms:—

"I am grieved to part with you, my good youth: but for the motives which you yourself so generously and considerately advanced, a separation becomes absolutely necessary. Mrs. Rowland and myself are shortly to pay our nephew and niece a visit; and they are to return with us to pass a few weeks at Manchester. Therefore it would be inevitable that Gertrude would recognise you——"

"Pray, Mr. Rowland," I said, "seek no justification on your own account, for that course which I myself proposed, and which I am ready to follow out. Never, never shall I forget that you saved me from starvation!—until the end of my life shall I experience a grateful sense of all I owe you!"

"And I, my dear youth, shall always be happy to hear of your welfare. But we are not going to separate without there having been some previous forethought with Mrs. Rowland and myself as to the disposal of you. I must inform you, Joseph, that Mrs. Rowland has some distant relations, of the name of Shackleford, residing in Berkshire. But little intercourse has for many years taken place between us and the Shacklefords, from the simple fact that it suits their purpose to lead a secluded life. There is however no want of friendship: for indeed we occasionally correspond—and it so happens that in a letter the other day received from Heather Place—the Shacklefords' residence—Mrs. Shackleford incidentally mentioned to Mrs. Rowland that they were in want of a domestic; and as their dwelling is in a secluded out-of-the-way district, the difficulty of obtaining their requirement is more than usually great. This situation is open to you, Joseph, if you like to accept it. I can tell you little more than that you will have good wages and be well treated: but you must make up your mind for a dull monotonous kind of existence——"

"My only object, sir," I answered, "is to obtain a comfortable situation; and as for its seclusion, I should perhaps rather like it than otherwise:"—for I thought at the moment of Mr. Lanover.

"If you agree to enter into Mr. Shackleford's service," continued Mr. Rowland, "I will write off by this day's post to tell him that he may expect you; and you can leave to-morrow or next day. The proper route for you to pursue is hence to Birmingham, and thence by Oxford and Reading as far as Bagshot. At Bagshot you must alight and inquire your way to Heather Place, which is some five or six miles distant from that town."

I assented to the proposal so kindly and considerately made for providing me with another situation; and commenced my preparatives for departure. My knowledge of English topography was quite sufficient to make me aware that my new destination could not be more than twenty or thirty miles from London; and perhaps I might have hesitated to settle myself in such close vicinage of the metropolis, were it not for the intelligence that Heather Place was in so lonely a situation. I tarried the whole of the following day at Manchester; and in the morning of the ensuing one was ready for departure. Mr. Rowland, on paying the wages that were due to me, presented me with twenty pounds in addition; and both himself and his wife bade me farewell in the kindest manner.

CHAPTER LII.

THE WHITE COTTAGE.

It was about eight o'clock in the evening of the second day,—for I had slept at Birmingham, and tarried there a few hours to see the great manufacturing town,—that I alighted from a stage-coach at a tavern in Bagshot. On inquiring of the waiter relative to Heather Place, I was informed that it was exactly five miles distant—that no high road passed near—and that it was therefore only to be reached by a private conveyance, unless I waited until the morrow, when at mid-day a carrier's van would leave Bagshot, and, passing by Heather Place, would set me down there. I had been rather anxious to reach my destination that evening, in consequence of Mr. Rowland's letter to inform Mr. Shackleford that he might expect me: but I did not think it worth while to go to the expense nor adopt the ceremony of hiring a chaise to proceed thither. While I was yet conversing with the waiter at the entrance of the tavern, and hesitating what course I should pursue, a gentlemanly-looking man, who was smoking a cigar as he leant against the door-post, and who had overheard our discourse, joined in it.

"I myself am going in that direction presently," he said: "I have my own vehicle, and shall not only be glad to oblige you with a lift, but shall welcome your companionship."

"You are going to-night, Mr. Henley?" said the waiter.

"Yes," replied the gentleman; "I must be at High Wycombe to-morrow morning by ten o'clock; and I mean to get as far as Windsor to-night. I have ordered my chaise for nine o'clock; and it will not take me a mile out of my road to put you, sir, down at Heather Place. So if you mean to accompany me, you will have just time to get some refreshments."

"I hope, Mr. Henley," said the waiter, in a tone of remonstrance, "that you have not got much money about you?"

"Nonsense!" cried the individual thus addressed, as he emitted a long puff of smoke from between his lips. "You don't think I believe all the old women's stories that are told about highwaymen on Bagshot Heath and its neighbourhood. The days for your Dick Turpins have gone by."

"Well, sir, all I know," rejoined the waiter, "is that a commercial gentleman in the same line of business as yourself, was robbed three weeks back——"

"Oh!" exclaimed Mr. Henley, with a laugh: "if there has been a bagman in my line here as lately as three weeks, that accounts for the few orders I managed to get to-day in your precious little town of Bagshot. As for all the money I collected, you might put it in coppers into a tumbler and cover it over with a cheese-plate. But joking apart, I have not got much money about me; and if I had, I should not be scared by the flying rumours that have reached my ears. Besides, I always carry a couple of pistols with me; and you may depend upon it that if I met my death, I should not be the only person left dead in the road after the scuffle. But what were you going to say about a bagman who was robbed three weeks ago?"

"You know Mr. Wilkins, sir?" resumed the waiter. "I recollect you were here at the same time with himself, just about this season last year."

"You don't mean that short, stout, podgy little fellow, who drank two bottles of wine and wound it all up with brandy-and-water?"

"Yes, sir—that was Mr. Wilkins."

"Oh, well," observed Mr. Henley, with a significant smile, "if drinking his couple of bottles a-day is his habit, I don't wonder he found it convenient to be robbed: but I should be very much surprised if the house he travels for would let him travel for them much longer."

"Mr. Wilkins, sir, is a very honourable man, I believe," answered the waiter. "It was only a matter of twenty odd pounds he was robbed of, and I heard him say that he should not mention the matter to his employers, as it was so small a sum."

"Well—and what account did he give of it?" inquired Henley.

"That he was attacked by a man with a black mask on his face——"

"Oh! I suppose he had been recently seeing a melodrama at the Surrey or Victoria Theatre," interrupted Henley; "and so, when he had got his two bottles in his head, he had all the horrors of black masks likewise. Stuff and nonsense! Why, I have heard these reports about a highwayman for the last two years; and do you think it is possible that the fellow would stick to the same neighbourhood so long and pursue his depredations, without being caught? Not a bit of it! He would have had a bullet through his head long before this. Well, sir," added Mr. Henley, turning to me, "what do you say?"

"I am exceedingly obliged to you," I answered, "for your kind proposal: but as it would be taking you out of your way, I could not think of putting you to such an inconvenience."

"No inconvenience!" exclaimed the commercial traveller: and then he added with a laugh, "But I suppose you are frightened by what this fool here"—alluding to the waiter—"has been saying about a masked highwayman."

"Frightened—no!" I responded, somewhat indignantly: "but I do not mind admitting this much, that I think it no proof of true courage to run foolish risks; and there seems to me to be

something more in what the waiter has told us than you, Mr. Henley, choose to acknowledge or are inclined to believe. At all events, I am not so pressed to arrive at my destination but that I can wait until the morrow."

"Very well, sir," answered the commercial traveller, in a good-humoured manner: "you would have been welcome to a seat in my drag, if you had liked to accept it."

I thanked him, but still declined; and soon afterwards I saw him take his departure in his four-wheeled vehicle, which was fitted up to contain samples of the particular goods dealt in by the house for which he travelled. I then entered the coffee-room—had my supper—and went to bed early.

I rose betimes in the morning—indeed, as soon as it was daylight; and the beauty of the weather—for it was now the end of March—put it into my head that I would set out and walk to my destination, leaving my boxes to be forwarded by the carrier's van. I had no inclination to jog along for a distance of five miles in a van of that description, and not reach my place till the afternoon—whereas an hour and a half's pleasant and easy walking would bring me thither shortly after nine o'clock. Besides, as this part of the country was altogether new to me, I had a natural curiosity to form as early an acquaintance with it as possible. I was fond of walking too; and as the fears of highwaymen very much resemble those inspired by ghosts, inasmuch as they vanish with the daylight,—I did not hesitate to trust myself to the road I had to pursue, however lonely it might be. My mind being thus made up, I at once ordered breakfast; and having partaken of it, settled my bill—gave directions about my luggage—and sallied forth.

It was not yet eight o'clock—and as I have already said, a charming Spring morning. There was a delicious freshness in the air, which exhilarated the spirits, invigorated the frame, and gave elasticity to the step. I had previously inquired my way,—receiving such instructions that if properly followed, could not fail to guide me to my destination. On emerging from the town, I was soon upon the heath, which exhaled a fragrant perfume, and the sameness of which was varied by groves of fir-trees. From an eminence I obtained a view of a large white building, about three miles off, and which the waiter had told me to look out for,—it being the Royal Military College of Sandhurst. Its situation, even when viewed from that distance, was exceedingly picturesque, having numerous groves about it, and in front a large lake with two wooded islands in the middle. I continued my way, which ran along a beaten bye-road intersecting the heath, and having neither hedges nor fences. As the distance between me and Bagshot increased, the scene grew more lonely,—the Military College being now hidden from my view, and only an occasional dwelling appearing here and there at long intervals. In this manner I proceeded about three miles, when I entered a road which was bordered by fields, and the hedges of which were putting forth the verdure of Spring. I thought to myself that I was now entering upon a more thickly populated part of the country: but a turning in this bye-road soon brought me in the close vicinage of the heath again,—though on one side there were still prospects of pasture-lands. About a quarter of a mile distant I perceived a small but picturesquely situated habitation,—a white cottage, with the nascent verdure of the clematis and the honeysuckle giving rustic beauty to its portico. It stood in the midst of a well-kept garden, in the rear of which was a small shrubbery of fir-trees. As I drew nearer the spot, it appeared to display additional attractions, of a simple and rural character. A couple of cows and a horse were grazing in an adjacent paddock: there was a small conservatory attached to the house; and through the panes thereof, I could discern a number of plants. Melon and cucumber beds, covered with glass frames, showed that the garden was turned to good account; and the parterres of flowers appeared to indicate the supervision of female taste. The blinds and curtains at the windows of the dwelling bespoke the neatness and comfort which prevailed within; and in all the window-sills there were rows of plants in green pots. Altogether this little habitation conveyed the impression of picturesque beauty and simplicity, not unblended with feminine elegance of taste. It stood quite alone; and as my eyes glanced around, I could not distinguish another habitation within at least a distance of a mile. But still more remote than this interval, and farther on ahead, I beheld a large gloomy-looking house, standing on an eminence, and a portion of which was embowered in a grove of fir-trees. I was just wondering within myself whether the neat little white cottage could possibly be my destination, and that it had been dubbed by the dignified name of Heather Place,—when I suddenly recollected that the waiter had told me I should have to pass such a cottage, where, he had incidentally observed, dwelt a gentleman by the name of Foley. But inasmuch as my informant at the tavern had not been explicit in respect to the house itself, but had merely said, after other details, "You will next pass the white house where Mr. Foley lives,"—it did not immediately strike me that this sweet little picturesque place was the one alluded to. However, now that my recollections were thoroughly revived, I comprehended that the gloomy-looking habitation I saw about a mile and a half ahead must be the dwelling of the Shacklefords.

I had reached the front of the white cottage, and was lingering at the low neatly-kept paling—looking over into the garden—when all of a sudden the front door opened somewhat violently; and out rushed a female with dishevelled hair, and anguish upon her countenance. She was about eight-and-twenty years of age, and remarkably handsome, despite the bitter affliction which was evidently convulsing her. Her hair was of raven darkness; and floating as it was in its dishevelled condition, it gave to her appearance a certain look of wildness, which, though but little compatible with the simple beauty of that charming spot, was by no means inconsistent with the nature of the surrounding scenery, where tracts of heather and dark green fir-groves were but only partially varied by the few fields and the hedge-rows amidst which I had just been pursuing my way. The lady of whom I am speaking, was tall and finely formed. She was of full proportions, though not of an exuberance to mar the symmetry of her shape; for

this was perfect, when considered in reference to proportions that were all upon a large scale. A morning-wrapper, evidently thrown on with negligence, did not altogether conceal the splendour and whiteness of her bust. Though her hair and eyes were dark, her complexion was pure and transparent; and those eyes, notwithstanding the tears which dimmed them, were of a lustrous beauty. Her features were not perfectly regular; but it could only have been a very nice criticism that would have cavilled at them. Her mouth might possibly have been considered a trifle too large, and the lips too voluptuously full: but they certainly were not coarse—and the splendid set of teeth they revealed were a satisfactory indemnification. There was something about her which at once bespoke the lady; and I concluded that she must be the mistress of the cottage. Indeed, as she wore a wedding-ring, I immediately set her down to be Mrs. Foley.

The interval between the cottage and the fence might be about thirty-yards; and she came rushing like one frantic along the gravel-walk. She reached the gate, towards which I immediately moved, as I saw that she desired to speak to me; and I felt much excited by the spectacle of so much bitter sorrow on the part of one so interesting and so handsome.

"Oh, sir!" she exclaimed, still clasping her hands in deep affliction, "would you render a service to one who is almost distracted?"

"Yes, madam," I answered,—"that I will, cheerfully and readily! What can I do?"

"My husband is dying, I fear!" she cried: and then suddenly covering her face with her hands, she sobbed convulsively.

"Dying, madam!" I ejaculated. "Have you a surgeon? or is it for medical attendance that you wish me to hasten?"

"Yes—that is the favour I beseech of you," cried the lady. "There is a little village yonder—about two miles distant—just behind that hill—and a surgeon lives there. Hasten, sir,—hasten, I implore you—or my beloved Ferdinand will be no more!"

"I go at once!" was my quick response: and I was hastening away, when Mrs. Foley—for such she proved to be—called me back.

"You had better take the horse," she said, endeavouring to conquer some portion of her bitter grief, so that she might think and speak in a collected manner. "You can reach the village in a few minutes; and you can give the horse to Mr. Games, the surgeon—so that he may lose no time in coming hither. Bid him ride quick—life or death depends upon his speed! This way—this way!"

She opened the gate—I entered the enclosure—and she quickly led me towards a stable, in which I found a saddle and bridle. Then I had to go into the paddock and catch the horse that was grazing there: but fortunately the docile animal—as handsome a creature too as ever I beheld in my life—suffered himself to be immediately captured. The bridle was hastily slipped on; and I led him round to the front of the stable. There I saddled him—in a moment sprang upon his back—and was about to gallop away, when Mrs. Foley again stopped me.

"Might I inquire who you are?" she asked; "that I may know who it is that is rendering me this kind—this generous service."

"My name is Joseph Wilmot," I answered; "and I was on my way to enter a situation which I have obtained at Heather Place."

"Then accept, Joseph Wilmot, the heartfelt thanks of a truly grateful woman!" exclaimed Mrs. Foley: and at the same time drawing forth her purse, she took thence a sovereign.

"No, no, ma'am—not for the world!" I cried,—"not for the world!"—and the next instant I was galloping away.

The horse went like the wind: a bridle-path, diverging from the main road in which the white cottage stood, led round the base of the hill which Mrs. Foley had indicated; and in a few minutes I reached the village. Almost the very first house that I saw was that of Mr. Games the surgeon. It was a modest one; and the little shop had the usual apothecary's bottles of coloured waters in the window—but all in a miniature size compared with those which chemists in large towns display. I sprang from the back of the horse; and holding the bridle, crossed the threshold. Mr. Games was an elderly man—with a mild good-natured look; and at a glance it was easy to perceive that he was simple-minded and of humble taste, as the surgeon of such an out-of-the-way nook might easily be imagined before he was seen. I quickly delivered my message; and though he exhibited prompt alacrity in putting on his hat, taking his case of instruments, as well as his stick, to hurry off to the white cottage,—he appeared by no means inclined to mount the horse. I assured him it was a matter of life and death—whereat he looked exceedingly chagrined, evidently balancing between what he felt to be his duty on the one hand, and his fears on the other.

"Come!" said I; "get up behind me—hold fast round my waist—and we will be there in a few minutes. It would take you a good half-hour to walk; and in the meanwhile the poor gentleman may die."

Mr. Games consented. Again I sprang into the saddle: he hoisted himself up behind me; and away we sped in the direction of the cottage. We reached it without any accident: Mrs. Foley at once rushed forth—and still with an almost frenzied affliction depicted in her looks, she besought Mr. Games to hurry up-stairs at once, for that she feared her husband was at his last gasp. She breathed a few hurried words of heartfelt thanks to me; and I proceeded to put the horse up in the stable and give him a feed of corn. As there was no groom nor man-servant about the premises, I concluded that Mr. Foley had been accustomed to attend to his own horse; and stripping off my coat and waistcoat, I groomed the animal to the best of my ability. As already stated, he was a beautiful creature; and I felt a pleasure in thus attending to him. An hour passed; and when I had resumed the apparel I had thrown off, I proceeded round to the back part of the premises to make an inquiry with respect to Mr. Foley's condition, ere I pursued my way to Heather Place. There was a servant-woman in the small but neat kitchen—a buxom, red-cheeked, healthy-looking creature of about four or five-and-twenty; and she stared at me in a way that at first struck me as peculiar. But I soon comprehended what it

meant: for when I addressed her, a sudden mournfulness came over her features—she shook her head—placed her hands significantly to her ears—and thus made me comprehend that she was deaf and dumb. She however beckoned me to enter; and opening the larder, pointed to refreshments, as much as to inquire whether I would take any? By the friendliness of her manner, I presumed that she had learnt from her mistress (who was doubtless accustomed to converse with her by signs) that some one had gone for the doctor; and she therefore concluded that I was the individual. I declined the proffered hospitality: for though really hungry and thirsty, with my walk and ride—as well as with the work I had done in the stable—I did not like to sit down deliberately to eat and drink in a house which death might be at the moment visiting. Neither did I think it proper to tarry there any longer; and I accordingly took my departure,—sincerely hoping that Mr. Foley's illness, whatever it were, might not prove so serious as his afflicted wife evidently apprehended.

As I drew near Heather Place, I was more and more struck by its gloominess. Myrtle Lodge—the abode of the Tivertons in Devonshire—had seemed of a sufficiently sombre aspect: but Heather Place was infinitely more so. It was a large house, built of dark red bricks—with heavy overhanging gables and massive chimneys, reminding one of the architecture of the reign of Henry VIII. It stood about forty yards back from the road,—the intervening space being chiefly occupied by a grass-plat. Instead of iron railings there was a wall covered with ivy: and a low door admitted me within the precincts of the grounds. I now perceived that at least half the house was shut up,—the wooden shutters being closed,—which of course added to the gloom of its general aspect. The gravel-walk leading up to the front door, was dotted with weeds: the grass-plat was ill-kept; and the borders intended for flowers, and which were skirted by the walls of the enclosure, had merely a few stunted shrubs and sickly plants, which appeared as if no gardener's hand ever touched them. There was not a human being to be seen either in the grounds or at the windows, as I approached the front door; and the fir-groves, with their sombre boughs, enhanced the gloom into an almost awe-inspiring solemnity. A sort of chill crept over me: for though I had made up my mind to a certain degree of seclusion and loneliness in respect to Heather Place, I could not possibly have foreseen that it would prove so profoundly dull, sombre-looking, and cheerless as it actually was. Neither did I think that Mr. Rowland could have been aware of all this; or he might have hesitated to recommend me to such a home.

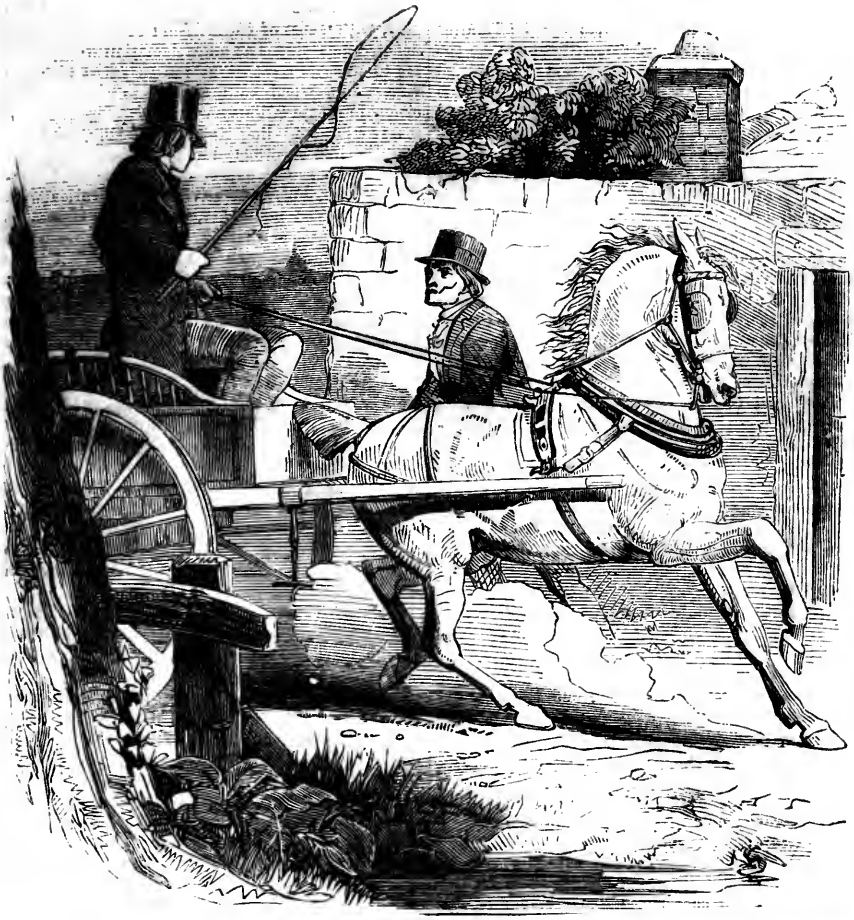
However, youth is not the period of life when one's spirits are kept down for any length of time by impressions that appeal to the imagination rather than by circumstances actually experienced. So I said to myself, as I rang at the front door, that perhaps the comfort of the interior would compensate for the external gloom. I was kept waiting more than a minute; and then the door was slowly opened by an elderly woman, with a reserved, though by no means saturnine or repulsive aspect. She was neatly dressed; and I judged her to fill the post of housemaid. I told her who I was: then she surveyed me with a transient surprise, as if she had at first taken me for a young gentleman, and little fancied me to be the new servant who was expected. I however saw that I *was* expected; and I was asked to walk in. I entered a spacious, dark, and gloomy-looking hall: so that I began to fear the inside of the house would prove as sombre as the outside. There was nevertheless a savoury odour emanating from the kitchen-department; and this at least gave promise of good fare. The housemaid—for such she proved to be—opened the parlour-door; and having announced my arrival, bade me walk in.

It was a room with massive old-fashioned furniture and heavy draperies—all cheerless and dismal—into which I was thus ushered; and there I found Mr. and Mrs. Shackleford, seated at luncheon. The former was a very tall thin man, of about sixty—with hair completely white—though his form was upright, and not deficient in vigour nor strength, despite his elevated stature and the leanness of his person. He had a long, pale, thoughtful face; and if it were not expressive of benevolence, it assuredly raised no alarm in my mind that he would prove a stern or severe master. Mrs. Shackleford, on the other hand, was a very short and exceeding stout woman, whose age merged upon fifty. She had great red cheeks and a good-humoured twinkling of the eyes, which gave her the appearance of a worthy rustic matron. That the Shacklefords lived well, I at once perceived by the ingredients of the luncheon; and that the lady especially could play a respectable game with her knife and fork, was apparent from the heap of cold fowl and ham that I discerned upon her plate. The gentleman was dressed in black; and as he wore a white cravat, without any shirt collars being visible, he had the air of a clergyman. His wife was apparelled in silk, and wore a somewhat spruce cap: she had plenty of jewellery, too, about her—and a certain little air of coquetry, showing that even in this solitude she was not unmindful of the business of the toilet. Altogether, the impression made upon my mind by the first glance which I threw upon my new master and mistress, was by no means an unpleasant one.

Mr. Shackleford surveyed me in silence for a few moments: but his wife immediately exclaimed, "Ah! you are Joseph Wilmot, of whom our cousins at Manchester have written in such favourable terms:"—and she appeared to be well pleased by my aspect.

"I hope you will find yourself comfortable in your new place, Joseph," said Mr. Shackleford, speaking with a sort of grave urbanity. "You were doubtless informed that you were to come to a secluded dwelling: but whatsoever sense of loneliness you may at first feel, will gradually wear off when you find that everything is done to conduce to your well-being."

Mr. Shackleford then proceeded to specify the wages which I was to have, and which were liberal enough. He next went on to give me an idea of what my duties would be. I should have to answer the front door—wait at table—take charge of the plate—and go in the chaise-cart two or three times a week to Bagshot to purchase such things as were required for the house. Thus



were my duties summed up; and they did not seem to be very onerous ones. Mrs. Shackleford interjectingly asked if I could drive?—and when I responded that I thought I could, though I had never had much opportunity of testing my skill, she looked still more pleased than she seemed at first. I was told that I should be put in livery, and that on the following day I must go to Mr. Shackleford's tailor at Bagshot to get measured for my clothes.

I was now consigned to the care of the elderly housemaid, who conducted me to the kitchen. I found that there were, besides myself, three domestics,—the elderly housemaid already mentioned—the cook, who was of about the same age—and an old man, who acted as groom and gardener. He could not be less than sixty-five, and appeared to be half childish; so that he seemed more fitted for superannuation than to continue in service. I could no longer wonder that the flower-garden presented so meagre an appearance; and I subsequently found that the vegetable-garden at the back of the house was not in a much more promising condition. The servants received me with a sufficiently cordial welcome,—the cook being a jovial good-humoured woman, and the old man of that half inane hilariousness which is often the characteristic of the advent of second childhood In the course of the day I found that the Shacklefords kept one horse and a phaeton, besides a light chaise-cart: I likewise learnt that Mrs. Shackleford was very fond of being driven about in the neighbourhood, and that it was chiefly for her use the phaeton was kept. The old man, who had been for years in the Shacklefords' service, was accustomed to drive the phaeton: but methought, from the question his mistress had put as to whether I knew how to handle the reins, she had it in contemplation to induct me into that duty. I should add, ere passing on to other matters, that my

three fellow-servants had all been for a considerable time in their present situations—that they seemed perfectly contented and happy—and I of course reasoned that these facts spoke well for my new master and mistress.

On the following morning, immediately after breakfast, Mr. Shackleford directed me to take the chaise-cart, go across to Bagshot, and get measured for my liveries. I was also to make some purchases of groceries and other articles, of which a list was given me. Old Jacob, the groom, turned out the little equipage in better style than I had anticipated; and I drove away. I was not many minutes ere I reached the white cottage; and it was with a considerable degree of anxiety and suspense that I threw my looks upon the windows to see if the blinds were drawn down as an indication that death was there. To my unfeigned joy it was not so; and I drove on to Bagshot. My commissions there were soon executed; and I could judge by the tradesmen's manner that the Shacklefords stood well with them. On my return I thought it would be but proper to stop at the white cottage and inquire after Mr. Foley's health. I did so; and just as I had alighted from the chaise-cart, Mrs. Foley herself came forth from the dwelling. She looked considerably more tranquil than when I had seen her on the previous day: she was no longer labouring under the same frenzied wildness of grief: but there was a deep anxiety visible upon her countenance. I however saw her to much greater advantage than on the former occasion: for this comparative serenity of the features—though it was only comparative—confirmed my impression that she was of no ordinary beauty. Her hair was now done up in massive bands—but brought low down before they were taken up again above the ears; and that hair, of raven darkness and glossiness, formed a lustrous frame of varnished ebony for the pale handsome countenance. The eyes were superbly bright—the brows, somewhat thick, and thus indicative of strong passions, were nevertheless nobly arched. On the previous day her lips were whitened with the excess of her emotions: now they were of a bright and dewy red. When carefully studied, there was something sensuous far more than sentimental in the contours and expression of that fine countenance: but her manners were soft and pleasing, and full of a gracious lady-like affability.

"I am sorry you should have gone away yesterday without seeing me again," she said, hastening forward to the gate. "I should have renewed my thanks for your generous kindness. I found, too, that you had taken care of poor Jupiter"—thus alluding to the horse: and then she added mournfully, "If Mr. Foley should ever rise from his bed again, he will be deeply grateful for your goodness towards that faithful animal."

"And might I ask, ma'am," I said, "how Mr. Foley is to-day?"

"He lives—and that is all that I can say," responded the lady, in a voice of deep sadness, the tears trickling slowly down her cheeks. "Totally deprived of consciousness, he hovers on the very verge of death; and yet the medical man gives me some hope——"

"Pardon me, ma'am," I said, "for venturing to proffer my advice: but with all respect for Mr. Games's good intentions, do you think that his skill is sufficient to grapple with such a very severe illness as Mr. Foley appears to be experiencing?"

"Oh, I was astonished at his skill!" cried the lady, with a sort of enthusiasm: so that my looks denoted amazement at an exclamation which gave me to understand that at the very first visit the village-doctor had been enabled to prove his efficiency in a case of illness which, it naturally struck me, could only lingeringly, gradually, and by scarcely imperceptible degrees, afford such evidences of medical expertness. "I mean," continued Mrs. Foley, perceiving the surprise with which I gazed upon her, "that Mr. Games at once understood what it was, and appeared to grapple vigorously with the malady:"—but there was a certain degree of confusion in Mrs. Foley's looks, as if she had said something, when giving vent to that enthusiastic encomium in reference to the surgeon, which had slipped out involuntarily and which she could wish recalled.

I was about to ask her what the nature of the malady was—but I was fearful of causing her pain; and she was afflicted enough already. I therefore contented myself with expressing a sincere hope that the next time I took the liberty of calling, I might hear a better account of Mr. Foley—and was about to ascend into the chaise-cart, when a sudden thought struck me.

"If you have no one as yet, ma'am, to attend to the horse," I said, "I will endeavour to spare a quarter of an hour for the purpose."

"Thank you," she replied: "again do I most sincerely thank you!—but Mr. Games sent me over a man from the village to attend to poor Jupiter."

I bowed, and drove away. At a distance of about a hundred yards I beheld Mr. Games bustling along with his stick, and with the perspiration pouring down his countenance, which was as rosy and wrinkled as an apple in the winter-time. I instantaneously pulled up the horse; and said to him, "What hope do you entertain, Mr. Games, of your patient?"

He shook his head with a solemn gravity, and uttered not a word.

"I just stopped at the cottage to inquire how Mr. Foley is getting on; and his wife seemed to think that you had given her some little hope."

"I merely said, young man," replied the surgeon, "that there is a possibility of Mr. Foley's recovery: but I did not say a probability. It is however natural that a wife should clutch at the slightest word which bears the semblance of hope. I wish that I could more emphatically give such hope: but I fear that the poor lady's husband will never speak again."

"What is the precise nature of his malady, Mr. Games?" I inquired.

The surgeon contemplated me in a somewhat singular manner for a few moments; and then he appeared to deliberate within himself ere he gave me any answer. At length he said, "It is a very severe case—a very severe case indeed. I cannot exactly make you understand it——but it is a general breaking up of the constitution—a something that seizes on one all of a sudden, and often terminating fatally with a swiftness as marvellous as it is dreadful."

Having thus spoken, Mr. Games hurried on his way: for he was evidently on a visit to the white cottage. I continued my own course towards Heather Place, somewhat bewildered by two or three little incidents which had just occurred, and which would persist in hovering in my mind, notwithstanding that I endeavoured to persuade myself they were mere trivialities and could no doubt be easily explained. But that readiness with which Mrs. Foley had testified to the surgeon's skill, as if he had given some immediate and striking proof thereof—the confusion in her looks which followed that ejaculatory encomium—then the strange manner in which Games himself had regarded me when I inquired what Mr. Foley's malady was—his hesitation ere he answered—and the sort of evasiveness with which he first spoke—together with the vague and general nature of the explanation which he immediately afterwards gave, and which really had the air of being the result of some second thought,—all these things, when grouping themselves together, struck me as somewhat strange. Yet what veritable singularity could there possibly be in them? Whatever the nature of an illness, so dangerous as that, might be,—there could assuredly exist no harm in describing it frankly. At least methought so. However, amidst all my wonderings and my bewildering reflections, there was a sentiment of genuine sympathy on behalf of that wife in respect to whose love for her husband there could be no possible doubt.

CHAPTER LIII.

HEATHER PLACE.

In the course of conversation with the domestics in the kitchen, I inquired whether there was any truth in the rumours which had reached my ears, to the effect that the neighbourhood of Bagshot was troubled with a highwayman, who wore a black mask, and who for the last two or three years had been carrying on his depredations?

"There can be no doubt of it," answered the cook. "Once or twice travellers have stopped at Heather Place, tearing madly at the gate-bell, and begging for shelter, as they had been robbed by a highwayman and were afraid to proceed."

"But when once the mischief was done," I observed, "it was somewhat too late to ask for an asylum for the night."

"Ah! but it unsettles one's nerves so," exclaimed the cook: "and people who get robbed on the heath, get their heads filled with all sorts of fancies, and don't like to continue their way in the night-time."

"And master himself," observed old Jacob, "says that one evening, as he was coming home late in the phaeton, a fellow on horseback dashed up to him, and seemed as if he meant to do him a mischief: but some how or another he thought better of it, and galloped away like the wind."

"And did Mr. Shackleford say that the horseman wore a black mask?" I inquired.

"He thought so, but wasn't quite sure," rejoined old Jacob. "The night was very dark, and master only just had time to catch a single glimpse of the fellow before he was off again like a shot. It was strange; because how a highwayman could by a single look at a gentleman judge whether he was worth robbing or not, beats my power of comprehension."

"Don't you recollect, Jacob," observed the housemaid, "that when master came home and told us the story, he said that the moment he heard the horse galloping after him, he took out his pistol?"

"Ah, to be sure!" replied the old groom; "and therefore I suppose the robber saw it in an instant: for these highwaymen, you know, have eyes like cats, and can see in the dark."

"And then too," suggested the cook, "master, being so tall, and sitting so upright in the phaeton—and wrapped up in his cloak too, which made him look stouter than he really is—the robber might have fancied him to be a strong, powerful man; and what with that idea, and a glimpse at the pistol, it wasn't so very wonderful that he should sheer off."

"Then it is positively true," I observed, "that there is a highwayman somewhere in these parts—and that it was no old woman's tale I heard repeated by the waiter at the Bagshot inn?"

"Oh, it's quite certain!" cried the cook. "There was Sir Ralph Fitzroy—the rich Baronet, who lives about four miles from here—he was riding home late one evening, and by some accident or another he had no groom with him. Well, all of a sudden he was stopped in the middle of the heath by a man on horseback——"

"And the man had his mask on," interjected the housemaid.

"Ah, to be sure!" continued the cook. "Well, poor old Sir Ralph had not the slightest chance with the fellow: so he was robbed of a matter of three hundred pounds he happened to have about him—for he had been to receive money. It was all done in the twinkling of an eye; and Sir Ralph really thought it was a dream."

"Aye, aye—and so it might have been in *his* case," observed Jacob, nodding his head as knowingly as he could. "Sir Ralph, old as he is, is very gay in some respects; and he fools away a deal of money—as some of the farmers' daughters round about have good reason to know, to their own profit."

"It is true," said the housemaid, "that malicious people did whisper at the time that Sir Ralph Fitzroy had never been robbed at all, and that he only invented it as an excuse to account for the disappearance of the money, and to save himself from a blowing-up on the part of his wife."

"Well, if you come to that," said the cook, "missus, you remember, laughed and joked master about his own adventure, and insisted that he had either been frightened by a shadow—or else that he had concocted the story just to pass himself off as a very brave man whose appearance scared away a robber all in a moment."

"No, no—I don't think Mr. Shackleford would invent any such falsehood," said the housemaid: "he is too grave for that. Besides, ever since the winter before last, when the thing happened, he has taken very good care not to be out alone after dusk. And if one person has been stopped on the heath, why not another? There was one of the Professors of the College, was robbed

eighteen months ago of fifty or sixty pounds; and he made a terrible resistance, and was knocked out of his gig by the butt-end of the highwayman's whip. There was no mistake about that: he had the marks on his person. And then again there was old Squire Truepenny——that's a gentleman," added the housemaid, turning to me, "who lives about six miles from here; and he was driving home one night in his gig, with a footboy or page—when they were stopped, and the Squire was robbed of over a hundred pounds. So you see that there is no doubt as to a highwayman infesting these parts."

"By all accounts," resumed the cook, "he must be a very gentlemanly sort of a man: he never takes watches or jewellery—nothing but money; and if the people he stops only remain quiet, he never thinks of doing them a mischief—I mean in the shape of ill-treating them. Why, there was the case of the two Miss Smithsons——those, Joseph, are a couple of maiden ladies, sisters of course, who live at Bagshot. They were out walking rather late one summer evening—and it was in a lonely spot—when up gallops the highwayman. The two poor old ladies were ready to die with fright: but he spoke so kind and civil, though in a strange queer voice, that they were almost inclined to thank him for robbing them in such a genteel manner."

"After all these anecdotes," I observed, "it would be scarcely possible to doubt the existence of the masked highwayman. And yet it appears strange that he should remain so long in the same neighbourhood——"

"Ah, but who can tell," interrupted the cook, "how he may go about to other places? Sometimes we don't hear of a robbery for several months together; and in the meanwhile the highwayman may have been to the Land's End and back."

"He nearly got caught once," observed old Jacob. "Don't you recollect——I forget how long ago it could have been—my memory isn't so good as it used to be——"

"I know what you mean!" exclaimed the cook. "It was a matter of two years back, that Mr. Foley told master and missus how he had been stopped by the robber, and how they had a desperate struggle—though the highwayman got clear off at last."

"And now Mr. Foley," I said, "is lying almost at the point of death."

"With little chance of recovering," said the cook, shaking her head mournfully. "They are nice people—very nice people. Master and missus went up to the cottage this afternoon to call and inquire how the poor gentleman gets on; and they saw Mrs. Foley——"

"Who spoke in high terms of your conduct, Joseph," interjected the housemaid. "She said more than you told us yesterday—how you had groomed the horse, and made the stable so neat and comfortable—and how you refused to take any reward. Ah! if Mr. Foley should go, it will break his poor wife's heart: for I never did see a woman so attached to her husband as she is!"

"What is Mr. Foley?" I inquired.

"A gentleman with a small independence," answered the housemaid—"just enough for him and his wife to live upon; and as they have no children, their expenses are not very great. They visit at the Place when master and missus give a party; and they are always amiable and full of life and spirits. It will be a shocking thing for Mrs. Foley—and for the poor gentleman too! He is not more than five or six-and-thirty—and as handsome as a man as she is beautiful as a woman. They are much respected in the neighbourhood, and visit at some of the best houses."

"Is Mr. Games a clever man?" I inquired, remembering the eulogy which Mrs. Foley had passed upon the village-surgeon.

"Some say he is clever, and some don't think so," returned the housemaid. "We know little about him: for when any one is ill here, we have Mr. Willis from Bagshot."

"But, thank God, no one ever does seem to be ill here!" exclaimed the cook; "and the only time that Mr. Willis has come to Heather Place within the last three years—I mean in his professional capacity—was about six months back——"

But here I noticed that the housemaid suddenly darted a glance of peculiar meaning upon the cook,—who at once stopped short, looked confused, and then turned abruptly away, with the air of one who had inadvertently let fall something to which she ought not to have alluded, and who was thus reminded of her oversight by her fellow-servant. The incident struck me as being strange: but as the parlour-bell rang at the moment, and I had to answer it, my thoughts were speedily turned into another channel.

A week passed without any incident worthy of special mention—unless it be that I learnt with much pleasure that Mr. Foley was getting somewhat better. Three or four times during this week, I was sent to inquire after that gentleman; and as I could not possibly comprehend the signs of the dumb servant-woman, Mrs. Foley on each occasion came down to the door to give me such intelligence as she had to impart. By the time the week had expired, she spoke confidently of her husband's ultimate recovery; and it was with a most unfeigned sincerity I proffered my congratulations. She treated me with a degree of kindness which testified her gratitude for the little service I had rendered her on the first morning of my arrival in that part of the country; and the more I saw of her, the higher was the opinion I formed of the goodness of her disposition, the amiability of her manners, and the love she entertained for her husband. On one or two occasions I again met Mr. Games; and I was happy in receiving from his lips a confirmation of the hopeful report made to me by Mrs. Foley,—although the village-surgeon qualified it somewhat by the ominous hint that the malady might yet take an unfavourable turn, and that at all events it would be a long, long time ere his patient could be pronounced convalescent.

I was accustomed to retire to bed at about ten o'clock: for the Shacklefords were regular and early in their habits,—withdrawing to their chamber at that hour in the evening so as to rise betimes in the morning. One night—about ten days after my arrival at Heather Place—a little incident occurred, which, trivial though it may appear, nevertheless requires mention. I had retired to my chamber at the usual hour; but ere seeking my couch, I sat up to pen a letter to Mr. Rowland, thanking him for his kindness in pro-

curing me a situation where I was perfectly comfortable notwithstanding the extreme loneliness of the dwelling. When I had finished I was preparing for bed—but suddenly recollected that I had not brought up my new liveries, which had arrived that afternoon; and as I should naturally be expected to appear in my undress-suit in the morning, I descended to the kitchen to fetch the parcel. As I was proceeding very gently down the stairs,—for I knew that Mr. and Mrs. Shackleford were exceedingly particular in respect to the servants putting out their lights within a reasonable time after retiring to their rooms,—the kitchen clock struck eleven. I did not think it was so late—but felt all the more assured that the entire household had withdrawn to rest, and that I should not therefore encounter a soul. But on reaching the kitchen, I was surprised to find not only a light shining there, but a strong fire blazing in the grate. I entered—and to my still greater astonishment, perceived that active culinary preparations were in progress. A couple of fowls were roasting in front of the fire: a saucepan was boiling upon it; and on a side-table there were jam-tarts and meat-patties, which had just been made, in readiness for the oven. I did not immediately see the cook: but while I was still standing gazing in surprise upon all that was going on, she suddenly emerged from the pantry, carrying some dishes in her hand.

"Why, Joseph!" she exclaimed, as if seized with sudden affright: "what brings you here at this hour?"

"I had forgotten my clothes," was my response, "and came down to fetch them."

"A pretty time of night to think of your clothes!" said the cook, somewhat sharply. "Hav'n't you been told that the only thing master and missus are very particular about—and not only very particular, but even strict——"

"I am aware," I interrupted her, "that I ought not to have been running about the house after ten o'clock—and also that my light should have been extinguished at least three quarters of an hour ago. But really I meant no harm—and can have done none now, inasmuch as you yourself are still up."

"Well, well," said the cook, now completely softened—for she was naturally a very good-natured woman, "it can't be helped: but another time, you know, you must keep the rules of the house."

"Rest assured that I should not wilfully break them: but Mr. and Mrs. Shackleford will expect to see me in my undress-livery to-morrow morning, and therefore I really thought there was no harm in coming down to fetch it. You seem to be busy here to-night. Is there a party to-morrow?—for as master and mistress retired to their own room an hour back, I know that these preparations are not for their supper to-night. Besides, they had their supper as usual at nine o'clock."

"Now, don't ask me any questions, there's a dear lad!" responded the cook, with a sort of coaxing good-humour: "but go up to bed. Perhaps I forgot to do in the afternoon what I am doing now: or perhaps——But however, you may know after a time——"

Then she stopped suddenly short, as if she had said a few words more than she had intended; and I recollected how, on the second evening after my arrival, she had been guilty of a similar inadvertence when so abruptly checked by the look of peculiar meaning which the more sedate and reserved housemaid had thrown upon her. It therefore struck me that there was some little mystery which I could not altogether understand: but of what nature it was—if indeed there were any at all—I could not form the slightest conjecture.

"Don't say a word," resumed the cook quickly, "that you came down stairs to-night: or else, if it reached master's ears, you might get a scolding—and that would be a pity; as I know he thinks well of you, and we all like you. So now good night, Joseph—and steal up-stairs again as softly as you can."

With these words, the cook hastened to put her patties and tarts into the oven; and I, taking up my parcel of clothes and wishing her good night, left the kitchen. Ascending the stairs, I had reached the second landing, when a door abruptly opened and Mrs. Shackleford made her appearance with a light in her hand. She instantaneously closed the door behind her—locked it—and took out the key: then advancing straight up to where I had stopped short in mingled alarm and astonishment on beholding her, she said, as she fixed upon me a searching look, "What are you doing up, Joseph, and about the house at this time of night?"

"The truth is, ma'am," I frankly answered, as I steadily met her scrutinizing gaze, "that I sat up to write a letter—it was a long one—and when I had finished, I recollected that I had not brought up my clothes. I accordingly went down stairs to fetch them;"—and I glanced towards the parcel in corroboration of my statement.

"Oh, cook is down stairs—I recollect!" said Mrs. Shackleford, in a sort of easy careless manner. "Another time, Joseph, you must on no account leave your room when once you have retired to it. There is nothing that I and your master have such a dread of as fire; and if the house once caught, recollect that in this isolated spot it would be burnt to the ground before any succour could arrive. I am not angry with you on the present occasion: but you will know better in future."

She spoke kindly: I thanked her, and hastened up to my chamber. But I have said that when she first made her appearance so abruptly on the landing, I contemplated her with mingled alarm and astonishment. The reader can of course understand that the alarm was occasioned by being thus caught wandering about the house at a forbidden hour: but the feeling of astonishment which I experienced has yet to be explained. It will be recollected that on my first arrival at Heather Place, I observed that one half the house was shut up,—the wooden shutters being all closed inside the casements. So they had continued during the short time I had been there, with the exception of three windows in the back of that wing of the premises. I had learnt from the domestics that the part of the house thus shut up, had long remained unused,—not even excepting the apartments to which belonged the three windows where the shutters were open. Now, the door whence Mrs. Shackleford had so abruptly

come forth—at an hour when I thought her fast asleep in her own chamber—communicated from the landing with some of the shut-up rooms; and this was the first time I had ever seen that door opened. It therefore naturally struck me at the moment as being strange that Mrs. Shackleford should be still up, and that she should emerge from a portion of the building which I had been led to believe was altogether out of use. Moreover, she had contemplated me with a peculiar air of scrutiny, as if she attached more importance to the fact of my being about the house than so comparatively trivial an incident appeared to warrant. The circumstance, united with the other little matters which had already induced the belief that there was some mystery which I could not fathom, tended to strengthen that idea; and when I sought my couch, I lay for some time pondering on all these things, before sleep visited my eyes.

On the following morning I observed, on entering the breakfast-parlour, that Mr. Shackleford surveyed me for a few moments with a certain degree of that same sort of unaccountable significant scrutiny with which his wife had regarded me upon the landing on the previous night: but his manner was unchanged towards me—it was gravely urbane, as was its wont. There was another circumstance too which I noticed during the day:—and this was, that of all the articles provided for the parlour-table, the poultry and the pastry I had seen in the course of preparation the previous night, were not forthcoming, and indeed had totally disappeared. But the housemaid incidentally observed, "how kind it was of her mistress to think of providing a few little dainties to send as a present to poor Mrs. Foley, who, heaven knew! was too much absorbed in her ministrations by her husband's couch to have leisure to think of herself."

This explanation was intelligible enough: but the mystery which had been made by the cook of the object of her culinary preparations, was not so easily understood, unless it were that the Shacklefords liked to perform a worthy action by stealth and to keep it secret as much as possible. But then, wherefore should the cook, who was rather inclined to be leaky in respect to secrets than otherwise—prove so mysterious on this one point; while the housemaid, usually so guarded, cautious, and reserved, had just spoken out as if in allusion to a matter concerning which there need exist no silence? As for the shut-up apartments, and Mrs. Shackleford's visit thereto, I endeavoured to persuade myself that there was nothing strange connected therewith—and that the lady might easily be understood to have occasion to enter a store-room, or anything of that sort: but still there was a vague idea floating in my mind, though dim and indefinite, that there *was* something of a mysterious character in respect to the matter last alluded to.

I went out into the back garden; and under the pretext of roaming there for my pleasure, surveyed with attention those three windows which had not the shutters closed. They were in a row, and belonged to the second floor—that very floor on which I had encountered Mrs. Shackleford on the previous night. Heavy dingy curtains hung against the windows: there were no white blinds—but some articles of furniture, which seemed to be chests of drawers, stood against each casement, appearing about a couple of feet higher than the window-sills. The panes themselves seemed to have been so long uncleansed that the heavy draperies and those articles of furniture, could only be indistinctly discerned through them. I was still gazing up at those windows,—wondering why the shutters should be left unclosed, when they were secured in every other casement, back and front, in the same portion of the spacious building,—when Jacob came into the garden to trifle away with a rake and a hoe. I therefore averted my eyes from that range of three windows; and after exchanging a few words with the old groom, re-entered the house.

Now that I had my liveries, I found my presage fulfilled, by Mrs. Shackleford desiring me to drive her out in the phaeton. I had no objection to this, inasmuch as it was a recreation, and varied the monotony of the life I was leading. She made calls at some of the principal houses within a circuit of four or five miles of Heather Place; and she frequently stopped and passed half-an-hour or so with Mrs. Foley. Thus about a month went by from the date of my arrival at Heather Place; and in the meantime Mr. Foley was gradually but surely recovering. Even Mr. Games himself—whom I found to be a man of by no means a sanguine disposition—was at length obliged to admit that his patient was out of all danger.

In order that the incidents I am about to relate may be thoroughly understood, I must linger for a few moments to describe the exact position of Heather Place in respect to the grounds which were attached to it. I have already said that it was a large building, with a space in front chiefly occupied by a grass plat, and enclosed with ivy-covered walls. Behind the building was the kitchen-garden. That portion of the house which was shut up, extended to the wall thus bordering one side of the garden. Beyond this wall there was a large shrubbery—or rather plantation of fir-trees—fenced in with high palisades, and occupying perhaps half an acre of ground. From the side of the shut-up portion of the house, a door opened into this plantation: but inasmuch as the doors of all the passages communicating with the shut-up wing, were invariably kept fast locked, there were no means of obtaining admission into the grove, unless it were by going outside and climbing over the palisades. In other words, it was absolutely necessary to pass through the untenanted portion of the edifice to obtain access to that plantation; and as the doors were kept locked, the plantation was hermetically sealed against the inmates of the dwelling. From the back windows of the inhabited portion, the grove could be partially looked into over the garden-wall; and from the highest windows enough could be discerned to show that it formed an avenue, with a broad gravel-walk in the middle. Such a lounge, methought, would have been pleasant enough in the midst of a sultry day, or in the cool of the evening; and therefore I marvelled that the Shacklefords should shut themselves out from such recreation in their own grounds by keeping locked the means of communication therewith. I never even saw old Jacob penetrate thither, to attempt the weeding of the walk or to look after the fences or the

trees. No one however alluded to the circumstance of the plantation being thus cut off from the dwelling: it seemed to be taken quite as a matter of course—a thing to which they were entirely accustomed; and therefore I did not choose to exhibit any impertinent curiosity by making an inquiry on the point.

One evening, in the beginning of May—when I had retired to my chamber—I felt no inclination to sleep; and if the rules of the house had not compelled me to seclude mysel punctually at ten o'clock, I should have gone out to stroll in the garden. It was a delicious evening—warm, but with a pleasant freshness in the air; and extinguishing the light, I gently opened my window, determined to enjoy the serene calm of the hour in my own room, as I could not do so in the garden. It was so light that I could have read a book with tolerably clear print: but I sat there, leaning with my arm on the window-sill, gazing forth—inhaling the pure atmosphere—and occupying myself with my thoughts. Presently it struck me that I heard a door open and shut in some part of the building; and the sound seemed to come from the direction of the plantation. The window of my chamber was on the highest floor, at the back of the house: and thus it commanded a view of the grove of fir-trees. As I was looking in that direction, I distinctly perceived two human forms moving along the gravel-walk of the avenue; and they were those of females. Fearful of being observed, I drew in my head, and closed the window as gently as I had opened it.

Who could these be? Was Mrs. Shackleford one? and either of the female domestics the other?—or were they the two female domestics? But if so, why should they wander in the plantation by night, and methought with a certain degree of stealthiness?—why should that enclosure be thus accessible under the wing of dusk or of darkness, when it was hermetically closed during the daylight? But then, I thought to myself that I was by no means certain it was never entered in the daytime: I had only concluded it was not, from the simple fact that I had never known any one to go thither during the month that I had now been at Heather Place. How could I tell but that walks were taken there by the Shacklefords when I was at Bagshot, making the household purchases? or when I was engaged in my own special duties in the pantry? Nevertheless, the circumstance strengthened that vaguely floating suspicion of mystery which I had previously entertained—a mystery which seemed to attach itself to the shut-up apartments. I retired to rest—but lay awake a considerable time, pondering over all these things.

On the following evening, when I retired to my chamber, I could not help unclosing the window to a slight distance, and listening attentively to catch any sound of a door opening which might herald another ramble in the plantation. That sound did speedily reach my ears; I dared not open the window wider, nor attempt to look forth, for fear of being observed. But I listened attentively,—listened with suspended breath. The night was as beautiful as the preceding one—of argentine clearness—and so still, so serene, that not a leaf in the garden could be heard to rustle. As I listened, methought that the accents of female voices were wafted to my ears—but necessarily low, and perfectly indistinct as to whatsoever they were saying, on account of the distance from which they were thus heard. Indeed, they were scarcely more audible than the whispering of the zephyr's breath would have been if there were the gentlest breeze to float through the foliage. But all of a sudden it struck me that I heard two or three deep convulsive sobs; and then all was still. Whether it were fancy I could not tell: but my belief inclined to the reality of the impression thus conveyed. Again I sought my couch, pondering on all these things, and more than ever convinced that there was some strange mystery attached to the shut-up apartments.

On the following day I had comparatively no work to do: Mr. and Mrs. Shackleford went out together in the phaeton, to call upon Mrs. Foley, and extend their drive elsewhere;—so that I, having several hours at my own disposal, ascended to my chamber to amuse myself with reading. Such was my intention: but on reaching my room, instead of taking a book, I lounged at the open window, looking forth upon the plantation. In a few minutes I distinctly heard the sound of a door opening and shutting; and fearful of being observed, I drew back sufficiently to avoid being seen by any one who might be entering that inclosure of fir-trees. Still I kept myself in such a manner that I could peep round and catch a glimpse of what might be passing. I beheld two female forms pass slowly along the gravel-walk in that avenue,—in a few moments disappearing amongst the trees. One of those forms I had no difficulty in recognising as that of the housemaid: but who the other was, I could not possibly tell. This latter had on a straw bonnet and a shawl; and the glimpse I obtained was so partial, that no definite impression as to her appearance was left on my mind. That she was not the cook, I was however certain: for she seemed slender and genteel—whereas the cook was stout and ungainly. Neither was she Mrs. Shackleford. Who, then, *could* she be? Perhaps a visitress to the housemaid. Struck by this idea—and thinking that if it were so, the housemaid was merely taking her thither to view the grounds, and would not have thought it worth while to lock the doors of communication—I hastened down stairs to ascertain how far my conclusions might be correct. But I found the passage-doors leading from the several landings, as well as that from the hall, into the shut-up portion of the building, securely locked as usual.

Now, what was I to surmise? If that female with the bonnet and shawl was not a visitress, could she be an inmate of the house?—and if an inmate, did she inhabit that portion of the building which I had been hitherto led to regard as being altogether untenanted? And again, if this surmise were correct, wherefore was she kept a prisoner? why was she buried in such a dreadful seclusion? who could she be? I must candidly confess that I burnt with an insatiable curiosity for the clearing up of these mysteries, now that I knew that such mysteries did really exist, and that they were not the creations of my own fancy.

CHAPTER LIV.

THE MYSTERIES OF HEATHER PLACE.

On the following day another incident occurred which was but too well calculated to increase my curiosity and inspire me with fresh wonderment. At about two o'clock in the afternoon there was a summons at the front door; and on hastening to obey it, I gave admittance to Mrs. Foley. She smiled upon me with her wonted kind affability of manner—for she continued to entertain a most grateful sense of the services I had rendered her.

"You will be pleased to learn, Joseph," she said, as she stopped a moment in the hall thus to address me, "that Mr. Foley is getting on as well as can be expected, and far better than a short time back I dared hope would ever be the case. His consciousness is thoroughly restored; and he knows that we lie under a deep obligation to you. When he is quite well, you shall come and see him, that he may personally thank you for your generous readiness to assist me on that dreadful morning; and he will not forget your attention to his faithful Jupiter."

"I can assure you, ma'am," I answered, "it will give me infinite pleasure to see Mr. Foley completely restored to health."

I then announced the lady in the parlour, where Mr. and Mrs. Shackleford were seated; and they received her with the welcome due to an intimate acquaintance. Luncheon was presently served up; and as I waited at table, I had an opportunity of observing that the comparative ease of mind which Mrs. Foley now experienced on her husband's account, enhanced if possible the splendour of her beauty. Immediately after luncheon, Mrs. Foley and Mrs. Shackleford, rising from the table, quitted the parlour and went up-stairs. I finished clearing away the repast; while Mr. Shackleford took up a newspaper which the morning's post had brought.

A few minutes afterwards I had occasion to ascend to my own chamber; and instinctively I glanced forth from the window towards the plantation which had recently become for me a scene of much mysterious attraction. The window was open; and at the very instant that I thus looked forth, I caught a glimpse of Mrs. Shackleford and Mrs. Foley passing along the avenue. But this was not all. It struck me that Mrs. Foley carried something in her arms—and that this something was an infant child. The glimpse I thus obtained of them, was so transitory—they disappearing so quickly amongst the trees—that when they had vanished from my sight, I had no positive certainty as to one portion of what I have just stated. That the two female forms were those of Mrs. Shackleford and Mrs. Foley, I had no doubt; but that the latter lady was really carrying an infant, I could not be equally sure. Such however was my impression; and it filled me with a strange uneasy wonderment.

I could not possibly tarry in my chamber—for I had work to do down stairs: I accordingly descended,—with difficulty composing my looks in such a way as to avoid attracting the notice of my fellow-servants. In about twenty minutes the parlour bell rang: I hastened to answer the summons—and found that it was to open the front door for Mrs. Foley, who was just taking her departure.

"And you really will not stay and dine with us?" asked Mrs. Shackleford.

"I dare not remain any longer from home," was the lady's response. "Pray do not press me. This is the first time I have left Ferdinand since his illness: but I could not, after all your kind inquiries, forbear any longer from coming personally to acknowledge them. In a short time I shall be enabled to pay you a more protracted visit."

"And I hope soon," observed Mr. Shackleford, "to see my friend Foley well enough to take an airing. Remember, the phaeton is at your service; and Joseph, who is really an excellent whip, shall drive him."

Mrs. Foley expressed her thanks—shook hands with her friends—and took her departure.

My wonderment in respect to what I had seen, continued unabated: my impression was strong, though not altogether certain, that it was really an infant that Mrs. Foley had held in her arms. But if so, whose was it? Not that lady's own: for she being married, there could scarcely exist a reason for the concealment of that offspring. Again, I asked myself—was she the person whom I had seen with the straw bonnet and in company with the housemaid in the plantation on the previous day? I thought not; and this opinion was chiefly founded on the fact that Mrs. Foley had just spoken to Mrs. Shackleford in a way as if it were now the first time she had left the white cottage since her husband's illness. But I will not persevere in detailing all the conflicting and bewildering reflections which passed through my mind—nor all the strange conjectures that I formed relative to the mystery of the shut-up portion of Heather Place. Suffice it to observe that for the next few days I beheld no one walking in the plantation, either during the day or in the evening.

One morning—when I repaired to Bagshot with the chaise-cart, as was my wont two or three times a-week, a circumstance occurred which I must now relate. Having more to do than usual, I had put up the chaise-cart at a tavern; and having accomplished my commissions, I was returning thither to have the horse harnessed again, when I encountered Mr. Henley, the commercial traveller who had so kindly offered me a seat in his vehicle. He recognised me at once; and catching me by the arm, exclaimed, "By Jove, young man! that waiter was not quite such a fool, after all, as I took him to be."

"What do you mean, sir?" I asked. "I suppose you refer to his tales of the highwayman. I myself was inclined to believe him at the time; and I have since heard sufficient to confirm that impression. There can be no doubt——"

"No doubt at all!" ejaculated the commercial traveller: "for in me you behold a witness to the fact that there *is*—or at least *was*—a highwayman on Bagshot Heath."

"Indeed! And you have fallen in with him?" I exclaimed: "for I am sure that nothing less than such an encounter would convert your former scepticism into a conviction on the subject."

"I encountered him—and on that very same evening too," replied Mr. Henley, "when I offered you a seat in my vehicle."

"How extraordinary! But I hope that you did not experience any considerable loss? If I recollect right, you said at the time you had not much money about you."

"Nor did I lose a single farthing of it," rejoined Henley. "The robber wanted my gold—but he very narrowly missed having an ounce of lead in its place. Indeed, I am rather inclined to think that I must have hit him by the manner in which he at once sheered off."

"Pray tell me the particulars," I said.

"With pleasure," replied Henley. "You recollect it was only a little past nine o'clock when I set off, and the night was somewhat dark. I was smoking my cigar as I drove along, thinking of what I had to do at High Wycombe on the following day—and with nothing in the shape of a highwayman in my mind at all. Indeed, I was perfectly sincere in ridiculing the waiter's statements, and laughing at the notion of a robber, mounted and masked, infesting these districts. The road across the heath was lonely enough: but for this I cared not at all. I am accustomed to travelling by night as well as by day; and had no more fear of highwaymen than I have at this minute of ghosts. I must however inform you that I invariably journey with loaded pistols. Until recently it was a mere matter of habit—a thing insisted upon by the house I travel for: or else it is by no means probable that I should have had any weapons at all. Well, I was enjoying my cigar, and calling over in my mind the names of the people I purposed to visit at High Wycombe, when I presently heard the sounds of a horse's hoofs. At that instant the waiter's stories rushed back to my mind; and as a matter of precaution I grasped one of my pistols,—sticking the whip

in between the cushion and the rail of the seat. I was really half ashamed of myself at what I conceived to be a cowardly manifestation of fear: but the next moment the horseman was by the side of my chaise—and presenting a pistol at my head, he ordered me to stop. A glance showed me that his countenance was completely covered with a black mask; and perhaps, if I were depicting this scene in a novel, I should add that his eyes literally appeared to glare through the holes of that vizard. But I did not take much time for observation, nor allow him a great deal of leisure to retain his menacing attitude towards myself.—'Take that!' I cried; and discharged my pistol at him point blank. It struck me that he reeled for a moment on his saddle: but this might be mere fancy. Very certain however it is that he turned his horse round, and galloped away with the speed of lightning. I continued my journey, cured of my scepticism relative to the highwayman, and infinitely delighted at having frustrated his predatory attempt."

"It is a wonder, Mr. Henley," I observed, "that he did not fire his own pistol. But I remember to have been informed that he has never been known to take life—and seldom indeed to perpetrate violence."

"Depend upon it," responded the commercial traveller, "if his pistol had been really loaded, he would have fired it. In the excitement of the moment he would have done so—it would have been natural: but I dare say that he merely presented the weapon to terrify me, and with the idea that I should prove as easy a pigeon as any others that he may have plucked. *My* wonder is that my pistol did not shoot him dead upon the spot. I can't possibly make it out. I fired, as I tell you, point blank at the fellow: his head could scarcely have been a yard distant from the pistol's muzzle."

"Perhaps he may have been wounded," I suggested; "and finding himself unable to cope with you on that account, he took to flight in so precipitate a manner."

"I told you just now," answered Mr. Henley, "that some such impression was also made upon my mind. However, if he was not wounded, he was terribly frightened: for in a few seconds he was out of sight. His horse bore him away with the speed of lightning."

"You had a narrow escape, Mr. Henley," I rejoined; "and I proffer you my congratulations on the result of your encounter with the highwayman. Let me see? That must have been exactly six weeks ago; and during this interval I have not heard that he has been again seen in the neighbourhood."

"He would doubtless betake himself to some other part of the country," observed the commercial traveller. "But depend upon it that sooner or later he will grace the gallows; and if I happen to be within twenty miles of the place, wherever it may be, I will go and see him hung."

"That is a spectacle," I remarked, "which I would rather go twenty miles to avoid."

Mr. Henley only smiled at this observation; and nodding a farewell, he pursued his way along the street. I mounted my chaise-cart, and drove homeward,—thinking the whole time of the anecdote I had just heard, and of the singularity of the coincidence that Mr. Henley should have received such unmistakable proof of the highwayman's existence within the very same hour that he had turned the whole matter into ridicule.

On reaching Heather Place, I found that Mrs. Foley was in the parlour with the Shacklefords; and she remained to luncheon. When the repast was over, she and Mrs. Shackleford quitted the room, as they had done on the former occasion,—Mr. Shackleford remaining there to read a book or a newspaper. I hastened to clear away the things from the table,—being anxious to ascend to my own chamber and see whether another visit was to be paid by the ladies to the plantation. The window of my room was open: I placed myself at it in such a manner as to be enabled to see without being seen;—and sure enough, in a few minutes I beheld Mrs. Shackleford and Mrs. Foley passing along the gravel-walk in that enclosure. They did not disappear from my view so rapidly on the present occasion as they did on the former one; and I now acquired the certainty that Mrs. Foley *was* carrying a child in her arms. If there were for a moment any doubt upon the subject, it was speedily cleared up by the sounds of the infant's screams, which all of a sudden burst forth and distinctly reached my ears. Then I perceived Mrs. Foley hastening back from the shade of the avenue, and tossing the child up and down as women are wont to do when seeking to pacify a refractory or frightened little one. She seemed to be hurrying back into the house; and Mrs. Shackleford was following close. I remained at the window for a quarter of an hour longer: but no one re-appearing in the plantation, I descended the stairs, and found Mrs. Foley just on the point of taking her departure.

Again was I lost in bewildering reflections as to the meaning of what I had thus seen: but the mystery appeared to defy all possible conjecture. I longed to question my fellow-servants—but dared not. Whatever that mystery were, the housemaid was evidently acquainted with it; and methought that the cook and old Jacob must be equally in the secret. Indeed, when I recollected that significant look which the housemaid had thrown upon the other female domestic, on the occasion of the latter's evidently unguarded allusion to the last visit which Mr. Willis the surgeon had professionally paid to Heather Place,—I could scarcely doubt that it bore reference to this very mystery which was so much bewildering me. Then too I remembered that on the night when I surprised the cook in the middle of her belated preparations, she had again given utterance to an inadvertent and half-finished sentence,—to the effect that "the time might come:" and what could this mean but the expression of a thought which was floating in her mind, that a period would arrive when I also might expect to be initiated in the same secret that was already known to her?

The very next day the incident which I am about to describe, took place. Having nothing particular to do in the afternoon, I was amusing myself with a stroll in the back garden—thinking at the time of the shut-up rooms, and of the three windows which had the shutters unclosed—when all of a sudden I heard the sound of a pane of glass smashing; and sweeping my looks over the rear of the building, I perceived a hand thrust forth from the broken pane, which was in one of

the three windows just referred to. Inside that window I also caught a glimpse of the head and bust of a female form above the piece of furniture: but the panes themselves were too dingy for me to see sufficiont of her to retain the slightest impression of her appearance. A scrap of paper was floating upon the air,—evidently thrust forth by that white hand; and instantaneously smitten with the conviction that it was some communication which an unfortunate prisoner had to make to me, I bounded forward to catch it. But at the same moment an ejaculation of violent anger, uttered in the well known voice of Mr. Shackleford, smote my ears: I stopped short—and he himself snatched up the paper, which at the instant reached the ground. The glance which I instinctively threw up at the window, showed me that the hand was withdrawn and that the female figure had retreated.

Mr. Shackleford ran his eyes hastily over the paper—and then thrust it into his waistcoat-pocket. His look, which was at first full of anger, slowly smoothed down; and he beckoned me to follow him into the house. He led the way to a room which had a few books in it, and was therefore called "the library;" and seating himself in a grave deliberate manner, he said, "It is necessary, Joseph, after what has just occurred, that I should give you some little explanations."

He paused: and I awaited, with much curiosity and suspense, the resumption of his speech.

"Those apartments with the three windows where the shutters are not closed," he went on to say, "have an occupant. This occupant is a relation of Mrs. Shackleford: she has disgraced herself—and the sense of her shame has affected her reason. It is from motives of humanity, as well as of mercy towards herself, that we thus conceal her, not merely from the eyes of the world, but as a positive protection against the vindictive fury of an outraged and dishonoured husband,—who, maddened by his wife's guilt, has vowed that her life shall be forfeit to *her* crime and to *his* vengeance. I might stop here and decline farther explanations. But I will say a few words more. I comprehend your disposition: you are a generous-hearted and magnanimous youth; and it is natural that you should experience something like sympathy on behalf of one who is thus withdrawn from the great theatre of the world. I will therefore tell you that all possible kindness is bestowed upon her—and that her frailty, instead of being made a subject of reproach, is regarded with true Christian leniency. She is allowed to take exercise in the plantation; and the best of provisions are furnished for her table. Of this latter statement you yourself, Joseph, received ample proof: for it is not unknown to me that you one night—during the first few days you were here—descended to the kitchen to procure something which you required or which you had forgotten; and you found the cook engaged in preparing food. Now, young man, you have learnt a secret which you will do well to keep,—inasmuch as the revelation of it cannot possibly benefit yourself; while on the other hand it would only cause annoyance to myself and still greater vexation to Mrs. Shackleford."

"I can assure you, sir," was my answer, promptly given, "I should be much distressed if by any indiscretion on my part——"

"Enough, Joseph!" interrupted my master: "I believe you. Mr. and Mrs. Rowland gave you the best of characters; and your conduct has hitherto justified the terms in which they expressed themselves."

I withdrew from my master's presence, pondering on all that I had heard. The mystery connected with the shut-up portion of the building, now seemed to be entirely explained. No mention was made by Mr. Shackleford of the child that I had twice seen in Mrs. Foley's arms: but I could not doubt that it was the offspring of that amour which had stamped the dishonour of the secluded occupant of the mysterious apartments. I further concluded that Mrs. Foley, being acquainted with the secret, was accustomed occasionally to visit Mrs. Shackleford's disgraced relative—and that in the natural kindness of her heart she nursed and fondled the infant. This opinion raised Mrs. Foley still higher than ever in my esteem; and more than ever too was I rejoiced to think that so excellent a lady had not been doomed to bitterest affliction by the loss of her husband. My fellow-servants were already aware of what had occurred in respect to the scrap of paper being thrown out at the window: for when that ejaculation burst from Mr. Shackleford's lips, the housemaid had rushed forth to see what was the matter. Therefore, when I rejoined them after my interview with Mr. Shackleford, they at once comprehended that I was now initiated in the mystery of the closed portion of the building.

"You will exercise the same discretion, Joseph," observed the housemaid to me, "that we have done."

"But I am glad that Joseph does know it all at last!" exclaimed the cook: "because it is so difficult to keep always upon one's guard. I remember dropping a hint," she added with a smile, —"a hint, though, which I really did not intend to let slip from my tongue—that the period would arrive when you would know everything as well as we."

"And might I ask," I said, "how long the unfortunate lady has been an inmate of Heather Place?"

"Upwards of a twelvemonth," responded the cook. "Her child——for of course master has told you there *is* a child——was born here; and that was what I meant one day when I dropped a few words about the last visit that Mr. Willis the surgeon had paid to the house."

"And are you not afraid," I inquired, "that old Jacob will let out something on the subject: for you see how garrulous he is."

"On this point he is close enough," answered the cook. "You yourself can judge whether he has ever let fall a single word to excite your suspicions?"

"True!" I observed.

"And if any one has been more unguarded than the rest," added the cook, with another smile, "it is me."

Here the conversation ended: for though I longed to put several additional questions, I did not like to appear impertinently curious. Still it was natural that I should feel to a certain degree interested in the unfortunate being who was consigned to such a seclusion—and that I should be anxious to learn something more of her history.

In the evening, when the cook and myself happened to be alone together, I revived the subject: but I found that her knowledge was no more extensive than mine, and that she was utterly unaware of the particular circumstances under which the secluded lady had drawn down so much dishonour on herself and had become the object of so much savagely vindictive feeling on the part of her husband. Her very name was unknown to my fellow-servants: the cook had never seen her but once—and she gave me to understand that she was young and eminently beautiful. Mrs. Shackleford and the housemaid divided between themselves the duty of attending upon the secluded lady; and no other person, with the exception of Mrs. Foley and Mr. Willis, ever entered the apartments which she occupied.

"It is to be supposed," I observed, "that the poor lady is impatient of the restraint put upon her; and that the billet which she threw out of the window, contained some appeal to my feelings."

"Most likely," answered the cook; "although from what little the housemaid has told me, the unfortunate creature has generally seemed resigned to her fate. She is doatingly fond of her child; and it is entirely by her own wish that she performs the duty of nurse as well as of mother. Her intellects, you know, are touched, Joseph; and the housemaid says that she will sit for hours with the child on her lap, gazing on its pretty little countenance——Ah, poor thing! one can't help pitying her—and her husband must no doubt have been a brute!——his disposition shows *that:* or else he would not threaten her in such a dreadful way that her relations find it necessary to lock her up for her own safety."

"Perhaps," I suggested, "if she were not under restraint here, she would be consigned to a lunatic-asylum; and therefore it is much better she should be under the care of relations who are good and attentive to her."

"There is no doubt she is well treated," observed the cook. "All sorts of delicacies are furnished for her table, so that her appetite may be tempted. Still it is a shocking thing to reflect that she may perhaps have to pass her whole life in such a dreadful seclusion. Her intellects *must* be badly touched: for she is fond of walking out in that plantation late in the evening."

I could have told the cook that I was already aware of such being the case: but I did not choose to let it be supposed I had ever experienced any previous suspicions, or had given way to the curiosity which certain circumstances had excited.

"So, very often," continued my talkative companion, "Mrs. Shackleford or the housemaid goes after ten o'clock and indulges her with a ramble when the nights are fine. Of course they do not at any time let her go out alone in the plantation, for fear she should take it into her head to climb the palisade and decamp. It is no pleasant thing for missus to have to take charge of the poor creature: but she is a good-hearted woman, and perhaps, for anything we know," added the cook, in a mysterious whisper, "the lady is a nearer relation to missus than we may think for."

"What do you suspect, then?" I asked.

"I scarcely know," responded the cook: "indeed I have no reason to suspect anything at all, beyond what I am told: unless it is on account of that very great kindness which is shown to the young lady. She is said to be missus's cousin: but cousins don't often treat one another with so much affection. If I suspected anything, it would be that the young lady is missus's niece—though I am sure if she was her own daughter——"

"Ah!" I said: "now I understand what is really uppermost in your mind. You fancy that perhaps the young lady *is* Mrs. Shackleford'a daughter?"

"Hush!" interrupted the cook: "it is too much to express in words."

"But if actually the daughter," I continued, "do you not think that Mr. Shackleford himself would go and see her oftener?—whereas, from what you have given me to understand, he seldom or never goes near her at all."

"I didn't mean that the young lady was *master's* daughter," rejoined the cook. "Missus has been married before: master is her second husband:—so, who knows but that she may have had a daughter by her first marriage? And yet it can't well be, either," proceeded the cook, after a few instants' reflection: "for I have been ten years in my present place, and I never heard a syllable spoken of any daughter belonging to missus. Therefore, all things considered, I must be wrong. However, no matter who the young lady is, she is well treated—and that's a consolation for everybody who knows anything at all about her."

"Yes—it is a consolation," I remarked; "because it is impossible not to bestow one's sympathy on the poor lady, however great her guilt may have been. But you say she bears no name?—not even a fictitious one?"

"Nothing of the sort," replied the cook.

"But the child——that surely must have a name? Has it never been christened?"

"Never," was the response. "But he is called——"

"Ah! then it is a boy?" I observed.

"Yes—and the sweetest little fellow you ever saw in your life. Let me see?—he must be about seven or eight months old by this time. Dear me! what will become of the poor creature as he grows up and has to be told of his mother's disgrace?"

"You were about to mention his name," I said.

"Ah! it is singular enough—but he is called Joseph—and *you* are Joseph!" exclaimed the cook. "It never struck me before! How very odd!"

"By no means," I rejoined: "there are plenty of Josephs in the world, as well as Edwards, and Williams, and Georges, and so forth. Your name is Mary—and I have known plenty of Marys likewise."

Here the housemaid and old Jacob made their appearance; and my discourse with the cook was put an end to.

CHAPTER LV.

THE SECLUDED LADY.

It was now upwards of two months since I first arrived at Heather Place—and consequently two months since I had fetched Mr. Games to attend upon Mr. Foley. One day, as I was returning from my periodical visit to Bagshot, I saw Mrs. Foley walking in the front garden of the neat little white cottage; and, as usual, I drew up to inquire after her husband.

"He is improving wondrously," answered the lady, "and is sitting in an easy chair in that bedroom where you see the casement open. I promised that you should have an opportunity of receiving his thanks so soon as he was enabled to express them; and you shall come and see him now."

I alighted from the chaise-cart; and knowing that the horse would stand perfectly quiet, had no hesitation in following Mrs. Foley into the house. The front-door opened on a little passage, whence on either side there was a communication with a neatly furnished parlour,—one doubtless serving as a dining-room, and the other as a drawing-room. Mrs. Foley led me up the carpeted staircase; and gently opening the bedroom door, she said, "Here is Joseph Wilmot, Ferdinand, who has come to pay his respects to you."

"Let him walk in," replied the invalid, in a voice that was somewhat feeble, but of most agreeable tones: and I passed into the neatly furnished chamber.

Mr. Foley was lying back in a large easy chair, his head supported by pillows. He was enveloped in a dressing-gown; and though much emaciated, he at once conveyed the impression of being a remarkably handsome man. He was not above the middle height: but notwithstanding the dressing-gown which so loosely enwrapped his form, I had no difficulty in discerning that he was admirably proportioned—well-knit and muscular, without the slightest clumsiness—but on the contrary, with a perfect symmetry. His hair was somewhat light—his eyes were blue—his profile was regular—and the expression of his countenance singularly pleasing. Its paleness and the languor of illness no doubt imparted an additional interest to that expression: but it was easy to conceive that when in the full vigour of health, he was a man whose look had a certain honest frankness and genuine good-nature calculated to inspire confidence and esteem. There was something peculiarly agreeable—and methought, in the eyes of a woman something that must be absolutely fascinating—in Mr. Foley's smile, which, when playing on his well-cut lips, displayed teeth as fine as those of his wife. His hair curled naturally, and was parted above a forehead which proclaimed no mean order of intelligence. Altogether, I could well understand a woman's devoted love for such a husband—and how distracted must have been her thoughts when she fancied that the finger of death was upon him.

"I have to express my sincerest thanks," he said, "for your generous kindness when I was taken so ill. Mrs. Foley failed not to mention it to me so soon as I had the power to comprehend the words that were addressed to me. And your cares, too, were extended towards my faithful Jupiter—for which considerate attention on your part I have likewise to thank you."

I assured Mr. Foley that I had felt happy in rendering any assistance, however trivial, under the circumstances; and I congratulated him on having so well got over such a dangerous illness.

"I told you, Joseph," said Mrs. Foley, "that the village-surgeon was really a clever man: and such he has proved himself to be."

"But far more, my beloved wife," said the husband, in a gentle tone and with a tender look, "am I indebted to you than even to Mr. Games's skill. The kindest ministrations that man could possibly receive from woman did I experience at your hands!"

I was much affected at the spontaneous, unstudied, and totally genuine ebullition of feelings which this attached couple displayed towards each other; and I withdrew, infinitely rejoiced that such a husband should have been spared to such a wife.

Three or four days had now elapsed since the occurrence of the broken pane and the billet, which had revealed to me the mystery of the closed portion of the building; and during this interval I had not been in the back garden. In the afternoon of the same day on which I was introduced to Mr. Foley,—Mrs. Shackleford, being unwell, did not go out in the phaeton; and I was the master of my own time. I scarcely know what feeling it was which prompted me to go and walk in the garden: but I think I ought to confess that it was curiosity, blended with sympathy, in respect to the secluded prisoner. There seemed to me something shocking in the idea that a young and beautiful woman—no matter what her fault might have been—should find herself thus doomed to an imprisonment which might be eternal. I wondered wherefore the Shacklefords could not have her to live completely with them—allow her to take her meals at their table—and thus afford her a greater relief than, under existing circumstances, she experienced in respect to the monotony of her life. Mr. Shackleford did not appear to be by any means a stern or implacable man—while Mrs. Shackleford was beyond all doubt a good-hearted woman. To keep the poor creature, therefore, perpetually locked up—or else limited to the range of the plantation—began to make upon my mind the impression of an unnecessary cruelty; and I thought to myself that even if her husband were pursuing her unrelentingly, he could scarcely come down upon the house so suddenly but that if she were in the parlour at the time, she might be hurried back to her own apartments ere that husband of her's could obtain admittance. These reflections—which had not entered into my mind before—now struck me forcibly, as I looked up at the range of three windows where the shutters were unclosed. I should observe that the pane of glass had not been mended, but was simply covered over with brown paper,—thus giving a shabby aspect to the window itself.

While I was contemplating those windows, a female form appeared at one of them, and seemed to be gesticulating as if to rivet my attention. Indeed, it first struck me that she was kissing her

hand to me; and if it were so, I naturally attributed the circumstance to some illusion of her disordered intellect. I could not see her distinctly: indeed it was merely her head and her bust that I could discern at all, on account of the large piece of furniture which stood against the window. All of a sudden she disappeared: but in a few moments she returned to the same spot, holding her child in her arms. It seemed that she was extending the infant towards me, as if imploring me for her child's sake to bestow my sympathy upon herself and procure her release. Just at that moment old Jacob appeared in the garden: I instantaneously averted my eyes from the windows—and soon afterwards re-entered the house.

For the remainder of the afternoon I pondered upon the scenes which I have just described; and the more I reflected thereon, the less could I reconcile myself to the idea of the absolute necessity which the Shackleffords appeared to think existed for the close prisonage of their unfortunate relative. In the evening Mrs. Shackleford was taken so much worse that I was sent off in the phaeton to fetch Mr. Willis from Bagshot. It was still light, it now being the first week of June: nevertheless, as I drove across the heath, I could not help glancing around me very often to assure myself that no highwayman was near. The reader must not think that I was absolutely afraid: I may without vanity affirm that I possessed as much courage as most young men at my age;—and I had taken care to provide myself with a stout cudgel, being determined to give the highwayman, if he should make his appearance, as warm a reception as possible. Still the thought that such an encounter was quite possible, if not probable, kept me to a certain degree anxiously on the alert: but I reached Bagshot without misadventure. Mr. Willis was at home; and he at once agreed to accompany me to Heather Place. His wife called out to him from the parlour to bid him be sure to take his pistols as well as his medicine-chest; and this advice he was careful to follow. We however crossed the heath as safely as I had previously done; and we arrived at the house just as the dusk was completely setting in. Mrs. Shackleford was rather alarmingly ill, with all the symptoms of fever; and Mr. Willis directed that one of the female servants should sit up with her all night. When he was ready for departure, it was arranged that old Jacob should drive him back to Bagshot, and remain there all night, in order to be in readiness to bring the surgeon over to Heather Place again the first thing in the morning, as the horse would be too tired to return that night—and moreover Mr. Shackleford did not like to trust the old man alone with the equipage in the dark. I should observe that Mr. Willis, having brought his medicine chest with him, was enabled, ere taking his leave, to compound such potions as he considered necessary for Mrs. Shackleford's use.

The housemaid was appointed to sit up with her mistress; and when the surgeon had taken his departure in the phaeton, Mr. Shackleford sent for me to the parlour.

"Joseph," he said, "I am about to give you a proof of the confidence I place in you, and of the favourable impression which has been made upon my mind by the strong recommendations I received on your behalf from Mr. and Mrs. Rowland. Your mistress, I am afraid, is entering upon an illness which may confine her for some time to her chamber; and it is absolutely necessary that the housemaid should be in constant attendance upon her. The cook has her own special duties to perform; and Jacob is too old to be entrusted with that task which I am about to confide to you."

Mr. Shackleford paused, and surveyed me attentively—as if to assure himself, by this long scrutiny of my countenance, that he was acting prudently in the course he was adopting. I more than half-suspected what the nature of the task was which he was about to explain; and I experienced the tremulous suspense of curiosity and interest, as my thoughts pointed towards the inmate of the shut-up portion of the house. I nevertheless kept my countenance; and Mr. Shackleford proceeded in the following manner:—

"You are already aware, Joseph, that an unfortunate young lady is domiciled beneath this roof. You know likewise that for certain reasons a watch has to be maintained upon her. So long as circumstances prevent Mrs. Shackleford and the housemaid from ministering their usual attentions to that lady, you must take upon yourself a portion of the task. Presently you will convey to her apartments those supplies of provision which the cook has prepared for her use. To-morrow—at any time during the day that it may suit this lady to walk in the plantation—you must attend upon her. I need not add that you will of course prevent any endeavour on her part to escape: nor is it necessary for me to suggest that while in reality watching her, you will observe the most respectful demeanour. Still less is it needful for me to guard you against being won over by any appeal to a sympathy which, if exercised in such a case, would be altogether a false one. Remember that the unfortunate being's intellects are unhinged, and that on your head would rest an awful responsibility if you betray the trust which I am now confiding to you."

"I can assure you, sir," I answered, "that in this matter as well as in every other, I shall make it my endeavour to perform my duty."

The reader will observe that my response was guardedly shaped and studiously qualified: for I was resolved not to pledge myself beforehand to any particular course, for fear lest a better acquaintance with the circumstances of this melancholy case should induce me to deviate therefrom. Mr. Shackleford did not however perceive that I spoke with a studied reserve, and even with a deliberate evasiveness: for his looks expressed satisfaction at my reply.

"Now come with me," he said: and he led the way from the room. We ascended the stairs together, until we reached the second storey; and there he pointed towards the door whence I had seen his wife emerge on that night of my descent into the kitchen to fetch my livery.

"This is the entrance to the lady's apartments," said Mr. Shackleford, now speaking in a whisper. "Whenever the cook bids you repair thither, you will come to me for the key. Immediately on entering, you will lock the door, and be careful to put the key in your pocket. Every morning you will receive the lady's orders as to the par-

ticular hour at which she may choose to walk in the plantation. Then, at the hour so specified, you will come to me; and you will receive—in addition to the key of this door—another key, which will afford you ingress to the grove. You comprehend all these instructions?"

"Perfectly, sir," was my answer.

We descended the stairs,—Mr. Shackleford returning to the parlour, and I proceeding to the kitchen. It was now a little past ten o'clock; and the cook had placed upon a tray a quantity of comestibles, which were to be conveyed to the lady's apartments. She already knew that it was Mr. Shackleford's intention to confide to me the task of waiting upon her, as well as that of watching her in her walks. I must candidly confess that I was by no means flattered by the latter portion of the duty thus assigned to me; and I should have refused it, had the circumstances been in any way different. But I had a strong curiosity to behold this lady who was thus condemned to so severe a seclusion: I had an undefined notion, too, that I should probably learn that the facts of the case were not perhaps precisely as they had been represented—and that the lady's immurement was in reality based upon motives somewhat deeper than those which had been hitherto alleged. Peradventure, too, the idea floated in my mind that I was destined to render assistance to one who, whatever her misdeeds had been, was nevertheless partially the victim of an unnecessary cruelty as well as the object of merited punishment. But all these ideas were so dim, vague, and shapeless as they hovered in my brain, that perhaps I am now defining them more clearly and plainly than I ought to do,—I mean that I am giving them more form and substance than they actually possessed at the time.

"Now, Joseph," said the cook, with a smile; "you must enter upon your duties. These things are to be taken up; and you will at length see the poor creature in whom I know you are more or less interested, from the way you have spoken of her to me."

"And you too are interested in her?" I answered, fearing lest she should think that my sympathies might render it dangerous for me to be trusted as the custodian of her walks in the plantation.

"To be sure I am!" cried the good-natured woman. "Whatever she has done, she is suffering for it; and one must have a heart as hard as a stone not to pity her. You will see little Joseph too——but not to-night—I suppose the child will be in its cradle in the bedroom. To-morrow however you are certain to see it; and then you will say what a sweet infant it is. But how foolish I am to go on talking like this! You men never notice children, and don't care anything for them. Now run to the parlour and ask master for the key—and let's get this business over, so as to be off to our bedrooms."

I repaired to the sitting-apartment and received the key from Mr. Shackleford. A curious sensation quivered through me—a feeling as if I were touching upon the threshold of a revelation of unknown and unsuspected mysteries. But my countenance betrayed naught of what was passing in my mind; and I quitted the parlour.

"There's the magic key," said the cook, when I returned to the kitchen. "Now can't you fancy how Bluebeard's wife must have felt when he placed in her hand the key of the mysterious closet, and told her that she was not to enter it if she valued her life?"

"But in the present instance," I exclaimed, laughing, so as to carry off the betrayal of any portion of that curious and unaccountable feeling which was still agitating me,—"the case is quite the reverse: for whereas Bluebeard enjoined his wife not to enter the closet, this key which I hold in my hand is purposely given me to enter the apartments to the door of which it belongs."

I took up the tray, and ascended the staircase. I reached the second floor, and placed the key in the lock. My hand trembled so that if any one had overheard the sound, it might have been thought I was purposely fidgetting with that key, or that I was half tipsy and unable to apply it to its proper use. The tray meanwhile I had placed upon a table which stood close by on the landing.

The door was opened; and the light of the candle which I had brought with me, at once showed me a sort of ante-chamber, into which I carried the tray; and setting it down on another table, I locked the door, taking out the key and securing it in my pocket. I knocked at an inner door; and as no answer was returned, I endeavoured to open it: but it yielded not to my touch. Then I observed that it was bolted: and having drawn back the bolts, I opened it. It revealed a larger room; and the shutters being closed—as was likewise the case in the ante-chamber—I recollected, by the observations made from the garden, that the lady's rooms must be still farther on. I accordingly traversed the one on which the inner door opened; and now I perceived a light shining through the key-hole of a door at the farther extremity. Depositing the tray again upon a table, I knocked at this door: but no answer was returned. I knocked a second time—and a little louder than before. A low voice spoke the words "Come in."

That voice was only just audible: but its accents, instantaneously striking me as being familiar to my ear, sent a strange feeling quivering and trembling through my entire form. Yet I recognised them not so as to identify the possessor of that voice.

I opened the door: a lady, who was seated at a table, raised her countenance—a cry of thrilling joy and wild exultation burst from her lips—she sprang forward—and the next instant I was folded in the arms of Lady Calanthe Dundas.

CHAPTER LVI.

MY CHILD!

My emotions were almost overwhelming. I was astounded, I was afflicted, and I was enraged,—astounded at the discovery of Lady Calanthe Dundas in the person of the prisoner—afflicted that she herself should be plunged into so much affliction—and enraged at the conduct of those who had placed her as well as of those who kept her there. But all in an instant—flashing through

the midst of the other feelings and sentiments which agitated me—came an idea to my soul that made my heart swell with emotions never experienced before. That child—Calanthe's child—could it be possible? was the sudden yearning which seized upon me, nature's inward prompting voice? was that child my own?

"Dearest, dearest Joseph!" murmured Calanthe, straining me to her bosom and covering my cheeks with kisses. "Oh, at last we meet! at length we are restored to each other! Dearest Joseph!"—and then drawing back her head a little way, she contemplated my countenance with looks of ineffable love. "Oh, you are handsomer than ever!" she cried: and again and again did she embrace me. "But come quick!" she suddenly ejaculated: "come quick! This way—this way!"

Taking me by the hand, she led me hurriedly across the room. She was almost wild with delight: her cheeks were flushed — her eyes sparkled through the tears of joy which hovered on her jetty lashes: she held my hand tightly clasped—she kept her looks fixed on me, as if fearful that were she to avert them only for a single instant, I might be snatched away from her, or vanish from her presence,—leaving her to the sudden awakening from a dream of ecstatic delusiveness. I sped along mechanically——No, not mechanically: it is not the proper word: I was impelled by the indescribable feelings that accompanied nature's yearning within me. My soul was full of excitement,—pleasure and pain so strangely commingling that I have no power of language to define what I exactly felt. Talking of delusive dreams, it appeared to me as if I myself were walking in a vision—as if I were being hurried along in the wildest, the maddest, and the most fantastic of all dreamy illusions!

A door was thrown open at the farther end of the room: Calanthe led me into a bed-chamber—and hastily taking forth the child from its cradle, she placed it in my arms, murmuring, "Joseph, it is your's."

Oh, the feelings of a father—to me as ecstatic as they were novel! I pressed my lips to the soft velvety cheeks of the child which was still sleeping: the tears trickled from my eyes:—again and again I kissed the boy. He awoke; and now I gazed down into the sweetest eyes from which the soul of infantile innocence ever looked forth. The child did not cry;—again and again I kissed it;—and overcome by my emotions, I sank down upon a chair, weeping—I scarcely knew wherefore!

"Oh, Joseph!" murmured Calanthe, as she took the child from my arms and began fondling it with all a mother's doating love: "it is Providence that sent you hither!——Oh, it appears all like a dream!"—and she fixed her superb dark eyes upon me, as if still to convince herself that it was no delusion, but that I was present—and that I was seated there, before her!

But now I suddenly recollected that I must not make my stay too long on the present occasion. In a few hurried words I explained how it was that I had been appointed to attend upon her; and when she found that I might return to her on the morrow, she could scarcely restrain an hysterical outburst of wildest joy.

"You will come early, Joseph—you will come early? Oh, if I may judge your feelings by my own, you will be but too anxious to embrace your child!"

"Yes, Calanthe—Oh, yes! believe me that such is my feeling!" I exclaimed; "and I will come early—as early as possible."

"We have so much to say to each other," quickly responded Calanthe: "we have plans too to discuss!—for now that you are here, Joseph, my imprisonment cannot last much longer——tell me, dear Joseph, that it shall not last much longer?"

"Heaven forbid!" I exclaimed vehemently: "heaven forbid! It has already lasted too long."

Calanthe seized my hand, pressed it to her lips, and wept over it,—murmuring, "Your words, dearest Joseph, infuse solace into my soul. Oh, I have thought of you—night and day have I thought of you, since our separation! My God, I have endured such agonies on your account—knowing not what had become of you—wondering whether we should ever meet again—and in my anguish calling upon heaven to send you to me that I might place your little son in your arms!"

Again was I melted to tears: again did I take the infant and cover its little cheeks with kisses. Then Calanthe wound her arms about my neck, and embraced me with fervour and fondness once more: nor did I prevent her—had she not a right thus to treat the father of her child? But time was slipping away—and I was compelled to depart. Another outpouring of fondness towards the infant—another fervid locking in the arms of its mother—and I hurried forth from the prison-apartments. I was so bewildered with my feelings that I almost forgot to bolt the inner door; and I had opened the other one before I recollected it. I turned to do so: it opened for an instant—and Calanthe, with radiance on her countenance, and holding the child in her arms—flung upon me a parting look of indescribable fondness. Oh, it was cruel to be compelled to draw a bolt upon one who loved me thus devotedly, and who was the mother of my child!—but it was necessary, in case Mr. Shackleford should take it into his head to pay those apartments a visit. Yet I vowed in my soul that Calanthe should not much longer remain a prisoner there.

When I had locked the outer door and had drawn forth the key, I stood for upwards of a minute on the landing to compose my countenance as well as I was able, ere passing into the presence of Mr. Shackleford. I feared that I had already lingered too long in those apartments: yet after all, scarcely a quarter of an hour had elapsed since my feet first crossed the threshold of the seclusion where so unsuspected a mystery was cleared up. I descended to the parlour, wondering to myself whether my countenance would betray any portion of the feelings which were agitating me: but it did not—for when Mr. Shackleford raised his eyes from the book which he was reading, and bent them upon my features, his own countenance varied not its usual expression.

"You have seen the lady, Joseph?" he said; "and you have intimated to her that you are for the present to attend upon her?"

"Yes, sir," I answered: and my brain was so

bewildered that I could not tell whether I was speaking incoherently or intelligibly. "The lady desires me to wait upon her at a somewhat early hour, that she may walk in the plantation."

"As early as she pleases after daylight, Joseph," responded Mr. Shackleford; "and as late as she chooses until the dusk sets in."

I withdrew,—overjoyed to have passed, without exciting suspicion, through an ordeal which, while descending the stairs, I had so much dreaded. I returned to the kitchen; and the cook immediately began to overwhelm me with questions—what I thought of the lady—whether she had spoken to me—how she looked—if she were dull and moping?—and she wound up her catalogue of queries by asking, "And did you see the child?"

"Yes—I saw it," I replied: "it was awake at the time:"—and then I felt so strange that I was compelled to turn abruptly away, lest my emotions should be betrayed by my looks.

"Well now," cried the cook, "you are not in such a hurry to get up to bed that you cannot sit and chat for a few minutes."

"I thought that just now you yourself were anxious to get to your chamber, and I was afraid of keeping you up. Besides, Mr. Shackleford told me that we were to retire at once."

This was not true: but I was so anxious to seek the solitude of my own room, that I could not help giving utterance to that falsehood. The cook immediately began bustling about to prepare for retiring; and seizing a chamber-candle, I hastily bade her good night.

When alone at length in my room, I sat down to reflect upon everything that had occurred. But I could not sit long: neither could I reflect seriously and deliberately. There was a strange confusion in my mind—ineffable emotions still agitating in my soul. I felt feverish; and putting up the window, wooed the cool night-air to my

burning brow and hectic cheeks. But I could not even remain long there: I felt as if I must either pace the room, or else rush forth from the house to take a long ramble. I knew not what to do. At last I closed the window—hastily put off my clothes—and went to bed. But I could not sleep. I was a father—and this thought was one that blended all the conflicting excitements of pleasing pain: it was a joy that in itself was excruciating. And now too came back the image of Annabel to my mind—that Annabel whom I loved!—and I felt as if a gulf had opened suddenly at my feet to separate her from me for ever. I did not love Calanthe as I loved Annabel: and yet if Calanthe should demand, in the name of our child, that I would conduct her to the altar, how could I repudiate the claim which she had upon me? These thoughts now filled me with an almost mortal anguish,—absorbing those feelings of joy which I had experienced at the idea of being a father. The incidents of a single moment appeared to have given a sudden turn to the very current of my existence: my destiny had all in a moment developed a new phase: circumstances were as much altered with me, as if I had been taken up in the arms of some invisible aerial being and dropped down into the midst of another clime thousands of miles off.

But I will not linger for the present upon these conflicting meditations—these strange blendings of pleasurable emotions and distracting thoughts! Suffice it to say that it was long ere slumber visited my eyes that night; and in my dreams all the incidents of the evening were reproduced in the most fantastic shapes and forms. I awoke at an early hour in the morning—and for some minutes lay pondering whether it were indeed all a dream, or whether it were in any way tinctured with reality. But when I thought of that child which I had pressed in my arms—that infant-boy on whose velvet cheeks I had showered paternal kisses—I experienced a strong yearning to hasten again to the seclusion where my son dwelt with his mother; and as I thought of that mother too, I felt an illimitable compassion for the woman who loved me so tenderly and so well. Soon after eight o'clock, I requested Mr. Shackleford to give me the keys, as it was now the hour at which "the lady"—for thus I spoke of her—had purposed to walk in the plantation, and that I was ready to attend upon her. My master, evidently without suspicion, gave me two keys, and I marvelled in my own mind that he noticed not how my hand trembled as I took them. I ascended the stairs—I unlocked the outer door, and entered the ante-chamber. Having relocked the door and consigned the key to my pocket, I unbolted the inner one:—Calanthe was waiting just inside with the boy in her arms. I caught upon her countenance a look of anxious suspense which was just vanishing away as her eyes met mine: it was evident she had been fearful lest another should come instead of myself. But now with what delight did she welcome me! how fond was her embrace!—what pride and joy animated her countenance when she saw how I took my little son in my arms and covered him with kisses!

"You love him, Joseph—you love him!" she exclaimed: "Oh, I see that you love that dear, dear child! And I called him by your name—and in the depth of my bitterest affliction it was a solace to address him by that name of Joseph!"

"Yes—I love him, I love him!" I cried, the words flowing upward in unfeigned rapture from the depths of my soul. "He has your eyes, Calanthe——"

"But his features will be like your's," she instantaneously interjected. "Oh! young as he is, a mother's eyes cannot be deceived. Already do I behold in that sweet babe a resemblance to you; and I have sat with him for hours and hours upon my lap, gazing upon his countenance until fancy has cheated me into the belief that he is even more like you than at such an age he can possibly be."

I now contemplated Calanthe; and I saw that she was not so much altered by her imprisonment as I might have expected to find her. There was no wasting away of her form—no emaciation of the countenance; and if this countenance had been pale before, it was now animated with the glow of the heart's happiness. I presently learnt from her lips that though she had experienced intervals of torturing anxiety relative to myself, yet that she had yielded far more to hopefulness than to despair—and that she had experienced the presentiment that we should meet again. Besides, for the last two months she had known that I was an inmate of the house; and this circumstance had tended to turn into exultation whatever little amount of despondency she had previously felt: so that the improved condition of her mind had reacted favourably on her physical being, and had resuscitated all her wonted beauty. It was evident, too, that she had taken pains with her toilet in order to give me the cheerfullest and the most pleasing welcome on the morning of which I am writing. Her hair, of raven darkness, was arranged in massive bands, with long tresses hanging down from the knot in which it was gathered at the back. Her superb black eyes beamed with the lustrous light of joy; and, as before said, there was a rich glow upon her cheeks. As for her intellects being unsettled, it was a detestable falsehood—a device forming part of the fabulous motives which the Shacklefords alleged as the ground for keeping her in strictest prisonage there.

"Now, Joseph," said Calanthe, after a while, "we must go forth and walk in the plantation for the sake of appearances. We have so much to say to each other——Oh, so much!"

The bed-chamber opened upon a passage which led to a staircase: this we descended,—Calanthe carrying the child in her arms. I opened a door, which was in a little vestibule at the bottom of those stairs; and we emerged into the plantation. We sought the most shady portion of the avenue; and then, as we walked side by side—taking turns to carry our little son—we entered into mutual explanations. I did not however acquaint Calanthe with the abominable treacheries which Mr. Lanover had practised towards me in London, nor with the circumstance of my shipwreck: I did not think fit to allude to Mr. Lanover at all. I therefore simply gave her to understand that, through the agency of her father the Earl of Mandeville, I had entered the service of Mr. Vennachar of Inch Methglin—that certain circumstances had led me into the household of the Rowlands at Manchester

—whence other circumstances had transferred me to my present situation at Heather Place. It was a mere sketchy outline that I gave her, and filled in with none of those incidents which have occupied so many chapters since the one wherein my separation from her in the Isle of Wight was recorded.

"Again I say, it was Providence that brought you hither!" observed Calanthe, when my brief narrative was ended. "As for myself, Joseph, my explanations may be speedily given. Referring to that dreadful occasion when my father and my brother Hubert discovered me at Ryde, I need not do more than declare how distressing was my grief at the thought of being torn away from you. You kept the secret of what had taken place between us: I knew that you would do so—I knew it even while penning those hurried and feverishly written lines which a servant of the hotel undertook to convey to you. From Ryde I was borne home by my father and brother. The secret however which you had so faithfully kept, was to be revealed by means of other evidence: for in a short time I found that I was in a way to become a mother. And think you, Joseph, that I was afflicted by the idea? think you that I abandoned myself to grief and despair at the prospect of being regarded as a dishonoured and degraded being? No, it was joy that filled my soul—joy at the thought of pressing to my bosom, when the time should come, a little being whom I might look upon as the miniature counterpart of yourself! Oh, for your sake, Joseph, I cared not for what the world calls *shame!*—I felt that I should be armed with a courage which would enable me to rise triumphant above the maledictions of a father, the gibes and taunts of brothers and sisters! Nevertheless, with a sort of instinctive feeling, I concealed my situation for some months; and then, during a few days of somewhat serious illness, it was discovered by the family physician. To my surprise my father uttered not a single syllable of reproach. On the contrary, he appeared to speak the language of mournful kindness, as if he compassionated me. He declared that the secret should be kept from the knowledge of my brothers and sisters—and that a fitting retirement should be immediately provided to receive me until I could re-appear in the world again. But as you may have already suspected, Joseph, all this was a mere specious pretext on the Earl's part to inveigle me into the snare which he was providing for me. I believed him to be sincere; and without suspicion I suffered him to bring me to Heather Place."

"And here you found a prison!" I exclaimed, my blood boiling with indignation. "And yet—and yet," I added, that fever of the veins suddenly subsiding, and my accents sinking into reflective mournfulness, "allowances must be made for the feelings of a parent——But you have not experienced ill-treatment here, Calanthe?"

"Conscientiously must I answer in the negative," she replied. "Doubtless these Shackleffords, in keeping me a prisoner, have only carried out the instructions they received. They do not know who I am—and I have never told them: or if they do know, they have never suffered me to comprehend that they have such knowledge. My father, while dooming me to an imprisonment which he perhaps hopes and intends to be eternal, has done his best to render it as tolerable as possible. The Shackleffords, we must presume, are paid handsomely for keeping me here; and Mrs. Shackleford has conducted herself towards me with as much kindness as under circumstances she could possibly show. She has even departed somewhat from my father's peremptory instructions in respect to the seclusion in which he meant me to be kept,—she has violated those instructions, I say, in my favour, by introducing an amiable lady to visit me occasionally and to vary the monotony of my existence."

"You allude to Mrs. Foley," I said; "and I esteem her more highly than ever. I have seen my child in her arms—from the window of my chamber have I observed her carrying and fondling this dear boy!"

"Yes—she is an excellent woman," answered Lady Calanthe. "To Mr. Shackleford I took a dislike the very first time I beheld him: I could not help regarding him in the odious light of a gaoler—a man who consents to become an accomplice in the persecution of a fellow-creature, that he himself may thereby reap a golden reward. I have not attempted to conceal that aversion; and for this reason has he so rarely visited my apartments. I ought to thank him perhaps for so much forbearance," added Calanthe, with a slight tinge of ironical bitterness in her tone. "Oh, think, Joseph!" she cried, thus suddenly breaking into another strain, "how ineffable was my astonishment—how breathless my suspense, when I one day, about two months back, fancied that I beheld you in the garden. I could scarcely believe my eyes; and I nearly fainted with delight when I found that it was no delusion. The idea that my presentiment had been fulfilled, and that Providence had brought you beneath the same roof under which I was held captive——Oh, I cannot find words to convey the feelings that surged up within me! Often and often did I watch from the window in the hope of catching a glimpse of you: but you were so rarely in the garden—and frequently when you were, Mrs. Shackleford or else the housemaid was with me; so that I was compelled to put an iron restraint upon myself. But still I knew that sooner or later there would arise some opportunity for me to communicate with you—or some chance to fling us together; and this conviction was a source of immense solace to my mind. My spirits improved—my health therewith—and my appearance also," she added gently, as if appealing to me through the medium of her beauty, that I would love her as much as she fancied I had loved her when we were at Mrs. Robinson's.

"And that day, Calanthe, when you broke the pane of glass?" I said, having lavished some caresses upon the infant, whom she carried, and which delighted her as much as if they had been bestowed upon herself.

"That was in a mood of sudden and fleeting desperation," responded the young lady. "Two months had elapsed since you entered the house; and I felt assured that you had not recognised me at the window—you had not perhaps even seen me there at all! Indeed, of the few occasions when I did behold you in the garden, it struck me that on only one did you really observe

me——However, I was resolved to communicate with you—I penned but two lines on a piece of paper—for I dreaded lest by any accident the billet should be picked up by another——"

"And those lines, Calanthe," I said,—"what were they?"

"Merely to the effect '*that a captive lady demanded your sympathy:*' for I knew full well that if the billet fell into your hands, you would at once recognise the writing—and that it would be a revelation for you. Scarcely was the deed done when I bitterly repented of my rashness: for the voice of Shackleford, reaching my ears in its wrathful ejaculations, told me but too plainly that my project had failed. However, accident has thrown us together at length; and it was the happiest moment of my life when last evening, on raising my eyes, they encountered your looks!"

I gazed upon Calanthe with a degree of compassion which in the fervour of her own love she might have well taken for a reciprocal feeling; and seizing one of my hands, she pressed it to her lips.

"Now, Joseph," she went on to say, "what are we to do?"—and she looked wistfully upon me.

"You cannot remain here," I answered vehemently: "you must not——No, no—it would be the height of cruelty!"

"Cruelty indeed, Joseph!" she rejoined. "Besides," she added, glancing first towards me, and then looking down on the face of the child, who was slumbering in her arms, "you must give a father's name to this dear babe of our's—you must give me a right, Joseph, to regard you as my own!"

"Yes, yes, Calanthe!" I replied, with distress in my soul, as the image of Annabel rose up before me: but instantaneously smitten with a sense of duty towards that child and its mother—a duty which was paramount over all other considerations, —I hastened to add, "Yes, Calanthe—I must take upon myself the responsibilities of a husband and a father!"

She did not see that there was any constraint in my manner—that there was anything forced in the way in which I expressed myself: but again pressing my hand to her lips, she murmured "Dearest, dearest Joseph! happier shall I be in the humblest cottage with you, than in a palace if mated with one whom I could not love!"

What was I to say? what was I to do? Calanthe adored me: her whole heart was devoted to me:—in me was her soul wrapped up. Fondly as she had loved me from the first, it was natural that she should love me more than ever since she had become a mother. She gazed upon me with adoration in her looks: she gazed upon her infant with a mingling of the sweetest affection and the loftiest maternal pride. I felt bound to accompany her to the altar—bound to toil to maintain that offspring of a bygone interval of infatuated passion! It was not for me to argue that I no longer loved Calanthe, even in the same sense in which I had been attracted towards her at Mrs. Robinson's: it was sufficient that she had surrendered her honour up to me—and I was bound to repay her with honourable treatment. Besides, I was equally bound to give a father's name to the offspring of that mad passion; and for the sake of both, every selfish feeling must be laid aside—every other sentiment put out of the question! Annabel would be lost to me: but this was the penalty which I had now to pay for my former infidelity to her:—it was the condign punishment of my weakness and my error.

"Yes, Calanthe," I said, "if you do not tremble at the idea of linking your fate with one who has nothing but his own industry to depend upon——"

"No, dearest Joseph!" she interrupted me; "I have no fear of anything except of being separated from you. Now listen! At the time I was brought hither by my father, he did his best to avert all suspicion as to the cruel prisonage to which he had foredoomed me. He bade me bring all my effects—my valuables and my jewels—as it would be given out to the family in general that I had again gone on a visit to my sister-in-law, Lady Georgiana Tiverton. He gave me, too, a sum of money—about two hundred pounds, I think, though I have never had the curiosity to examine the purse closely,—alleging that it was a subsidy for my expenses during my retirement. All this he did, you comprehend, Joseph, to prevent me from suspecting that treachery was meditated: for he knew my spirit well enough—and he judged likewise by my former flight from home—so as to make him fear lest I should flee a second time. If I mention all these things, it is only to show you that we shall not be without immediate resources. With my money and jewels we may command at least five or six hundred pounds; and we are neither of us, dear Joseph, absolutely deficient in intelligence:—so that we may lay out our little means in a manner that will forward whatsoever views we may entertain. When once united, we need no longer tremble at the name of the Earl of Mandeville."

Lady Calanthe Dundas made all those allusions to her pecuniary position in so delicate a way, and seemed so fearful of offending my own feelings, that I could not possibly help being touched by this fresh proof of her devoted and thoroughly unselfish love. This love of her's had proved to me a source of bitterness—was proving so still—and threatened to prove even worse: namely, fatal to all the fond hopes I had cherished in respect to Annabel. But still it was a love which could not be made a reproach against her who bore it: nor was I ungenerous enough to display whatsoever bitterness of feeling it excited within me. I felt that it was my destiny to become her husband—and that therefore it was now my duty to extricate her as soon as possible from her imprisonment at Heather Place. I accordingly began to speak on this subject.

"Your liberation, Calanthe," I said, "cannot take place all in a moment. It is true I possess the keys of your prison-doors—or with little trouble you might even now climb these palisades, with my assistance. But if our flight were speedily discovered, a chase would be instituted, and we should be brought back."

"I have already reflected upon these things," observed Calanthe. "Nor can our flight take place in the night; for it would be death to our beloved child to expose it to the cold air."

"I must make arrangements for the hiring of

some vehicle to be in the neighbourhood," I said, "in the course of a few days; and it shall be by climbing the fence of the plantation that we will escape. But still there are difficulties in the way. So long as Mrs. Shackleford remains ill, I shall continue in attendance upon you; and therefore I shall cease to pay my periodical visits to Bagshot. It is only there that I can hire a chaise or vehicle of any description——"

"Can you not devise some pretext, Joseph," asked Calanthe, "for paying a speedy visit to Bagshot? For instance, suppose that to-morrow, when you come to me in the morning——"

"Ah! I know what you are going to say," I exclaimed, anticipating Calanthe's thoughts. "I will tell Mr. Shackleford that you do not purpose to walk out in the plantation until the cool of the evening, and that you have dispensed with my services until then. I shall thus have several hours at my own disposal; and I will ask leave to repair to Bagshot in order to make some little purchases of which I will pretend to stand in need. Yes—let this be the arrangement, Calanthe."

"It is for to-morrow," she observed, gazing fondly up into my countenance; "and for the day after you will have a chaise duly bespoken, so that our flight shall be effectually accomplished."

The plan was thus settled; and as we had now been rambling for more than an hour in the plantation, I suggested that for prudence sake, and in order to avert the possibility of suspicion, it would be better for us to re-enter the house. We did so; and having embraced my child, and received Calanthe's fervid caresses, I issued forth from her apartments. I lost no time in restoring the keys to Mr. Shackleford, who inquired after the health of the lady and the little one. I replied that they appeared to be both well—and then withdrew to attend to such duties as I had to perform. In the evening I paid another visit to Calanthe's apartments—but was careful to remain with her only three or four minutes. On the following morning, at about nine o'clock, I revisited her—likewise remaining but just long enough to exchange a few words and fondle the little Joseph. I then repaired to the parlour, where Mr. Shackleford was seated; and I said to him as I laid the key upon the table, "The lady, sir, does not wish to walk in the plantation until the evening. Her orders are that I shall wait upon her between five and six o'clock."

"Very good, Joseph," responded Mr. Shackleford; "and in this case, as you will have the greater portion of the day before you, you can go across to Bagshot and make the usual purchases. You will acquit yourself better than old Jacob, who is becoming quite childish."

I was glad that Mr. Shackleford thus anticipated, by his orders, the very leave and license which I had been about to solicit; and having received a list of things which he required, I set off in the chaise-cart. On passing the white cottage, I beheld Mr. Foley walking in the little garden, leaning upon the arm of his handsome wife, who was evidently overjoyed at her husband's continuously satisfactory approach towards convalescence. I stopped for a minute to proffer my congratulations,—receiving a kind word and an affable smile from both; and then I continued my way. I speedily reached Bagshot, and executed the various commissions entrusted to me. I was now upon the point of making some inquiry as to the hiring of a post-chaise,—when it struck me for the first time that the proceeding would have so singular an air, it might possibly reach the ears of persons acquainted with the Shacklefords, and thence be carried to Heather Place. Between two and three miles farther along the road, and in the close vicinage of the Military College, was the little town of Blackwater; and, after a few minutes' deliberation with myself, I resolved to repair thither and carry out the arrangements which I had now in hand. Accordingly, to Blackwater I proceeded,—and soon found a person who had a close chaise to let on hire.

"Are you disposed," I said, "to do a certain little job with becoming caution and secrecy, if you be well paid?"

"When I am well paid," was the man's response, "I never ask any questions at all: I have no ears and no eyes for anything that I ought not to hear and am not wanted to see."

"Then you are the very person that will suit me," I exclaimed. "You will put a couple of good horses to your chaise to-morrow in the forenoon; and at mid-day punctually you will be at the spot that I am going to describe to you."

"Proceed," said the man.

"You know Heather Place?" I asked.

"Perfectly well," he replied.

"Do you recollect that at a distance of about half a mile farther along the road on which Heather Place stands, there is a hill crowned with fir-trees?"

"I know it as well as if I saw it before me at this instant."

"Good!" I exclaimed: "for it is on the other side of the hill of which we are speaking that you are to be with your chaise punctually at the hour of noon to-morrow—not a minute later, and but a very few minutes before the time!"

"It shall be attended to," answered the man.

"Here are a couple of guineas as an earnest of the liberality of those who have instructed me to employ you. But one word more!" I added, as a thought struck me. "If half-an-hour should pass, and no one should come to the place of appointment, you will drive away and return home. I shall, in that case, take another opportunity of seeing you to make a new appointment."

"Good!" observed the man: "all your directions are easily understood, and shall be punctually attended to."

Having enjoined him to the strictest secrecy, I drove rapidly away from Blackwater, and returned to Heather Place. But scarcely had I reached the house, when Mr. Shackleford came rushing forth, exclaiming, "You must be off to Bagshot again immediately, Joseph——"

"Is mistress worse, then, sir?" I asked.

"No, no—it is not your mistress—though she herself, poor soul, is exceedingly ill, as you are aware. But it is the lady's child——"

"The child!"—and I started with a sudden access of wild terror.

"Yes, poor little thing!" continued Mr. Shackleford, who did not observe the full extent of the emotion which thus painfully galvanized me: "he was suddenly seized with convulsions——"

"Good heavens—convulsions, sir!"—and I was about to spring down from the cart.

"Don't be so frightened, you foolish lad!" said my master: "you evidently do not know what I mean. It is nothing catching——"

"No, no, sir! But convulsions!" I exclaimed, with an air of dismay and stupefaction, so strangely blended with excitement that it might be easily taken for bewilderment: "they are dangerous—they are dreadful—they kill in a few hours——aye, even in a few minutes!"

"Let us hope that there is no such great danger in the present case," said Mr. Shackleford. "The housemaid has gone to the lady's apartments—she raised an alarm by tearing at her bells——"

"I will away for the doctor at once!" I cried: and lashing the horse, urged the animal to a speed which, under other circumstances, would have bordered on cruelty, considering that the poor brute had only just returned from a tolerably long circuit.

CHAPTER LVII.

THE HEATH.

It was with feelings of a wild terror and agonizing suspense that I returned to Bagshot. Ah! little did Mr. Shackleford suspect the cause of that affrighted dismay and bewildered air of mine!—little did he think that every word he was uttering, wounded me in the most sensitive points! But it was so: I felt that I now loved that dear child infinitely more than I had hitherto fancied, much though I already knew that I loved it. During the rapid drive I depicted to myself all kinds of dreadful things,—the wild anguish of Calanthe—the possibility that on my return to Heather Place I should hear that little Joseph was no more—or perhaps the long and tedious illness of the beloved child, and the frustration of all my plans for liberating its unfortunate mother. In this state of mind did I reach Bagshot: Mr. Willis was fortunately at home; and he at once set off with me. He had already paid one visit that day to Heather Place to see Mrs. Shackleford: he was now to repair thither for another patient. I lashed the horse as if I were mad: I urged it along at the utmost stretch of its speed—so that Mr. Willis himself thought it necessary to remonstrate against a proceeding that began to amount to an actual cruelty. But I did not care—*he* did not know that it was my own child on whose account I was so fearfully anxious!

We reached Heather Place; and Mr. Shackleford, hurrying out to meet the surgeon, at once gave the cheering intelligence that the child was somewhat better. Such a revulsion of feeling took place within me that I could have burst into tears—I could have fallen upon my knees and sent up a fervid prayer to heaven. But I was compelled to exercise a strong control over my feelings:—I even dreaded lest I had already betrayed their strength in a manner to excite some extraordinary suspicion in the mind of Mr. Willis. This apprehension proved however to be unfounded.

For one whole month did little Joseph continue exceedingly ill—often hovering upon the very brink of death, but rescued therefrom by a naturally good constitution, by Calanthe's unwearying ministrations, and by the surgeon's skill. For obvious reasons Mr. Shackleford did not wish to introduce any other domestic into the household: it suited his purpose to confine the secret of Calanthe's presence there to as few a number of persons as possible. Much less would he have thought of taking a nurse, who would only be a temporary resident, and who on leaving might go and gossip elsewhere. The housemaid had therefore to divide her time between Mrs. Shackleford and the sick-chamber which contained the child. Mrs. Shackleford herself continued exceedingly ill; and Mr. Willis had to visit Heather Place regularly every day on account of his two patients. As the housemaid thus paid frequent visits to Calanthe's rooms to assist her in tending the child, my own visits thither were few in number during the month which thus elapsed. For the first fortnight indeed I did not once cross the threshold of Calanthe's apartments: she was too profoundly absorbed in maternal solicitude and ministrations for our beloved infant to think of leaving him even for a moment. But when the surgeon began to give a somewhat more favourable report, Calanthe felt a strong anxiety to see me; and in order to accomplish this object, she pretexted the necessity of fresh air. I was therefore sent for to wait upon her in the plantation, while the housemaid remained in attendance upon the infant. I thus had an opportunity of beholding my child; and with infinite difficulty was it that I kept back a violent ebullition of grief, when I observed how altered the child's appearance was,—how its plump velvety cheeks had become sunken and haggard—how its fine dark eyes were hollow and glazed—and how it still seemed to be hovering on the very brink of the grave. But while in the housemaid's presence, I controlled my feelings: yet I could not avoid giving way to them when I found myself alone with Calanthe in the plantation. We mingled our tears together; and she endeavoured to inspire me with hope that the crisis was past, and that our little son would survive the dreadful illness it had experienced. We grew calmer; and I then told her how I had made the arrangement for a post-chaise to be in waiting for us on the day specially appointed a fortnight back—but how I had fortunately given the man such instructions as would have prevented him from waiting beyond a certain time.

"Let us hope, dearest Joseph," replied Calanthe, "that in another fortnight you may make a new appointment, and that the condition of our dear child will enable us to keep it."

During the fortnight which now followed, and which made up the month of our child's illness, I saw Calanthe four or five times: but we deemed it prudent that she should not walk out every day in the plantation, for fear lest it might seem suspicious that after having devoted an entire fortnight without intermission to the cradle of her child, she should now abandon it, even though only for an hour, regularly every day. As for little Joseph himself, he improved—but yet slowly; and when the month was over, it was with some degree of hesitation that I yielded to Calanthe's earnest entreaty that measures should be again adopted for our flight.

"Not for an instant, dearest Joseph," she said, "would I be so selfish as to consider myself in preference to our child. For that beloved infant I would make any sacrifice. But I am confident that little Joseph can now be removed in safety; and inasmuch as my own health has within the past month suffered, it is necessary that I should adopt as soon as possible any measure that may improve it. For our beloved babe imbibes its nurture from my bosom; and the state of my own health consequently influences that of our darling. Oh! if once in the enjoyment of freedom and indissolubly united to you, I should soon be vigorous with health as well as elate with happiness! Promise me, therefore, that you will take an early opportunity to renew the measures requisite for our flight."

"I will do so, Calanthe, within a few days. To-morrow perhaps—with Mr. Willis's permission—you had better bring little Joseph down for a walk; and the day after you can keep him out longer still, so as to accustom him once again to the fresh air."

Our plans being thus settled, I began to think of seeking an opportunity to pay another visit to Blackwater, and make fresh arrangements relative to the post-chaise. I could easily understand and pardon poor Calanthe's impatience to get away from the place of her imprisonment; but I was resolved that at least another week should elapse ere I carried our purpose into execution—so that little Joseph might have ample time to recover at least a portion of his lost strength. I should observe that Mrs. Shackleford still continued very seriously ill, and was unable to leave her chamber; but on the other hand, Mr. Foley had by this time perfectly recovered. Indeed, slow as his progress towards recovery at first appeared, it had within the last month been proportionately rapid: so that during the latter fortnight of this month he had been enabled to take exercise not merely on foot beyond the limits of the garden, but also on horseback. Mrs. Foley I should add had frequently visited Heather Place to see Mrs. Shackleford, and also to console Calanthe during the illness of the child; for towards the innocent babe that kind-hearted lady had conceived no ordinary affection.

Just at the very time that I was now looking out for an opportunity to pay a visit to Blackwater in respect to the post-chaise, it appeared as if that opportunity was to be denied me, inasmuch as there was now no necessity to send me over to Bagshot. Mr. Shackleford had some little business there at the time, and therefore performed such commissions as the household purposes necessitated. He went nearly every day in the phaeton to Bagshot,—taking old Jacob with him, and leaving me at the house in case my services should be required there. Calanthe grew more and more impatient of her imprisonment; and as the child was now improving visibly, I determined to make an immediate effort for the execution of our plan.

Accordingly I one morning said to Mr. Shackleford after breakfast, "If you please, sir, can I be spared for a few hours to-day, as I have some little purchases to make on my own account at Bagshot? The lady has intimated that she does not purpose to walk out in the plantation, as there is a slight drizzling rain."

"You may go in welcome, Joseph," answered Mr. Shackleford: "but I cannot take you in the phaeton—neither can you have the chaise-cart—inasmuch as I have an appointment with a gentleman who lives about eight miles off; and by the time the old horse has been thither and back—sixteen miles, you know—he will be too tired to go out again to-day."

"I do not at all mind walking, sir," I answered, "provided that you give me leave of absence."

"Well, Joseph," rejoined Mr. Shackleford, "you must remain at the house until my return, in case you happen to be wanted: for old Jacob must accompany me—and the housemaid is too much occupied, under existing circumstances, to answer the front door. I shall be back at three o'clock; and you may then have all the remainder of the day to yourself."

This proposal fully answered my purposes; and I accordingly accepted it with thanks. It however occurred that Mr. Shackleford was delayed on his visit longer than he expected; and it was nearly five o'clock before he returned. I was unable to leave the house until he came back: but so soon as he made his appearance, I got ready to set off. I had so faithfully promised Calanthe that I would delay no longer in carrying out our views that I dared not disappoint her. Besides, it was now the month of June; and therefore the evenings were light until nearly nine o'clock—and I had four hours at my disposal ere the dusk would set in. I should add that as I was fearful of being observed in Blackwater, if my livery should be recognised by any friend of the Shacklefords, I put on my plain clothes—a course that I was free to adopt when going out for a holiday. But just as I was about to start, Mr. Shackleford gave me a little commission to execute for him at Bagshot.

It had not been my intention to visit Bagshot at all: the circumstance just mentioned however compelled me to proceed thither. It was half-past six when I reached Bagshot: Mr. Shackleford's commission occupied half-an-hour: it was therefore seven when I set off for Blackwater—a distance of nearly three miles. On arriving there, I had some difficulty in finding the man of whom I purposed to hire the post-chaise; and, to be brief, it was half-past eight o'clock before I succeeded in disinterring him from the tap-room of a public-house to which I eventually traced him. Then I found that for the following day his chaise was engaged—and he had no other close vehicle. I was accordingly obliged to make an arrangement for the day next ensuing; and this arrangement was precisely the same as that which I had defined on the former occasion. He was to be with the chaise, behind the hill at a short distance from Heather Place, punctually at the hour of noon on the day agreed upon. I gave him his earnest money—promised that his reward should be liberal—enjoined him to secrecy—and issued forth from Blackwater on my way homeward.

It was not necessary to take Bagshot in my way: by cutting across the heath the distance to the Shacklefords from Blackwater would be but little more than that from Bagshot—or about six miles. It was now past nine o'clock—the evening had closed in darkly and gloomily—a drizzling rain had been falling during the day—and it came

on with greater force. The clouds were gathered on the face of heaven; and a rather strong wind blew across the heath. I had an umbrella—but in consequence of the wind, I did not put it up. Buttoning my coat across my chest, I confronted the inclemency of the evening, and was soon at a distance from Blackwater. The darkness deepened around me, so that I had some difficulty in keeping the proper path. Two or three times I feared that I had struck into a wrong one, until some familiar object, dimly seen through the darkness, set my apprehensions at rest: for in consequence of having driven Mrs. Shackleford about in the phaeton, all the roads, lanes, and bridle-paths in the district were tolerably well known to me.

While advancing across the heath, I was so profoundly engaged in reflections which intimately concerned myself and my own position, that I had not once bethought me of the masked highwayman until I suddenly heard the quick tramplings of horse's feet. Then, all in an instant, the recollection of the lawless desperado flashed to my mind; and grasping the umbrella in such a way that it might serve as a weapon for defence, and its ivory handle be levelled to deal a blow if requisite, I determined to give the highwayman such a reception as I might be enabled to afford. Not half-a-dozen seconds elapsed from the moment that the sounds of the animal's feet reached my ears, ere the horseman galloped up to the spot where I stood ready for defence. The darkness was now so deep as to be almost intense: nevertheless I was at once enabled to perceive that the fellow wore something over his countenance—for it was all black under the brims of his slouching hat.

"Your money or your life!" he instantaneously exclaimed, in a deep hoarse rough voice: and a pistol was presented to my head.

"Villain!" I ejaculated, springing aside quick as lightning, and levelling at him a blow directed with all my force. But the next moment he was galloping, as if madness had seized upon both horse and man, across the heath. It was all the work of far less than a minute: his appearance and his vanishing amidst the darkness were like magic. I could scarcely believe the evidence of my own senses: I stood transfixed, as if suddenly awakening from a somnambulistic dream. I really was at a loss for a few seconds to convince myself that the adventure was aught beside a delusion of the fancy. Was it my resoluteness which had terrified the scoundrel? was he in his heart a coward? or had he really such an instinctive horror of shedding blood that he dared not trust himself to the chances of a conflict? But then I recollected that in the case of the Professor of the Royal Military College, he had used a certain degree of violence to accomplish his purpose; and it was consequently all the more unaccountable that he should abstain from it now. When thus able to reason calmly and deliberately on the incident, I congratulated myself on my escape: for my young life might certainly, had the villain chosen, been sacrificed to the pistol which he presented at my head—supposing that it was really loaded.

As I continued my way, I endeavoured to recollect what sort of a person in regard to form and stature he had the air of being: I tried hard to fix upon my mind some impression to that effect—but I could not. His appearance and disappearance had been so sudden, that I could no more have recognised him again, even if he had stood in my presence habited exactly as he was, only without the mask to prove *what* he was. In a word, the entire incident appeared like a dream which vanishes away, leaving only the faintest, the vaguest, and the dimmest impression behind it. It was long past ten o'clock when I reached Heather Place: but Mr. Shackleford uttered not a single syllable of upbraiding: he no doubt made allowances for me, inasmuch as it was so late when I had sallied forth. I did not choose to mention a syllable of my adventure with the highwayman,—as it would have really seemed that I was indulging in a romance or a gasconade.

On the following day I had an interview with Calanthe, and informed her of the arrangements which I had made and which now stood for the morrow. She was delighted at the renewed prospect of liberation from her imprisonment, and at the thought of speedily accompanying me to the altar. In the course of the afternoon Mr. Shackleford sent me with a present of some strawberries to the Foleys; and on my way homeward I encountered Mr. Games, the village-surgeon. I had not seen this gentleman for the last month; and he stopped to speak to me. He observed that he had been for a long round, and that he was exceedingly tired: his clothes were covered with dust—and the perspiration was pouring down his face. Seating himself on the heather by the roadside, he began to talk in a way which showed that he was in a humour for conversation; and as I was in no particular hurry to get back, I sat down with him.

"So you have had illness at the Place?" remarked Mr. Games. "I understand that Mrs. Shackleford has been very much indisposed——"

"For the last five weeks she has not left her chamber," I answered; "and she is still in a somewhat precarious state."

"Well, she has Willis to attend upon her," observed Games; "and he is a clever man. There is no professional jealousy about me; and therefore I don't mind paying a compliment to a brother practitioner. Besides, I have as much to do as I can possibly attend to—although, as you see, I have to run about for it:"—and then the worthy man wiped the perspiration from his face with his pocket handkerchief.

"Your patient yonder," I observed, glancing in the direction of the white cottage, "has got quite well."

"Oh, yes!—he walks and rides about as usual," responded Mr. Games. "Well, it would have been a great pity if the business had turned out otherwise. He is a very nice man, is Mr. Foley—a very nice man; and his wife is the most amiable of women. I do really believe she would have laid violent hands upon herself, or else have pined away, if her husband had died."

"They are exceedingly attached to each other," I remarked.

"I never saw such an affectionate couple," rejoined Games. "Even if they hadn't behaved as liberally to me as they have done, I should still speak of them in the highest terms: but I have every additional reason to do so—for they have treated me nobly. Why, would you believe it,"

continued the village surgeon, after a pause, during which he appeared to hesitate whether he should give expression to that little personal matter which his very pardonable vanity prompted him to communicate,—"when Mr. Foley asked me for my account the other day, and I sent it in——I only charged ten pounds for operation, attendance, medicine, and everything—he gave me a twenty pound note."

"That was indeed liberal," I observed. "But you spoke of an operation?"

"Oh, did I though?" ejaculated the simple-minded surgeon: and he looked as if he repented of an inadvertency committed.

"Yes—you mentioned the word *operation*," I went on to say. "Ah, now I bethink me, Mrs. Foley eulogized your skill the very day after I fetched you to the white cottage. I could not understand it at the time: but now I see what it meant. You had to perform an operation. Was it a painful one?"

Mr. Games pursed up his mouth in a somewhat ludicrous manner—and gave no response.

"I hope," I continued, "that you will not consider me guilty of impertinent curiosity: I would not for the world abandon myself to such a degrading sentiment. I can assure you that if I took the liberty of putting a question upon the point, it was only because I esteem Mr. and Mrs. Foley so much that everything which relates to either of them, seems to be endowed with a peculiar interest in my eyes."

"Well, I believe you, young man," answered Mr. Games; "and I remember that both Mr. and Mrs. Foley have spoken of your generous conduct on the occasion when you came to fetch me. I recollect too the zeal and anxiety you displayed, and how you made me mount the horse and hold

on tight to your waist—I who have not even the courage to mount a donkey!"

"But you acquitted yourself uncommonly well upon that occasion—and you certainly must feel rejoiced at having suffered your sense of duty to over-rule your timorous apprehensions: because, from what I learnt, your speedy arrival at the cottage led to the salvation of your parent's life."

"Indeed, you may say that!" responded Mr. Games, evidently flattered by my speech, and growing every instant more and more friendly and familiar. "The truth is, I *did* perform an operation. But if I tell you all about it, will you keep it to yourself?"

"I will," was the answer. "I can assure you that I will."

"Why, you see," continued Mr. Games, "it is rather a delicate matter to speak of; though if poor Mr. Foley had died, it would have all come out at the inquest in one way or another. I need not tell you that Mrs. Foley is a very splendid woman. Well, one day she had occasion to go to Hounslow on some little business. Perhaps you are aware that Hounslow is a town only a few miles distant, and that there is a regiment of soldiers there. One of the officers of that regiment insulted Mrs. Foley most grossly,—making overtures which she, as a virtuous married lady, repudiated with scorn and indignation. The officer's conduct was so bad that she returned home in a dreadfully excited state; and she could not possibly avoid giving explanations to her husband, although painfully foreseeing what the inevitable consequence would be."

"A duel?" I interjectingly observed.

"Precisely so," responded Mr. Games. "It appears that Foley was fearfully incensed against the ruffian who in the guise of a gentleman had treated his wife in so insulting a manner. He went across to Hounslow; and after some inquiries, ascertained who the individual was. The officer, as cowardly as he was brutal, proffered the humblest apologies in order to avoid a duel: but Mr. Foley declared that nothing short of a hostile encounter would be satisfactory. Well, the duel took place at a very early hour on that same morning when you came to fetch me. Indeed—judging from the state of the wound—it must have been some hours previously to your being enlisted in that service which you performed so zealously and so kindly. The officer was compelled to go out with Foley: and whether he was in reality a good shot—or whether it was only a random hit, I cannot tell: but very certain it is that the officer's bullet lodged in Foley's shoulder in a dangerous part."

"Good heavens!" I exclaimed, my blood boiling with indignation: "and that is the code of honour! A man, in seeking satisfaction for an outrage offered to his wife, has to peril his own existence!"

"Well," replied Mr. Games, "such is the plain state of the case, anomalous though such a thing naturally seems. But I ought to tell you how generously Mr. Foley behaved. The Colonel of the regiment to which his antagonist belongs, is a very strict disciplinarian, and a moral as well as a high-minded man. If it had come to his knowledge that one of his officers had been compelled to go out in a duel for gross ungentleman-like conduct towards a respectable lady, he would immediately have represented the transaction to the Commander-in-Chief of the Army, and the officer would have had to leave his regiment. Therefore, at the earnest representation of that officer, and of a brother-officer who was his second, Mr. Foley—with a generosity which cannot be too much admired—promised to keep the whole affair profoundly secret. At the same time, if he had died, you know, of his wound, it must all have inevitably come out."

"And the wound did nearly prove fatal," I observed,—"was it not so?"

"Fortunately I succeeded in extracting the bullet——"

"Ah!" I thought to myself, "and that was the reason Mrs. Foley eulogized your skill within comparatively a few hours after you had been called in. And she, too, as generous-minded as her husband, consented to hush up the transaction, rather than by giving publicity to it, cause the disgrace and ruin of the officer."

"Yes, I extracted the bullet," proceeded the village-surgeon; "but I can assure you that it was a very difficult task. For some days I dreaded lest mortification should ensue; and that was the reason wherefore I did not entertain very sanguine hopes of my patient's ultimate recovery. However, a naturally strong constitution, aided by the indefatigable attentions of his excellent wife——"

"And by your skill, Mr. Games," I interjectingly remarked; for, from all I had learnt, I really considered that the praise thus bestowed on the village-surgeon was no mere idle compliment.

"Well, well, we ought to put that out of the question," he said, with a complaisant smile: for simple-minded though he was, he had his own little vanity. "The essential thing is that Mr. Foley has recovered; and I heartily rejoice at the issue. I am now sufficiently rested to pursue my rounds. Good day, young man—and mind and keep the whole business strictly secret!"

The surgeon hurried off in one direction, while I proceeded in another; and in a few minutes I reached Heather Place,—pondering the while upon all that I had just heard, and which naturally led me more than ever to admire the generous character of Mr. Foley and his wife.

In the evening, at about half-past eight o'clock, Mr. Shackleford desired me to proceed in the chaise-cart to Bagshot, and fetch from Mr. Willis's the requisite medicines for Mrs. Shackleford,—the surgeon having by some accident omitted to send them. I set out; and when within about a quarter of a mile of Bagshot, the horse suddenly went lame. Thinking that he had taken up a stone in one of his shoes, I got down to look—but it was not so: the poor animal had sprained himself somewhere—and he appeared so much injured that I was even fearful of driving him for the remainder of the distance. He was a very old horse—had done much work—and bore the marks of having been bled and blistered for some previous injury. I got him into Bagshot: but the idea of taking him home again, was totally out of the question. I therefore put him up at a tavern in the town; and having procured the medicines from Mr. Willis's, set out to walk back to Heather Place.

It was now nearly ten o'clock; and just such a night as the preceding one—very dark and windy, with the rain falling. As I gradually left the town farther and farther behind me, I could not help thinking incessantly of the highwayman whom I had encountered on the previous evening. I kept my umbrella so as to serve as a weapon of defence: but I had not much apprehension that there would be any necessity for using it. It was perhaps about three miles from Bagshot, when I heard the sounds of horses' hoofs approaching from behind. They were coming at a moderate pace; and I was soon enabled to distinguish that there were two steeds thus about to overtake me. I was just wondering whether the highwayman had found a comrade with whom he had entered into a nefarious partnership, when the two horsemen came up; and I perceived that they were mounted policemen. The object of their presence in that district was at once conjectured by me; and they wished me "good night" as they passed. They were soon lost in the obscurity which prevailed: but they could not have been more than a hundred yards ahead of me, when the report of a pistol, coming from a distance across the heath, reached my ears; and that the same sound was heard by the mounted policemen also, was evident enough from the quick tramplings of their steeds as they at once urged them into a gallop.

There were two roads across the heath in that direction,—the bye-path which I was pursuing towards the Shacklefords', and a broader one at a short distance, but running parallel with the first-mentioned. The shot appeared to come from the broader road; and I had little doubt it was occasioned by some new incident connected with the masked highwayman—but whether he was the assailed or the assailant in respect to that shot, I could not of course conjecture. I hastened on—and in a few minutes beheld the feeble twinklings of lights in the broad road, the level expanse of heath in that spot affording an open range for the eyes to penetrate and for those lights to shine through the darkness. The frequent movement of objects before the lights, darkening them for an instant and then suffering them to become visible again, showed me that persons were hurrying to and fro on that spot; and I therefore concluded it was the scene of the adventure which had just taken place. Curiosity prompted me to speed in that direction; and as I drew nearer, my ear caught the sound of voices talking loudly. Nearer and nearer still did I approach; and in the course of a few minutes I distinctly heard some one exclaim loudly, "No, no my fine fellow;—let you go, indeed, for the sake of——"

Then a gust of wind drowned the remainder of the sentence.

"I swore if you were caught," cried another voice, which methought I recognised as that of Mr. Henley, the commercial traveller, "I would go twenty miles to see you hanged—and so I will. This is the second time——"

Here another gust of wind swept violently across the heath, drowning the remainder of the sentence: but I had no doubt it *was* Mr. Henley who had spoken,—not merely because of the voice, but likewise on account of that declaration which I perfectly well remembered his having made to me.

I hurried onward; and in a few moments reached the spot. It was Mr. Henley's chaise, the lamps of which gave forth the lights that had guided me thither: he himself had descended from the box—the policemen had dismounted—and between them they retained in custody an individual whom I at once concluded to be the highwayman. His back was towards the lamps; and I could not immediately discern his countenance.

"Well, Mr. Henley," I said, "your enemy is secured at last."

"Ah, my young acquaintance!" good-naturedly exclaimed the commercial traveller: "it is a singular coincidence that brings you here at this moment."

"I heard the shot——"

"That was fired by me," instantaneously rejoined Henley. "But it missed: the fellow attacked me with his riding-whip—we had a terrific struggle—I tore him off his horse—and just at that instant the policemen came up."

While thus speaking, Mr. Henley indicated the spot where the highwayman's horse stood; and I instinctively turned my eyes in the same direction. I could not help starting with a sudden access of amazement, as my looks settled upon that animal. I walked close up to the horse, and the recognition being unmistakably complete, I ejaculated, "Good heavens, it is Mr. Foley's Jupiter!"

A groan of deep distress reached my ears. A horrible suspicion now flashed to my mind; and coincidences hitherto utterly lost sight of, presented themselves all in a moment to my bewildered memory. On the previous occasion that Henley was attacked, he had fired at the highwayman, and had made almost sure that he had hit him somewhere:—and it was on the very next morning that Mr. Games had extracted the bullet from Foley's shoulder! Therefore the story of the duel now struck me as a well-devised fabrication for the purpose of veiling in secrecy Foley's real condition at the time. All these thoughts swept through my wildered brain with the rapidity of lightning,—accompanied by a horrible sickness at the heart at the idea that the amiable, the generous-souled, and the beautiful Mrs. Foley could be a highwayman's wife!.

"Now then," exclaimed one of the police-officers, "let us be off with our prisoner."

"One word—only one word!" cried a supplicating voice, which, altered though its accents were, I had still no difficulty in recognising; and if any doubt had previously lingered in my mind, it was now but too surely dispelled—for that voice was Foley's. "Joseph Wilmot," he went on to say, "your heart will dictate the service that I would demand of you——break it as gently as you can——"

"Oh, good heavens! what will your poor wife say?" I exclaimed, powerfully affected: but then as it immediately struck me that she herself must unquestionably have been all along aware of her husband's iniquitous proceedings, and was therefore an accomplice in them, she deserved but little of the sympathy which my soul was experiencing for her.

"The thought drives me mad!" cried Foley: and his sobs were now audibly convulsive. "Go, go at once!" he said, recovering his self-possession,

and suddenly assuming the calmness of fortitude. "I all along foresaw that this must happen sooner or later—and I ought to have been better prepared to meet it:"—then addressing himself to the police-officers, he said, "May this young man take charge of my horse?"

"No, not a bit of it," was the gruff response. "How do we know but that other cases will come against you, and that some traveller whom you have attacked may be able to identify the animal? Not but that the present case is enough to hang you——"

"Then go, Joseph Wilmot—go at once!" cried Foley: "for fear lest the intelligence should reach her from some other quarter, and burst upon her like a shock!"

"You seem to know this man?" said one of the officers to me: and methought, as the rays of the lamp fell upon his countenance, that he was half inclined to arrest me as an accomplice.

"Oh, I will answer for the lad," cried Mr. Henley, smitten with the same idea as I myself was. "He is a servant at —— what's the name of the house?"

"Heather Place," I said: and the officers were at once satisfied.

I now hastened away: for I had just caught a glimpse of Foley's countenance—and I did not wish to see it again. It was ghastly pale, and bore the impress of that despair which filled his soul, and which I knew that he experienced on account of his wife. I ran across the heath in the direction of the white cottage: but as I drew near that dwelling, I relaxed my pace—for I felt that it was a very painful task with which I had been entrusted. The longer I thought of it, the slower did I advance; and my thoughts wandered over the various incidents which I had heard or knew to be associated with the highwayman. For instance, on the occasion when he had stopped Mr. Shackleford, it was no wonder that he had rushed away so precipitately: it was beyond all doubt the fear that his horse might be recognised that had urged him to such instantaneous flight. A similar reason might account for the manner in which he had dashed away from me on the preceding evening,—unless indeed he were likewise inspired by a feeling of gratitude which rendered him unwilling to maltreat or plunder one to whom he was under obligations. Or he might even have thought on recognising me, that it was by no means probable I had enough about me to render it worth while for him to go to extremes.

While I was thus deliberating, I reached the railings of the garden in front of the white cottage. A light was burning in one of the ground-floor parlours: through the muslin curtains I beheld a female form seated at a table—and I knew it to be that of the wife to whom I was about to bring such horrible intelligence relative to a dearly beloved husband. Again my heart sickened within me; and I actually staggered against the door-post before I could nerve myself sufficiently to raise my hand to the bell-pull.

At length I gave the requisite summons; and it was almost immediately answered by Mrs. Foley herself. Methought there was a look of anxiety upon her countenance as she first opened the door—but that it instantaneously vanished when she recognised me. Then however it came back again—but with a different expression, as if the source of that anxiety had become suddenly changed.

"Is anything the matter at the Place?" she inquired hurriedly. "Your looks bode evil tidings!"

"Yes—evil indeed," I answered, in a voice of deep dejection: for when I remembered that my own child had been fondled in the hands which were soon to be clasped in rending agony—and that the beloved babe had been pressed to that bosom into which my words were in a little while to plant a dagger—I was seized with the profoundest melancholy; and no other feeling than sympathy and compassion did I experience towards Mrs. Foley, though not daring to believe that she was ignorant of her husband's guilt.

"Good heavens, what *has* happened, Joseph?" she exclaimed. "How sad you look! Is Mrs. Shackleford dead——But come into the parlour and sit down. You seem scarcely able to stand."

I did enter the parlour: I closed the door, forgetting at the instant that the servant-woman was unable, on account of her affliction, to overhear what was about to pass—and I sank upon a seat. If it had been a sister or other near relation to whom I was on the point of revealing a fearful calamity, I could not possibly have experienced a deeper sorrow.

"What has occurred, Joseph?" again asked Mrs. Foley: and I now saw that she herself was quivering all over with a torturing suspense.

"Oh, madam," I exclaimed, "prepare yourself to hear something dreadful!"

A shriek burst from her lips: she comprehended all in a moment that my words bore reference to her husband—her suspense was horribly cleared up. Her handsome features became convulsed with anguish: her countenance grew ghastly pale—she staggered back, and fell upon a chair as if about to faint.

"Oh, what is it? what is it?" she murmured, her frame trembling with a stronger and more spasmodic agony. "Ferdinand —— my husband——"

"Yes, it is of him that I have to speak—and would to heaven that some other messenger had been found to bear the intelligence: for it cuts me to the heart!"

"But he lives, Joseph—tell me that he lives?" cried the wretched woman wildly; and springing towards me, she endeavoured with poignant anxiety to read the answer upon my countenance.

"Yes—he lives, he lives!" I said, feeling it a relief almost amounting to joy, to be enabled to convey anything in the shape of a solace.

"Thank God!" she cried, clasping her hands fervidly: "for while there is life there is hope! But now tell me what has occurred. I will be firm—indeed I will be firm——I must be! for it will need all my fortitude to bear up against this dreadful calamity."

"Your husband is a prisoner," I answered; "and accident threw me in the way a few minutes after his capture."

"But you assure me that he lives? you are not deceiving me? you are not endeavouring delicately and considerately to prepare me for still more fearful intelligence? Perhaps he is wounded—dangerously wounded again!"

"No, Mrs. Foley," I exclaimed; "on my soul I am telling you the truth! He is not hurt—but he is a captive—taken in the act——"

"Enough!—do not allude to it!—it is dreadful!"—and the unfortunate woman shuddered visibly from head to foot: then with a sudden paroxysm of uncontrollable anguish, she burst into tears—she wrung her hands—she pressed them to her bosom—she writhed—she shook herself—she testified her bitter, bitter affliction in a manner which made me weep also.

"If there is anything I can possibly do to serve you," I said, "you can command me."

"No, no—there is nothing!" she responded: and it appeared as if the very question itself had all in a moment aroused her to a sense of her duty: for she hastily wiped her eyes—the violence of her grief subsided as suddenly as it had burst forth; and though still ghastly pale, her features became rigid with the fortitude which a settled purpose inspired. "Now leave me, Joseph Wilmot! But ere you depart, accept the thanks which are due for the considerate manner in which you broke these dreadful tidings. Go, Joseph Wilmot!—you are an honourable young man, and I am ashamed to look you in the face!"

Averting her countenance, she motioned towards the door—and I dared not linger another instant. It was in my heart to repeat my offer of service: but my tongue could not frame the words. I felt that she must indeed be full of shame, and tortured by the most poignant sense of utter humiliation; I knew therefore that it was an absolute mercy to go forth from her presence.

The door of the white cottage closed behind me; and slowly did I proceed towards Heather Place. There was still a sort of bewilderment in my brain, as if all that had just occurred was but a dream: and yet the affliction that I felt, made me aware of its reality. I could have given ten of the best years of my own life that this thing had not taken place. That couple whom I had regarded as being the very patterns of high-mindedness as well as of moral rectitude, were criminals of no ordinary dye; and as my thoughts gradually disentangled themselves from their stupefaction and amazement, I reflected that it almost amounted to a maudlin and sickly sentimentalism on my part to suffer myself to be so deeply moved on their behalf.

When I reached Heather Place, it was past eleven o'clock; and Mr. Shackleford had begun to grow uneasy at my protracted absence. The cook was sitting up to let me in; and she immediately saw by my countenance that something had happened. The ejaculation of alarm to which she gave vent, brought Mr. Shackleford forth from the parlour; and when I told them both what had occurred in respect to Foley, they evidently thought I had taken leave of my senses. I however soon gave them to understand that it was all but too true; and their amazement was as great as mine had been a short time back. Indeed, in the midst of that astonishment, Mr. Shackleford forgot to ask me about the chaise-cart—and I myself forgot to deliver the medicines I had been to fetch. It was only when I was about to ascend to my own chamber, that these matters were recollected; and then I explained what had happened to the horse—and I gave the parcel which I had brought from Mr. Willis. I slept but little that night; and when I did snatch brief intervals of broken, restless slumber, images of highwaymen and of distracted women, blended with scenes of solemn-looking tribunals and the hideous spectacles of public executions, haunted my fancy.

The day which dawned upon that momentous night was the one fixed for my flight with Lady Calanthe and our child. At about nine o'clock in the morning I visited the apartments which she and the dear babe occupied; and though I was rejoiced to find that the child was now recovering its former good looks and could be safely removed, yet on the other hand I was filled with nervous and uneasy feelings as if with a presentiment of evil—or because I felt that I was about to take a step which was to prove fatal to all my best aspirations and fondest hopes in this life.

"What is the matter with you, dearest Joseph?" inquired Calanthe, throwing one of her arms around my neck, and gazing up into my countenance with all the fondness of a mother who felt that she was thus clinging to the father of her child.

By way of an excuse for my sombre looks, I told her what had occurred on the previous night in respect to Foley; and now it was Calanthe's turn to be overwhelmed with horror and amazement.

"Good heavens;" she cried; "and I have been familiar with a highwayman's wife—and she has fondled our child!"

"It is for that very reason, Calanthe," I answered, "that we ought to show her some little commiseration. Guilt had not steeled her heart against the proper feelings of her sex; and the highwayman's wife has more kindness in her composition than many a woman who will now shrink from her in loathing and disgust."

"Heavens, Joseph!" answered Calanthe, the tears trickling down her cheeks; "do you mean that as a reproach for me? Ah, I was wrong to speak in that manner of the poor creature! Yes, yes—I ought to have recollected that she was good to our child—and that sometimes when I was either unwell or desponding, she took the dear babe out into the plantation——Oh, I will not reproach her!"

"Now you speak, Calanthe," I said, "in a way which gives me pleasure."

"And I will always speak in a way to please you, dearest Joseph," she answered, her eyes now beaming with delight through her tears. "Yes—rest assured, my beloved Joseph, it shall be the whole study of my life to promote your happiness. I will ever follow in the track of your views—I will speak as you speak—there shall be no difference of opinion between us. Ah, dear Joseph! you know not how I love you!—words have no power to make you understand how dear you are to me! Do you not believe me, Joseph? Oh, if you were but to tell me one hundredth part of what I am now telling you, I should become wild with joy! But you never speak to me, Joseph, in that sense! Your manner is kind——alas, I fear it is not loving! Oh, for heaven's sake do not think that I mean this as a reproach! No, no—not for worlds! And yet, Joseph, when you reflect on all the love that I bear you—on all that

I have done to show it, and all that I have suffered for that love—and how I have even gloried in that very martyrdom because it was endured for your sake—you might——But pray don't be angry——yet you might, Joseph, say one little word of affection—you might bestow upon me a single caress!"

There was something so sweetly plaintive, so softly touching in Calanthe's words—her looks were so full of deep earnest love, and at the same time glittering somewhat with the fear of giving me offence—that I experienced a keen emotion. The sense of my position cut me to the very soul. There was I, adoring the image of Annabel—yet about to take a step which would annihilate for ever all my hopes in that quarter. On the other hand, there was Calanthe, possessing every claim upon my love, yet not enjoying it,—every claim that her own devoted affection constituted, and which she might still more strongly advance as the mother of my child! To hear her appeal to me for my love, and yet be unable to give it—to hear her ask in that soft melting voice for a single syllable expressive of regard, and yet not dare utter it without being shocked at the idea of a flagrant treason against the image of Annabel,—Oh, all this rendered my position intolerable!

"Now tell me, Joseph," continued Calanthe, finding that I did not speak, and perhaps seeing an expression that looked like anguish flitting over my countenance,—"tell me, dearest Joseph, whether in the step which you are about to take you are acting from a sense of duty, or whether you are inspired by real affection? Listen to me, dear Joseph! If it be only a sense of duty," she continued, scarcely able to keep back an explosion of grief, "you shall not sacrifice yourself on my account. No—not for worlds would I suffer you to do it. Rather—ten thousand times rather, would I sacrifice myself for you! Yes, I will continue to endure my captivity here: for if I have not *you* to be the companion of my freedom, I would rather bury myself and my woes in this seclusion. And if you say, Joseph, that what you are about to do has been prompted by a sense of mere duty, no syllable of reproach shall issue from my lips: I will even endeavour to keep back my tears lest they should anger you!"

But Calanthe could not restrain them even while speaking; and now they gushed forth freely. Oh! why was it that every word this generous-minded creature spoke—every action which she performed—every look which she bent upon me, conveyed evidences of a deep devoted love?—and why should that deepest and most devoted love that a female heart ever bore—with one exception only—prove to its object a curse instead of a blessing? I was profoundly affected: my soul was full of anguish, but blended with an illimitable compassion for Calanthe Dundas. I drew her towards me; and for the first time since we had met at Heather Place, did I imprint kisses upon her cheeks. Hitherto I had received her caresses—but now I gave them of my own accord. And then the wild delight which seized upon her as she took those caresses for evidences of the love whereof she had sought me to afford some little proof! She threw her arms around my neck—she embraced me—she drew back her countenance to gaze fondly up into mine: there were tears in her eyes and smiles on her lips——Oh! truly, if I had not loved Annabel, I should have loved Calanthe!

Then she hastened to the cradle—she took up the child, first pressing it to her own bosom—then giving it into my arms; and when she saw with what unmistakable sincerity I kissed and fondled it, her cheeks glowed with all a mother's pride: and now she wept for very happiness.

I could not linger many minutes more in her apartments; and it was agreed that I should tell Mr. Shackleford she purposed to walk in the plantation at half-past eleven o'clock. In the meantime she promised to have all her little preparations made—while I, in the same interval, was to make mine. I then withdrew, and descended to restore the key to my master, and give him the requisite information relative to the hour when I was to wait upon "the lady" again.

I was somewhat puzzled as to the course I should pursue in respect to my plain clothes and my livery. I should have on the latter at the moment of the intended flight: but it was absolutely necessary that I should take away the former with me. After some deliberation I decided upon the best course to be adopted. I seized an opportunity when old Jacob had gone upon a message to the nearest village, and when the cook was in the midst of her own avocations, to make a parcel of my plain clothes, together with some clean linen and other necessaries; and this parcel I threw out of the window into the garden—so that on descending the stairs I might not stand a chance of being met if carrying it. Then I hastened down from my chamber—passed into the garden—took the packet—and threw it over the wall into the plantation. Having done this, I proceeded to the pantry and occupied myself in cleaning the plate.

At length it was half-past eleven o'clock on that forenoon; and having dressed myself in my best livery (as I was wont to do when accompanying Calanthe in the plantation) I repaired to the parlour to ask Mr. Shackleford for the keys. These he immediately gave me: and I ascended to Calanthe's apartments. She was in readiness—the child was likewise dressed to go out: Calanthe had made a parcel for herself, containing such necessaries and changes of apparel as were indispensable: she had likewise secured in the packet her money and her valuables. Everything was in readiness for departure; and I must confess that my heart palpitated so violently that it produced a sensation of sickness and of pain. I however did my best to conceal my emotions from Calanthe: I felt that as my mind was made up to do my duty towards her, I had no right to cause her any affliction. She herself was perfectly radiant with happiness; and she lavished upon me the tenderest caresses.

We descended into the plantation: I picked up the parcel which I had thrown over from the garden; and we hastened to the farther extremity, where the shade of the fir-trees was densest. The child was sleeping soundly: Calanthe deposited him for a few moments upon the grass which bordered the gravel-walk; and I then assisted her to climb the palisade. This she accomplished in perfect safety: the babe was handed over to her—and the next instant I stood by her side.

"Give me little Joseph, Calanthe," I said; "and you will be enabled to walk all the more quickly."

I took the infant in my arms: we hastened away—skirting that same extremity of the plantation where we had just clambered the palisades: but scarcely had we reached the angle, when whom should we behold leisurely walking along, but Mr. Shackleford! A cry of terror escaped Calanthe's lips; and Shackleford, with an ejaculation of mingled rage and astonishment, bounded towards us.

"Run, Calanthe—run!" I cried: "and if he overtakes us, it will be a fierce struggle between him and me!"

Calanthe uttered a few words expressive of renewed confidence; and we sped across the heath, —Mr. Shackleford in full chase. He called after us—at one moment commanding, at another entreating that we would stop—now menacing me with all the rigours of the law—the next instant offering me bribes—twenty—fifty—a hundred guineas—to restore him his prisoner. But I heeded him not; and we held on our course. In this manner more than half the distance towards the hill was accomplished—that hill behind which the chaise ought to be in waiting. I glanced over my shoulder: Shackleford was gaining upon us. I myself could easily have outstripped him: but Calanthe could not run so fast. She was already breathless; and seeing that she could not hold on, I stopped short. Restoring the infant to her arms, I said, "Hasten you on to the other side of the hill—get into the post-chaise—and drive to High Wycombe. I will join you there!"—for I mentioned that place, as it was the first that came into my head, and was suggested to me by the recollection of having heard Mr. Henley speak of it.

Calanthe—who was all obedience to my will—flung upon me a look of ineffable love, and sped onward: while I turned to confront Mr. Shackleford, who now came up to the spot, full of rage, and the perspiration pouring down his cheeks.

"Bar not my way, Joseph," he exclaimed: "or I will do you a mischief!"

"You shall not pursue that lady" I said in a resolute voice: and I clutched him by the collar.

"What! you dare assault me?" he cried, making a motion as if to deal me a blow: but thinking better of it, he let his arm slowly drop again.

"No—I do not assault you; but I stand between you and a young lady whom you have held captive against all law, justice, and right."

"Unhand me!" exclaimed Mr. Shackleford, making a desperate effort to release himself: but I held him fast, and compelled him to remain.

"You will get yourself into a terrible scrape, infamous fellow that you are!" he said, his lips white and quivering with rage. "I will give you into custody for decamping with my liveries!"

"See!" I answered, pointing to the bundle which lay upon the heath: "there are my plain clothes—and your livery would have been returned to you, as it still shall be, by some conveyance. As for giving me into custody, you must find a constable first!"

"I will keep you here till assistance comes!" exclaimed Shackleford, now grasping me in his turn.

"Well, do so," I said, glancing over my shoulder; and to my satisfaction I perceived that Calanthe was far distant. "You talk about giving me into custody: what if I were to proceed to the first magistrate and denounce you as one of the most lawless usurpers of individual rights that the whole country contains?"

"Come, Joseph, let us not quarrel," said Mr. Shackleford, evidently alarmed by this threat. "I will give you two hundred guineas if you suffer me to speed at once and bring back that lady."

"Not if you offered me two thousand or two million!" I exclaimed, with indignant vehemence.

"But what in heaven's name shall I say to those who placed her with me?"

"Say what you choose! It shall not be my fault if you ever have her in your power again. And now," I continued, by no means sorry to keep him thus engaged in discourse, and afford Calanthe ample time for flight,—"and now you may learn, if you will, that from the very first moment I knew that there was a captive within your walls, I yearned to liberate her—and from the instant that I saw her, I resolved to do so."

"Do you know who she is?" asked Shackleford eagerly.

"Yes," I responded; and I gazed steadily in his face, to ascertain by his looks whether he also was acquainted with her name and family: but I at once saw that he was not.

"Tell me who she is, Joseph?" he cried: "for now that you have set her free, I must communicate with those who consigned her to my charge."

"That is a secret which you will not learn from my lips:"—and all this while my grasp was firmly fixed upon him.

He remained silent for a few moments, glancing around as if in search of succour: but none was nigh. I too glanced around—and Calanthe was no longer in sight.

"By heaven, I will not be treated thus!" suddenly ejaculated Shackleford; and with clenched fist he aimed a violent blow at my face.

I evaded it; and at the same instant hurled him to the ground, placing my foot upon his chest.

"Help!—robbers! help! help!—murder!" cried Shackleford, struggling to get up.

"Now, if you dare go on thus," I said, speaking with resolute sternness, "I myself will shout for help—but it will be to convey you into the presence of a magistrate, to whom you must account for your lawless conduct in becoming that young lady's gaoler. She has committed no crime that she deserved a prison-house: her intellects were not impaired—nor have you a license to keep a mad-house."

Shackleford had ceased bawling forth for succour; and as some minutes had elapsed since Calanthe was no longer visible, I concluded that she had by this time gained the post-chaise. Suddenly snatching up my bundle of clothes, I darted away at full speed across the heath—reached the hill—gained the opposite side—and caught a glimpse of the post-chaise just as it was turning the angle of a grove of fir-trees about half a mile distant.

"Calanthe is safe!" I said to myself: and then

for an instant a treacherous thought entered my head. What if I were to avail myself of this opportunity to sever a connexion which had been so unfortunately recommenced?—and the image of Annabel rose up before me in all the sweetness of its seraphic beauty. But no!—the very next instant I repudiated the thought with loathing and scorn: I hated myself for having harboured it for even that fleeting second. No, no!—it was a stern and imperious duty which I had to perform! And then too, as the image of Annabel paled before me, that of my child vividly took its place. So I sped forward; and in a short time reached a village—through which, on inquiry, I learnt that a carrier's van proceeded daily to Bagshot, passing by Heather Place. Entering a tavern, I changed my clothes—formed the livery into a parcel—and directed it to Mr. Shackleford, —leaving the requisite sum to pay for the conveyance. I procured a vehicle, and proceeded in the track of the post-chaise towards High Wycombe. At each place we reached, I learnt that the post-chaise had traversed it; and presently I procured another vehicle with a better horse. Still I could not catch up the post-chaise; but when within a few miles of Wycombe, I learnt that it was only three quarters of an hour in advance of me. On I went—and it was only about a quarter of a mile of the town that I beheld a travelling-carriage, with four horses, approaching at a furious rate; and as it swept past, a loud cry in a female voice reached my ears. That voice was Calanthe's! I had just caught a glimpse of a lady and two gentlemen inside the carriage: but it dashed past with such lightning-speed that I should not have recognised Calanthe, were it not for that cry which her lips sent forth. As for those who were with her, I could only conjecture that they were two members of her family—perhaps her father and brother.

I instantaneously ordered the driver of the vehicle to turn back and follow the carriage. Not that I had any hope of catching it up—nor of being enabled to rescue Calanthe, even if I were to overtake it: but it was of importance I should learn the direction it pursued, so as to judge whether she was borne back to Heather Place. I traced it to Windsor: but from that point I could obtain no farther intelligence thereof. I remained at Windsor, taking up my quarters at a tavern; and deliberated upon the course which I should now pursue. That the unfortunate Calanthe had fallen into the hands of her relatives—or at all events into the hands of those who would place her in the power of her family—there could be no doubt. That she would be sent back to the Shacklefords, I did not think, on calm deliberation, was at all probable; inasmuch as it would be foreseen that I should either assist her to escape again by some means or another, or should perhaps adopt the course with which I had threatened Shackleford—namely, of appealing to a magistrate. For that Calanthe's relatives would learn that I was the author of her flight—even if they did not already know it by recognising me in the vehicle as the one to whom Calanthe's appealing cry had been sent forth—was to be regarded as a matter of certainty. But what could I do on her behalf? how was I to trace her? Doubtless she would be plunged into some fresh seclusion, and environed with still greater precautions against flight than before. I was bewildered and afflicted; and I experienced a boundless compassion for that unfortunate young lady whose infatuated love for me had been to her the source of so many trials and such cruel persecutions.

I wrote to Mr. Shackleford, requesting that my boxes might be forwarded to Windsor, and notifying to him that I had sent his livery in the manner already described. I said not a word of "the lady,"—leaving him to conjecture whatsoever he thought fit (supposing that he had as yet received no communication from those into whose hands she had fallen). In the evening of the ensuing day I received my boxes, but unaccompanied by any answer to my own letter: neither indeed had I expected any. For that and the two or three following days I wandered about the environs of Windsor, instituting every possible inquiry with a view to ascertain which direction the travelling-carriage had taken—but all without success. Windsor was a point whither so many carriages arrived, and whence so many were constantly departing in every direction, that when I came to reflect I recognised the folly of having even entertained the hope of prosecuting my researches with success. I was compelled to abandon them; and being once again adrift in the world, I had to bethink me of what I was to do next.

I did not however choose to let Mr. Rowland be misled by anything that the Shacklefords should take it into their heads to write concerning me; and I therefore penned a long letter to that gentleman, describing all that had taken place—but of course without mentioning Calanthe's name—and suffering him to believe that it was from mere motives of humanity I had connived at her escape. I received a kind answer, expressing astonishment at the narrative which I had forwarded, and assuring me that Mr. and Mrs. Rowland, so far from blaming, approved of my conduct.

CHAPTER LVIII.

READING.

I WAS looking over a Berkshire newspaper, when my eyes settled upon an advertisement offering a situation which I thought would suit me. It was that of page and valet to an elderly gentleman, who was very infirm and required constant attention. The advertisement farther specified that applicants must be of good manners and tolerably well educated,—inasmuch as amongst the duties to be performed, were those of occasionally reading to the advertiser and answering his letters. The place was represented as a very quiet one,—no company visiting the house; but that the wages would be liberal and the treatment good. It was altogether a strange advertisement: but it nevertheless struck me as one that was worth my attention. The advertiser dwelt at Reading, which was at no very great distance from Windsor; and I accordingly resolved to proceed thither. If I did not experience success in obtaining that situation, I might procure another; and it was in the interval a matter of no importance to me where I resided. If I say no more of

Calanthe at the present time, it must not be supposed that I had ceased to pity her, or had ceased to love her child, who was likewise my own. No—heaven alone can tell how my heart yearned towards that innocent little being—and how sincere was my resolve to perform my duty to Calanthe by making her my wife if chance should bring us together again. But that I now refrain from dwelling longer on the topic, is simply because of the inutility of inflicting on the reader all my thoughts and feelings in connexion with Calanthe and little Joseph.

I had another motive in proceeding to Reading, apart from that which related to the advertisement. It was that Ferdinand Foley, the highwayman, was a prisoner in Reading gaol; and I was both anxious and curious to see the result of that man's unfortunate career. The same newspaper in which I saw the advertisement, informed me that he had been committed for trial on the evidence of Mr. Henley, the commercial traveller; but it did not appear that any other cases had been brought forward against him. Not a word was said in the newspaper report about Mrs. Foley; and I still felt more sympathy for that woman than was perhaps precisely consistent with my knowledge that she had all along been an accomplice in her husband's guilt.

I repaired to Reading—left my boxes at the coach-office where I alighted—and was proceeding along the street, when my name was suddenly mentioned by a well-dressed happy-looking couple who were walking arm-in-arm; and I at once recognised Charles Linton and Charlotte Murray The latter had, however, as I soon learnt, changed her surname into that borne by her companion. In a word, they were married. My hand was grasped warmly and cordially by each; and they began overwhelming me with questions,—as to what I had been doing with myself for some time

past—whether I was now in a situation—or whether my circumstances had improved, as they both hoped and thought by my appearance? I soon gave them to understand that I had not risen in the world, but was still dependent on my own industry for my bread—and that I was then on my way to see a gentleman who had advertised for a young man to fill a situation, which I thought would suit me. I should here observe that I had frequently thought of asking Lady Calanthe, when at Heather Place, about Charlotte Murray—but something had always prevented me: for my interviews with Calanthe were usually ones of a more or less feverish excitement,—in the discussion of our plans and projects—in the fear of being observed or overheard—and affording no scope for the deliberate exercise of the memory in respect to commonplace matters. I had not therefore previously learnt that Charlotte Murray was married: but I now speedily gathered that such was the case from the manner in which she and Charles Linton addressed each other.

"You see, Joseph," said Charlotte, who looked remarkably handsome, "I threw myself away upon this good-for-nothing fellow here;"—but she glanced towards her husband in a manner which showed how fond she was of him, and how much reason she had to be satisfied with her change of life.

"And I, Joseph, quite lost my wits," said Charles, "when exposed to the wicked wiles of your old friend Charlotte. However, we manage to get on very comfortably: and if the truth be spoken, I don't think that she regrets more than I do the day that made us *one*."

"I see that you are very happy," I observed, smiling; "and I most sincerely congratulate you. "Might I ask how long ago the pleasant event took place?"

"A little more than a year," replied Charles Linton.

"And were you," I asked, addressing myself to Charlotte, "with Lady Calanthe Dundas until your marriage?"

"Yes," she replied; "or rather I was still in the Earl and Countess of Mandeville's service: for Lady Calanthe went away upon some visit—and I did not accompany her."

I knew very well that Charlotte alluded to the time when Lady Calanthe occupied the situation of governess, under the name of Matilda Palmer, at Mrs. Robinson's in the Isle of Wight: but I kept my countenance while alluding to her ladyship; and I felt assured that Charlotte herself had not the remotest suspicion of those love-affairs in which Calanthe and I had been so unfortunately involved. If however she suspected that there was anything strange in Lady Calanthe's disappearance from home at the time, she was too discreet to make the slightest allusion thereto.

"But I have not seen any of the Mandeville family since I left their service," continued Charlotte: "for we settled at Abingdon immediately after our marriage," she added, glancing towards her husband; "and there we shall be very happy, Joseph, to see you at any time. You know where Abingdon is?—not a great many miles from here. We only came to Reading yesterday, upon a little business; and are now going to the coach-office to take our places home again."

"But lest you should fancy it is only a passing civility, and not a sincere wish on our part, Joseph," observed Charles Linton, "in inviting you to our house, we must tell you more particularly how to find it, if you come to Abingdon. Suppose you went from Reading, the coach drops you in the middle of the best street at Abingdon; and on the right-hand side of the way you will see a house of tolerable size—the shop-window being full of caps, and bonnets, and ribbons, and head-dresses, and making a very pretty little show indeed. Well, on a brass-plate on the shop-door, you will see the words, '*Mrs. Linton, Milliner and Dressmaker.*'—And I can tell you too, that Mrs. Linton," he went on to say in the same good-humoured manner, with a sly look of fondness towards his wife, "keeps a shop-woman, and also four or five girls at work in an up-stairs' room. And what's more, Joseph—Mrs. Linton does not work the poor girls to death, nor half-starve them, nor scold them, nor treat them harshly."

"I am sure she would not!" I exclaimed, judging how true this panegyric of Charlotte's conduct must be from my own knowledge of her character and disposition.

"Well, to continue the description of this house of our's," proceeded Charles Linton, "you will see another brass-plate: but that is upon the private door."

"And on this brass-plate," exclaimed Charlotte, taking up the strain with a similar facile good-humour, "you will read the words, '*Mr. Linton, Wine-Merchant;*' and at the back of the house there is a snug little office where he transacts his business; and in the cellars or yard there is a man always bottling, and packing, and attending to orders. The stock is not perhaps very large: but Charles insists that it is very good—and I don't think he can be very far wrong; for somehow or another his customers increase—and if a gentleman buys a sample, he is sure to come back for a larger supply. However, there is a room at your service—for we *have* a spare one, I can assure you."

"And what is more," added Charles Linton, "the very best bottle of wine in the cellar shall be drawn on the occasion that you pay us a visit."

"Rest assured that so kind an invitation," I responded, "will not easily pass out of my recollection; and if I obtain a holiday of some two or three days, at whatever place I may get at Reading, I will most certainly avail myself of the opportunity to inflict my presence upon you. And let me add, that I am unfeignedly rejoiced to hear of your prosperity."

"Why, you see, Joseph, that both Charlotte and I had been thrifty during our respective periods of servitude; and we both pretty nearly always had good places. So, when we clubbed our little funds together, we found that we had a few hundreds to dispose of; and we have made the best of them. I am sorry we are not going to remain another day in Reading: for you should dine with us, and we would talk over old matters: but we must get back to Abingdon this afternoon."

"How is Mr. Walter Ravenshill?" I inquired: "and I should also ask concerning his wife, the beautiful Miss Jenkinson that was."

"Or Lord and Lady Ravenshill, as you should now call them," answered Linton.

"What!" I exclaimed: "are the old lord and lady dead?"

"Oh, yes—long ago!—I mean about eighteen months. The old lord died in Italy; and her ladyship, while returning to England, was seized with illness in Paris—an illness which proved fatal; so that there was only a period of about two months between their deaths. Old Mr. Jenkinson too is dead, you must know: and Lord Ravenshill—Mr. Walter as we used to call him—has managed to buy back Charlton Hall and all the Devonshire estates."

"Indeed!" I exclaimed: "these are news for me. By the bye, did you ever hear what became of those Bousteads?"

"Oh, the vulgarians!" ejaculated Charles Linton; "the proud upstarts! But they have come down a little, I can tell you! Would you believe it, Miss Euphemia,—you remember Euphemia, with her wretchedly affected manners and the disdainful tossing of her head?——well, she eloped with a Polish Prince who turned out to be an English adventurer: I believe the fellow had been the valet of a foreign nobleman—had lived much upon the Continent—and, ape-like, had picked up divers airs and grimaces which he played off to the best advantage. Those, together with a smattering of French and German—an awful pair of whiskers, and a tremendous moustache—rendered him quite irresistible to the romantic Euphemia: but I believe, too, that he talked largely of his castles and estates, his flocks and his serfs. Old Boustead, it would seem, suspected him from the very first, and would not hear of the match: so Euphemia eloped—and before the honeymoon was over, she had the mortification to find that instead of a Polish Prince, she had married an English adventurer without a single shilling. Soon afterwards something went wrong with old Boustead—his fortune was swept away as rapidly as it was made; and I have heard—I don't know how true it may be—that his wife has set up as a laundress—in other terms, a washerwoman—for which, by the bye, she was always best fitted; and that Boustead is reduced to the ignominy of turning a mangle. At all events, their ruin was complete; and so I think you will agree with me that Mr. Walter—or the present Lord Ravenshill rather—had a very lucky escape."

"I hope that he is happy with her ladyship?" I said.

"Yes—they are as happy, I have no doubt, as they well can be. They have everything to render them so; and when that is the case," added Charles Linton, looking archly at his handsome wife, "people would be very discontented if they did not wear bright faces."

Charlotte blushed, though joy shone in her eyes: for she comprehended full well that her husband was alluding to the happiness which they themselves enjoyed, and to the bright looks which they both consequently wore.

"Ah! by the bye," inquired Mrs. Linton, "how was it, Joseph, that you came to leave Myrtle Lodge with such wonderful suddenness? You evaporated all in a moment, as if melting into thin air. You never said good bye; and I felt rather offended with you at the time."

"As much offended with me," I said, smiling, "as you were one day at that same Myrtle Lodge when I told you that Charles had desired to be remembered to you."

"I recollect, you good-for-nothing fellow, that you tantalized me on the subject," said Charlotte. "But do tell me, wherefore did you leave so suddenly? Mr. Tiverton took you away with him to Exeter; and when he came back, he said that he had been compelled to part with you, but that it was through no misconduct that entailed any disgrace upon your character—but that you were a very honourable young man; and this he said in the presence of all the servants, and very impressively too. I must admit that I was much astonished——"

"I am glad that Mr. Tiverton did me that amount of justice," I observed. "He promised that he would do so; and it appears that he kept his word. As for my leaving Myrtle Lodge so suddenly——"

Just at that instant a neighbouring church-clock began to proclaim the hour of noon; and Charles Linton exclaimed, "Heavens, dear Charlotte, we shall be late for the coach! Good bye, Joseph—good bye, my dear friend; and recollect your promise to visit us at Abingdon!"

"Good bye, Joseph," said Charlotte; "and remember that you will get quite out of my good books if you do not show that you regard us as friends and come and visit us."

They both shook hands most warmly with me; and hurried along the street to the coach-office. I was by no means sorry that the discourse was interrupted just at that particular point by the striking of the clock: for I was about to stammer and flounder through some excuse to account for my sudden departure from Myrtle Lodge, in response to Charlotte Linton's query: for I should not for the world have thought of making a particular allusion to Lady Calanthe. But if I were glad that the conversation was cut short in that manner, I was infinitely more rejoiced at the spectacle of matrimonial happiness which I had just beheld, and at the evidences of that prosperity which was enjoyed by so worthy a couple.

I continued my way to the number of the house indicated in the advertisement: but I as yet knew not the name of the gentleman whom I was about to seek. The house itself was a small one, and by no means of an imposing appearance. It was old-fashioned, with heavy overhanging gables, which seemed ready to fall forward into the street. The chimneys were of a massiveness that almost led one to suppose the architect must have made a mistake and fancied he was building them for a vast mansion. The upper windows were latticed, and had little white curtains, which gave the front of the dwelling a mean and meagre appearance. The ground-floor window was small; and draperies of dingy red were seen through. It was at the door of this house that I knocked—though with an idea that either the place would not suit me or that I should not suit the place. The summons was answered by an elderly female, whom there was not the slightest difficulty in at once assigning to the class known as char-women. She was short and stout, with so little symmetry of shape that an immense sack of bran tied round with a rope, would not have been an improper illustration of her

figure. This figure was clothed in an old dirty cotton gown, patched with odd pieces in divers places: a coarse apron had the corner so turned up that it descended into an angle: her sleeves were tucked up—and her great brawny arms bore unmistakable evidence of having just emerged from a pail; so that I concluded the excellent woman had been interrupted by my summons, in the midst of some such interesting and healthy process as scrubbing down a staircase. She had an old rusty black bonnet perched on the top of her head, just as if it had fallen there by accident; and her grizzly hair peeped forth from underneath a cap which looked as if, by mistake for the flannel, it had wiped down the very stairs she had been scrubbing. She had a red face, a snuffy nose, and watery eyes; and the instant she opened the front door, my olfactory nerves were rendered sensible of a strong odour of the juniper berry, just as if I had mistaken the house and had knocked at the door of a wine-vaults. The aspect of this creature set me even more against the place than the external appearance of the dwelling itself had already done.

"Can I speak to the gentleman?" I inquired, determined not to retreat without at least seeing something more of the situation for which I had thought of applying.

"Well, I think as how you can," responded the char-woman; "leastways if so be Sir Matthew isn't a-taking of his nap."

"Pray what is the gentleman's name?" I asked.

"Well, I'm blessed!" cried the char-woman: and as her mouth opened wide, simultaneously with her eyes, at what she evidently deemed marvellous in my question, the sensation of the air being fragrant with gin was more perceptible than at first. "Pray, sir, who be you that comes to a gen'leman's 'ouse which the name is unbeknown. I rayther think, young man, you're up to nuffin good."

"Nonsense, Mrs. Tibenham!" said another elderly female, now emerging from the back part of the premises: and she was of a very different appearance from the char-woman whom she thus addressed—for she was cleanly and respectable, and had the air of a housekeeper. There was a certain degree of matronly kindness too in her looks; and as she came forward she surveyed me with a sort of respectful attention.

"Excoose me, mem—but did you say *nonsense?*" inquired Mrs. Tibenham indignantly. "I hope, Mrs. Hodgson mem, you will correct yourself and not imply such a hepithet to the like of me. It isn't bekase bad times and troubles eompels me to do a little charing, and take in a little washing when I'm not engaged for the day—which is half-a-crown and my wittals, with a drop of gin and three pints of porter, besides any broken meat to take home—that you should consult a respectable woman. There was poor Tibenham, which carried on a good business in the catsmeat and tripe-dressing line for forty year till he were called away to give a blessed account of his-self in another world——"

"Well, well, Mrs. Tibenham, I did not mean to insult you, as you seem to imagine," interrupted Mrs. Hodgson: then turning to me, she said politely, "Might I inquire your business?"

"I have called," I answered, "in respect to an advertisement."

"Indeed!" said Mrs. Hodgson, who had evidently half suspected that such was the case, but yet had been half in doubt that I was really an applicant for the vacant situation.

"Wot adwert*is*ement?" demanded Mrs. Tibenham, as if with the indignation of one who strongly suspected that some mystery was going on into which she had not been duly and properly initiated; so that her prescriptive rights of char-woman had all been scandalously violated by that extreme want of confidence.

"An advertisement," responded Mrs. Hodgson, mildly, "for a young man to take a situation here."

"And it were all unbeknown to me!" cried Mrs. Tibenham. "Now, Mrs. Hodgson mem, you have knowed me a matter of five-and-twenty year, which was a friendship that persisted betwixt us, and which you gave me the preference in doing the charing-work; but there were no rale friendship, bekase you've kept me out of your confidence, which was undeserving by me, Mrs. Hodgson mem, and my feelin's is hurted. It wounds me *here*, Mrs. Hodgson—*here*, mem, in my buzzim:" and what with the influence of those afflicted feelings and of the gin, the poor char-woman, seemed mightily affected as she placed her dirty hand upon that region within which the heart existed.

"Will you walk in," said the housekeeper to me, "and speak to Sir Matthew Heseltine? He is disengaged, and will see you at once."

I passed by Mrs. Tibenham, receiving a good stare from her watery eyes and a good puff of juniper fragrance from her mouth; and I was ushered by Mrs. Hodgson into a small back room fitted up as a library or a study, with numerous mouldy-looking books and very old-fashioned furniture. In a large arm-chair sat a gentleman, whose age could not have been much less than seventy and whose form was so emaciated that he looked like a living atomy. He wore a black silk skull-cap, around which his silvery hair formed a scanty fringe. His face was colourless—unless indeed it were somewhat sallow: his features were angular and sharp—his mouth going in through loss of teeth. And yet there was no absence of animation in that countenance. On the contrary, it seemed all alive with a peculiar viperish keenness of look, and with an expression habitually mistrustful and suspicious. It was not altogether a severe expression, but certainly a most unprepossessing one. The eyes, small and bright, appeared literally to speak when fixed scrutinizingly on any one who became the object of their regards: they seemed resolved to drag out all the secrets and the hidden purposes of the soul of whomsoever they thus rested upon. No—not rested upon; but pierced through and through. And this strange-looking figure was clad in a somewhat rusty suit of black, with a white cravat, which, as well as the shirt, had either been very ill-washed, or had been worn from the middle of the preceding week. Less and less did I like the aspect of the situation which, from the terms of the advertisement, I had at first thought would suit me so well.

Mrs. Hodgson, the housekeeper, having ushered me into the room, retired without speaking a word; and for upwards of a minute did Sir Matthew Heseltine regard me fixedly. As those horrid-

looking eyes were thus riveted upon me, I really felt as if I had committed some misdeed, and was fearful of having it dragged forth to the light: for I cannot otherwise explain the unpleasant sensation which the old man's piercing, scrutinizing, speaking regards caused me to experience. It was a long time before he opened his lips; and I made up my mind that when he did begin to address me, it would be in a mumbling and scarcely articulate manner: for it was plainly evident, though his mouth was sucked in and his lips firmly compressed, that he had no teeth inside. I therefore actually started when he suddenly broke forth in a voice as loud, as sharp, and as ludicrously peculiar, as that in which a showman makes Punch speak when addressing Judy. It seemed as if it were in a moment of irritation that he thus broke querulously forth,—just such a voice that might only have been expected if I were an intruder and he had angrily wanted to know what I wanted, and in the same breath had bidden me go about my business.

"And so, young man, you have come after the place?" were the words that thus thrilled through my brain, and produced that galvanic effect upon me.

"Yes, sir," I answered. "I saw the advertisement in the newspaper——"

"Did you read it for yourself? or did anybody read it to you?" he demanded sharply.

"I read it for myself, sir," was my response, given with a somewhat offended air.

"Oh, very well! Then you *can* read? It isn't every one who has got a good coat upon his back that has any education. Now then, take up one of those books and read me something:"—and he pointed with his long, withered, bony fingers to some volumes that lay scattered about upon the table.

I took up the first that came: it was a Latin book—and I was about to take another, when Sir Matthew cried in a shriller and more querulous voice than before, "No, no! read *that*, whatever it is!"

I accordingly read the first portion of one of the Books in Livy; and as I went on, I saw that the old gentleman was surveying me with increasing wonderment: his brows, naturally corrugated, slowly arched up till his forehead became a perfect mass of wrinkles—and by a simultaneous movement he gradually raised himself upright in his chair, he having been previously leaning completely back.

"That will do—that will do," he presently cried. "I didn't know it was Livy you had taken up—I thought it was some English book, and that as you saw hard words the instant you opened it, you were afraid to tackle them. Well, it is not bad—a false quantity here and there—that's all." And then he asked abruptly, "How came you to know Latin?"

"From the simple fact, sir, that I was taught it at school:"—and I had half a mind to add that I would not trouble Sir Matthew Heseltine any farther,—when he suddenly put another quick jerking question.

"And who are you?" was the query.

"My name is Joseph Wilmot, sir," I responded. "But——"

"Nonsense, *but!* You don't mean to say that Joseph Wilmot is your proper name, but that you go by another. How old are you?"

"Twenty, sir."

"And your parents—your relations——"

"I have none."

"Oh!"—and methought that for an instant his looks grew kinder: but it was very hard to attribute to their right sources any variations which the expression of that singular countenance underwent. "Have you a good character?"

"I have written testimonials, sir," was my answer; "but I am afraid that I shall not suit you:"—and I edged towards the door.

"You mean literally," shrieked forth the old gentleman, "that you think *I* sha'n't suit *you!*"—and he fixed upon me his horrid speaking eyes, as if they were glaring with a sort of malignant triumph, while his mouth was drawn in to a degree that his lips had totally disappeared. I never saw such a strange expression of countenance in all my life. Indeed, I knew not whether he would the next moment fly at me like a tiger-cat, or whether he would burst out into a peal of laughter. But he did neither—though it really seemed as if that strange mood of his must have ended in one way or the other. But leaning back in his chair again, he said in a gentler voice, "Don't be in such a hurry—and don't judge by first appearances. I sha'n't take you for the sake of *your* appearance, though it is decent enough; and you should not object to me on account of *mine*, though it may be forbidding enough."

There was certainly much truth in the moral thus conveyed; and I therefore resolved to remain and undergo a farther questioning.

"Where are these testimonials of yours?" he abruptly demanded.

"Here, sir:"—and I produced the written characters given me by Lord Ravenshill's steward, and by Mr. Tiverton of Myrtle Lodge.

Sir Matthew Heseltine took them, and to my surprise began reading them without spectacles,—which struck me as singular indeed for a man who could not have been much less than near seventy years of age.

"Why, these are old ones!" his voice rang shrillily forth. "What have you been doing with yourself during all the interval?"

"I have been in service in other places, sir. My last place was at a gentleman's named Shackleford, in the neighbourhood of Bagshot: but I cannot refer you to him."

"Is he dead?" demanded Sir Matthew, "or transported?"

"No, sir. But here is a letter from a highly respectable man—a Mr. Rowland at Manchester; and you will see that he gives me credit for my motives in having left Mr. Shackleford."

"But how do I know that this Manchester letter isn't a forgery——eh?" and again his horrid-looking eyes seemed to glare with a fiend-like malignity upon me.

I indignantly snatched up my hat, and was about to hasten from the room, when Sir Matthew Heseltine cried out, "Stop, stop! don't run away in this fashion, or you will make me think that what I suggested *is* the truth after all."

"Then I will stay, sir, to vindicate myself," I answered, my cheeks still glowing with a sense of

unmerited and wanton outrage. "Read Mr. Rowland's letter."

"That's what I mean to do," exclaimed Sir Matthew; and taking it from my hand, he perused every line of it. "Well, it certainly looks genuine: but I don't judge by appearances—though *you* seem to do so when you take me for a crabbed, ill-tempered, offensive, and malignant old man. Well, well, perhaps I am—or perhaps I am not:"—and then again did his eyes glare upon me as if he positively experienced a delight in plunging me into a state of bewilderment as to the opinion that I ought to form with regard to him. "Have you any objection, in case we agree on all other details, that I should write two letters to Manchester—one to the Mayor of the town, to ask if Mr. Rowland is a respectable man, or whether indeed there is such a man at all—and the other to Mr. Rowland himself (if he be not a phantom) inquiring whether this document is genuine or a fabrication."

"So far from having any objection," I answered, "it will please me for you to write such letters—inasmuch as every honest man is naturally anxious to prove himself to be so when he is unjustly suspected: and that is exactly my position. But pardon me, sir, for telling you at once that after everything which has transpired, I would much rather decline entering your service. I feel that in justice to myself——"

"Justice to yourself!" actually yelled forth Sir Matthew. "Why, you are doing yourself an immense *in*justice! What the deuce!—do you think you can come and jump into a situation all in a moment without answering questions or without having inquiries put? You have a much better knowledge of Latin than you have of your own interests. Let us suppose the applications to have been made to Manchester, and the answers to be satisfactory——just let us suppose that much, I repeat. Well, what do you say to forty guineas a year and two suits of plain clothes—good food—kind treatment—a comfortable home? Are all these to be lightly rejected?"—and again his lips were sucked in and strongly compressed—his eye-brows were raised—he leant forward, and stared at me with a sort of knowingness in which something vibrated—but whether it were good-natured raillery or malignant pleasantry, I could not possibly decide. He was either expressing the former feeling in a very singular manner—or else he was tantalizing me with a truly diabolical enjoyment.

"My only objects, sir," I answered, "are to obtain a comfortable home—receive good treatment—and eat the bread of my own industry: for which in return I proffer all the attentions I am enabled to bestow."

"Sit down," abruptly exclaimed Sir Matthew Heseltine: and with his long skinny skeleton-like fingers he pointed to a chair.

I took the seat—and began really to think that of the two opinions between which I had been balancing, I must adopt the more favourable one in respect to himself: but again was I bewildered by the unaccountable manner in which he continued to stare at me with those horrid speaking eyes of his.

"Now listen to me, Joseph Wilmot," he presently went on to say; "and don't interrupt. I need not tell you that I am an old man; but I must add that I have neither kith nor kin——I mean whom I choose to call so:"—and here for a moment methought that his singular querulous voice was tinctured with sadness and that his lips quivered as if with some inward emotion. "Well, I am a lonely man," he quickly exclaimed: "I dwell here almost in solitude. The woman who introduced you, is my housekeeper—a good enough woman in her way, but without two ideas beyond her own peculiar avocations. Then there's a drab of a servant-girl: but of course *she* has not even one idea apart from her pots and kettles."

I thought of the char-woman—but deemed it better not to make verbal allusion to her, the more particularly as she was only a casual and not a permanent appendage to the household.

"I have never yet kept a male domestic—I never would!" continued Sir Matthew Heseltine, raising his voice until it almost reached a scream as he uttered the last words. "People out of doors say I am rich, and that I am an old miser. Whether I am or not, is no matter: the world thinks so—and that being the case, I never chose to run the risk of having my throat cut in the middle of the night by some great hulking ruffian of a footman who would perhaps come with a forged character into a respectable house when he ought to have been dancing on the treadmill. But lately I have felt dull and lonely. You saw me read those papers just now with comparative ease: but my sight is failing me nevertheless. Well then, I want somebody to read to me. From time to time I have a letter or two to write on business—and as my hand shakes, I can no longer do it for myself. So I want somebody to write my letters. My limbs are enfeebled—I have a difficulty in performing my toilet. So I want somebody to help me. I cannot walk any distance without support; and so I want the arm of some one to lean upon. Now you begin to understand all that I *do* want. I have told you what you are to expect in the shape of wages, clothes, food, and treatment: on the other hand I have told you likewise what I require of you—and it is for you to decide whether you will take the place or not. Do just as you like. You are not the only one in the world that is to be got hold of."

I hesitated what answer to give. I was somewhat inclined to try the experiment; but yet I feared that the old gentleman's temper was such a one as I never could endure, particularly if I were to be thrown into such continual contact with him as the many services he had specified would inevitably occasion.

"Oh, I tell you very candidly," he went on to say, as if those horrid-looking eyes of his could read my secret thoughts as easily as if they were printed in one of his own books, and that book lay open before him—"you are afraid I shall prove irascible, peevish, ill-natured, and malignant—that I shall exhibit all the caprices of old age—that in my second childhood I shall give as much trouble as ever I did in my first. Well, it may be so: but even if I had the conviction that it would be all the very reverse, it is not for me to sing my own praises and tell you that I am good-natured, benevolent, unsuspicious, full of confidence, fearful of speaking my mind, and philosophic enough to sacrifice all my own comforts rather than make

those whom I pay bustle about. Now if I told you all this," he screeched forth, "I should lie most egregiously. In a word, as you find me now, so I dare say you will always find me—sometimes perhaps a little better—sometimes a little worse—but just as likely to be worse and never better. I think I need say no more. Give me your decision."

While Sir Matthew Heseltine was delivering himself of this last long speech, my thoughts gradually brought me towards a conclusion. I could not help fancying that he was endeavouring to try me to his utmost, and by the severest tests: I likewise conceived it possible that what I took for malignity and ill-nature, might be more of an habitual cynicism occasioned by his hitherto lonely mode of life—and in short, that at bottom he might be of a much better disposition than appeared on the surface. Besides, the whole tenour of his discourse was permeated with a certain straight-forwardness—or at least had an impress of fairness which decided me in coming to an affirmative decision.

"But one word more!" he suddenly shrieked forth, in his ludicrously shrill Punchinello voice. "You saw by the advertisement that no company is kept here: and that is the exact truth. You will be as dull as an anchorite—your life will be a terrible monotony. I hate company—I hate society—I was almost going to say I hate the whole world. Just now I told you that people think me rich; and I have had kind friends and considerate neighbours," he went on to observe, with the bitterest sneer on his lips, and the most caustic irony in his tone, "who have forced themselves upon me—who have vowed that they could not possibly think of leaving me all to myself—who have plagued my very life out to go and dine with them—and all that sort of thing. But I have pretty soon sent them about their business, I can tell you!"—and his eyes glared on me as if in sardonic satisfaction at the brilliant exploits thus performed in exiling all who approached him and shutting himself up in the seclusion of his own cynical mistrust and suspicion.

"I am not at all terrified, sir, at what you have been saying:—though really you will pardon me for observing——"

"That I have done my best to set you against the place?" he cried, his voice ringing through my brain. "Well, if I have highly coloured it in a bad sense, so much the better for you. But don't rely upon *that*, young man—don't rely upon *that!* Rather make up your mind that it is all just as I have told you, and as much worse as you like. And now, what is your decision?"

"I will accept the situation, sir," I answered, rising from my seat. "When will you write to Manchester?"

He looked at me in so peculiar a manner as if he himself thought that I was now taking my turn at malignant bantering: his brows were lifted completely up to the middle of his forehead—and his mouth was drawn in so that the profile displayed a sharp angular chasm between the nose and the chin. Then he suddenly ejaculated, "Write to Manchester!—to be sure I shall! If you think I am joking, you are very wrong, I can tell you. I shall write by this day's post to the Mayor and to Mr. Rowland,—always supposing that there is such a person as your Mr. Rowland—of which I am not yet quite satisfied in my own mind. But I have no doubt that there is a Mayor at Manchester——aye, and a constable too at Reading for any one who tries to play off his tricks."

I was terribly inclined to retract my decision and hasten forth indignantly from the house: for I really felt as if I were being most grossly insulted.

"Come, come—no display of humour, young man!" cried Sir Matthew: "it is a bad beginning—and instead of your declining to come, I ought to decline to receive you. However, I will give *you* a trial—as you are perhaps disposed to give *me* one:" and then his eyes were fixed upon me with the sharpness of needles. "You had better come at once—this very day: a room is in readiness to receive you."

"But the Manchester letters, sir?" I interjected.

He looked at me in such a way that I really thought for the moment he meant to spring towards me and endeavour to knock me down: and then he shrieked forth, "Of what consequence are they to you, if you are so sure that they will be satisfactory? To be sure I shall write them!—don't go running away with the idea that I sha'n't. But it need not prevent you from coming to the house at once. I could but turn you neck and crop out again and pack you off to gaol, if the answers to the letters should prove unsatisfactory. When do you come? Answer me that."

"Within an hour, sir," I responded.

He said not another word—but followed me with his horrid-looking eyes until the door of the apartment closed behind me. Mrs. Tibenham, the char-woman, was in the passage, and appeared to be retreating in a somewhat suspicious manner from that door, as if her ear had been applied to the keyhole all the time—as I had no doubt it was: but snatching up a scrubbing brush, she plumped down upon her knees, and began working away as if she had laid a wager to clean a certain number of stairs in a given time and was resolved to win it. I quitted the house to proceed to the coach-office and order my boxes to be taken thither: but I almost repented of having accepted a situation in the service of one who, even if he might turn out somewhat better than he seemed, was at all events a character of sufficient eccentricity to render my post no very agreeable one. Little did I foresee——But I must not anticipate, as at the instant I am about to do while penning this portion of my memoirs.

I had promised to enter my new place in an hour; and I availed myself of this brief license to walk about the town and render myself acquainted with the principal streets. As I was proceeding along one of the thoroughfares, I suddenly encountered Mrs. Foley. Only a week had elapsed since last I saw her, on that memorable night when I conveyed to her the afflicting intelligence of a husband's capture: and how altered she was! She looked as if she had just risen from a sick-bed after several months' illness: her countenance was haggard—her eyes sunken—and her features wore the impress of a grief bordering on despair. She was endeavouring to hurry past me, evidently overwhelmed with shame, as if she were a lost,

fallen, and degraded creature in the worst possible sense: but I stopped her, saying, "I was thinking of your unfortunate husband at the very moment I encountered you."

She burst into tears, and bent upon me, through their dimness, a look of the most earnest gratitude: for I had spoken in compassionating accents. She seized my hand and wrung it fervently: but she could not immediately speak—her utterance was choked with low deep sobs. I was profoundly affected; and I said some words to console her.

"This is indeed kind of you—most kind!" she at length murmured, at the same time making a visible effort to keep down the evidences of her affliction. "Do you not find me changed?——Oh, I know that I am!—and I shall be changed infinitely more ere all is over!"

"And your husband—how does he bear up?" I asked.

"Oh! were he alone in the world, he would endure everything with resolution and fortitude," she responded, the tears still trickling down her cheeks: "but it is for my sake——"

And here she stopped short, unable to conclude the sentence.

"When will the trial come on?" I inquired after a pause, and putting the question in the most delicate manner.

"Not for the next three months," answered Mrs. Foley, in a voice so deeply desponding that it was scarcely audible. "Oh, what a long protracted agony to pass through!—what sorrow and suffering to be endured! Would that it were all over at once! I know what must be the result—expatriation for the remainder of his life! But I shall go with him——Oh, I shall accompany him! Never, never would I desert him!—for criminal though we are—wicked as we must appear in your eyes—hideous as was the long-sustained mockery of our respectability,—yet is the love which we bear for each other truly genuine and sincere!"

"Do you think," I asked, "that if Mr. Henley, the commercial traveller, were to speak a word in your husband's favour——But are there any other cases to be brought against him? From what I read in the newspaper, it would appear not."

"Nor are there," rejoined Mrs. Foley. "Oh, if the prosecutor could but be induced to recommend him to mercy, it might have some weight—it might diminish the term of his sentence!"

"I have some little acquaintance with Mr. Henley," I said; "and rest assured that when the time arrives, I will plead earnestly on your husband's behalf. And now will you excuse me if I proffer you pecuniary assistance?"

"No, no—not for worlds!" exclaimed Mrs. Foley. "Thanks—a thousand thanks for your kind promise in respect to Mr. Henley!"

She again wrung my hand—and then hurried away; while I proceeded slowly towards Sir Matthew Heseltine's house, pondering in a saddened manner upon the mournful scene which had just taken place.

CHAPTER LIX.

AN ECCENTRIC MASTER.

Sir Matthew Heseltine was a Baronet, and was reputed to be the possessor of great wealth. It was also said that he was a miser: but this allegation no doubt arose chiefly from the circumstance that he lived in a comparatively humble manner, when his means—if they were truly represented—would have enabled him to inhabit a fine mansion. He was not however parsimonious in the general acceptance of the term: there was no meanness nor stinginess practised in his little household: Mrs. Hodgson, in her capacity of housekeeper, was amply supplied with funds to conduct the establishment according to the limited scale on which it was based. We had good food, and plenty of it. There was certainly no waste—but still there was no stint. She herself was a kind-hearted woman: she understood her master's ways, and performed her avocations with as few words as possible. The other servant was a young woman of about seventeen or eighteen—of respectable appearance—and by no means meriting the appellation of "a drab of a girl," which our cynical master had bestowed upon her. I soon learnt that it was merely from compassionate motives the housekeeper gave occasional employment to Mrs. Tibenham the char-woman,—she having seen somewhat better days, and being left a widow with a large family to support.

My duties were precisely those which Sir Matthew had described: but it was some time before I could even begin to understand his true character. He always spoke in that loud, shrill, querulous tone: he always looked as if he thought people wanted to take some advantage of him, but would find themselves very much mistaken. He was not exactly irritable—but had a certain cynicism of character, as well as a nervousness of manner, which found expression in that sharpness of the voice and keenness of the look. I conceived him to be an obstinate man: I mean that if he took anything into his head, nothing could beat it out again; and he would adhere to a purpose as well as to an argument with unflinching perseverance, although perhaps convinced in his own heart that he was in error. In the same way, whatever he fancied, must be performed at once: he had many of the caprices of old age—many whims and oddities—but when these were promptly gratified, there were certain ways by which, when I came to know him better, I discovered that his satisfaction was expressed. He was a clever man—had read immensely—but on all sorts of subjects had his own peculiar notions and theories; and to these he would adhere with an immoveable tenacity. If contradicted, he would sometimes display an impatience that was irascible; and therefore I soon found that the best plan was to let him have his own way as much as possible. This however I could not always do: for he would sometimes force me into an argument on some topic that might transpire in the course of my reading to him;—and when thus driven into discussion, I did not choose invariably to sacrifice my own opinion to his domineering and dogmatic authority. On one or two occasions, within the first

week that I was with him, he flew into a rage because I would not succumb to his own views in respect to the topics we were discussing: and then I abruptly quitted the library. This conduct on my part gave him no offence—but, on the contrary, methought that he was not altogether displeased at such manifestation of my spirit. As for the Manchester letters, he never wrote them at all: but if ever I slily alluded to them—as I did at times—he would burst forth with a shrill screeching assurance that I might depend upon it the application should be made both to the Mayor and to Mr. Rowland.

The more I saw of Sir Matthew Heseltine, the more I was convinced that in some earlier part of his life he must have experienced calamities or misfortunes of some sort which had rendered him the being that he was; and in this opinion I was strengthened by the vehemence with which he occasionally inveighed against the ingratitude which persons in this world often experience at the hands of those who are nearest and dearest to them. But I of course never uttered a word which might be construed into a desire to lead him on to explanations in connexion with the subject.

Two months elapsed; and though Sir Matthew's conduct towards me continued precisely the same, yet I could not help thinking that in his heart he appreciated my sedulous attentions. I got so accustomed to the peculiarities of his manner, that they gradually ceased to produce upon me the same unpleasant effect as at first. His voice rang not so acutely through my brain; and I cared not when his eyes were riveted on me with that expression which at the outset had appeared so horrid. I generally read to him about three hours every day, but at different parts of the day: an hour was spent in leading him out to walk—for though his intellects were active enough, his limbs

were much enfeebled;—and I generally had several hours at my own disposal. Occasionally I wrote letters to his dictation; and these were to a solicitor in London, and to a bailiff or steward in Westmoreland. I thence discovered that he possessed property consisting of houses in London, and that he had money in the Funds—likewise that he had an estate in the county just named: but the letters were always so peculiarly worded that it was impossible to ascertain whether the houses were mansions or cottages—whether the money in the Funds consisted of hundreds or thousands—or of what extent the Westmoreland property might be. It seemed as if he chose to veil these things in mystery, and that I should be but little the wiser from the process of letter-writing. Yet while dictating those letters, it was impossible to judge by his manner that he was studiously enwrapping his affairs in that mystery: but on the contrary, it might have been supposed that it was his own perfectly natural though peculiar way of conducting his business. As for any letters which he received in answer to those which he sent off, he himself invariably read them; and he locked them up with the utmost care, as if fearful that I should seize an opportunity to peep into their contents.

He never asked me about my own antecedents —never exhibited the slightest curiosity to ascertain how it was that, being tolerably well educated, and having been brought up in a genteel position, I had become reduced to the necessity of servitude. It seemed as if he purposely avoided any discourse that might for a moment lead me to think he was in any way interested in me. He evidently had a mortal distrust for all the world; and in the cynicism of his impressions, never appeared to give any one credit for an honest sincerity. Indeed, on this point he would sometimes burst forth into observations that were calculated to wound the feelings most keenly; and if he saw that such was the effect of his remarks, he would either stare with an expression of malignant satisfaction—or else, on the other hand, endeavour to atone for what he had said by saying something which he meant to be a salve, but which was very likely to be ten times more galling than the original cause of offence. Yet I felt convinced he had not altogether a bad heart—far from it. If a case of distress were mentioned to him, he would burst forth into vehement denunciations of the extravagance, profligacy, idleness, and unworthiness of those who were suffering: but he would end by remitting succour—often enough to a liberal amount,—at the same time declaring that the recipients must not consider that he had been duped or deluded into a belief of their lying representations. Sometimes he went to church on Sunday,—I invariably accompanying him, and sitting in the same pew. But he never opened the prayer-book; and throughout the sermon he would sit with his horrid speaking eyes riveted on the clergyman—his mouth drawn in so that the lips totally disappeared; and no human being could tell by the expression of his face, whether he were devoutly edified by the discourse, or whether he were passing in his mind a running commentary of sneering irony and contemptuous sarcasm on the whole line of theological argument.

During the two months which thus elapsed from the day of my entrance into my new place, I had not once encountered Mrs. Foley: but from time to time I heard, in an indirect manner, that the health of the prisoner was suffering much, and that his wife was as constantly with him as the regulations of the gaol would permit. At length, one day—as I was reading a local newspaper to Sir Matthew Heseltine—I came upon a paragraph which, alluding to the captive highwayman, and speaking feelingly of his wife's attentions, added that she was experiencing the greatest distress, and would have starved were it not for the succour of some benevolent ladies, who, moved by her devotedness towards her husband, had rendered her assistance.

"What!" literally yelled forth Sir Matthew, so that any one who did not rightly understand him, would have thought he had exploded into a towering rage: "assistance to a highwayman's wife! I never heard of such a thing! Those who render it, ought to be hanged themselves. It is a premium upon villany—an encouragement of crime! I never do such things. Now, don't you look at me, young man, in a way as if you thought I did. I'll——I'll chuck this book at your head——egad, I will in a moment, if you dare entertain the thought that I would encourage such proficacy."

I made no observation: but I knew perfectly well how it would all end.

"Why don't you go on reading?" he querulously exclaimed. "I suppose you fancy I have something more to say?—but you are mistaken. I hav'n't another word—I am dumb—I am holding my tongue. What! you don't believe me? Succouring a highwayman's wife indeed!—it is monstrous—preposterous—outrageous—abominable! And so she would have starved, would she? So much the better!—and too good a fate for her into the bargain! Ah, you dare fix your eyes on that purse of mine lying on the desk? I suppose you mean to pocket it the moment my back is turned. But you sha'n't have the opportunity, you pilfering young rascal!"

"I never pilfered anything yet, sir," I answered firmly: "and if you think I am capable of it, you ought not to keep me another moment——"

"Capable of it?" he screamed forth: "of course you are capable of it! Everybody is capable of a roguish action. We are all rogues—and you perhaps one of the keenest, for anything that I know to the contrary. I have my suspicions, I can tell you. Ah, you start—do you? and you turn red? Well, I only told you that you were capable of a roguery: but I don't *yet* accuse you of having committed one. Give me that purse, sir."

I did as I was ordered; and Sir Matthew snatched it out of my hand as if I had given him some mortal offence which he knew not how sufficiently to resent. Then he went on inveighing vehemently against the charitable ladies alluded to in the newspaper paragraph; but all the while he was gradually extracting some coins from his purse.

"A set of maudlin sentimentalists!" he cried: "a parcel of trumpery cheats! Why don't they give their alms in proper channels? How dare you look at what I am doing?—what do you mean by regarding this purse so greedily, you ugly

young monkey? I know very well that in your precious conceit you fancy that you are an uncommon good-looking fellow, with that hair of your's parted on one side; and you would have the world believe that it curls naturally—all nonsense! Paper and tongs—that's what it is! You waste your time in trying to make yourself look smart: but you don't succeed though—for you are about the worst-looking young chap I ever set eyes on. Now don't fancy this money is for you: you are not worth your salt——Come, come, no bridling up! Here, sir—take this money, and run off and find out where some poor deserving creature lives—I don't care who—and give it to her."

"You mean Mrs. Foley, sir," I said, taking the five guineas which he put into my hand: and I really could have seized his own hand and shaken it warmly at the instant, though he had been more abusive towards myself than ever I had known him before.

"Well, and what if I do? This is just like your impudence:"—and then he stared at me in his usual fashion, sucking in his lips at the same time so that his profile exhibited a terrific indentation between his angular nose and his peaked chin. "If I do send any money to such a worthless creature, it is only because I want to shame her into doing something industrious and honourable to earn her livelihood. Don't tell her from whom it comes—I won't have my name paraded in a newspaper, unless it is to send her to the treadmill as a tramp and vagrant. Mind and let her know that the person who remits her this money isn't deceived by her shameful imposture. And—and, Joseph——you may just drop a hint——But no! Don't lead her to imagine that she is to expect any more from the same quarter. And now be off."

I sallied forth; and being ignorant where Mrs. Foley lived, proceeded to the office of the local newspaper in which I had read the paragraph concerning her: for I suspected from the wording thereof, that the place of her abode must be known at that office. Nor was I disappointed; and having obtained the address, I hastened thither. It was in an obscure and poor street that Mrs. Foley resided; and on inquiring at the house, I learnt that she was then at the prison with her husband—but that in a few minutes she might be expected home, inasmuch as for the two hours in the middle of the day—while the prisoners and turnkeys, and others connected with the gaol, were getting their dinners—the gates were closed against all persons from outside. The woman of the house, though a poor, was a respectable-looking, well-spoken, and good-hearted creature: she invited me to walk into her own little parlour and wait till Mrs. Foley returned. She discoursed upon the circumstances of the unfortunate lady,—saying that she herself had done what little she could for her, and had never thought of troubling her for her rent; but that when she found Mrs. Foley was rapidly making away with even the most necessary articles of wearing apparel, and had recently suffered the greatest privations—which however she kept secret as much as possible—the landlady had privately mentioned the unhappy creature's circumstances to one or two charitable ladies to whom she had access; and hence the sympathetic movement which had been made in her favour.

"Now, thank heaven," added the landlady, "she is more comfortable as far as money goes: but nothing, I am afraid, will ever restore her to health and spirits—for both seem to be shattered by the dreadful calamity which has overtaken her husband."

In the course of a few minutes Mrs. Foley made her appearance; and the woman of the house left us alone together in her parlour—for she no doubt judged that I had come on a charitable errand, though I had said nothing in explanation of my business—nor had I mentioned the name of Sir Matthew Hesseltine. Neither was it my purpose to do so, as he had particularly charged me to the contrary.

Two months had elapsed since I had last seen Mrs. Foley: I had found her altered on that occasion—but she was still more terribly changed now. Though certainly not nine-and-twenty years of age, she looked forty: her figure, which was wont to be of such rich fulness of proportions, had fallen away—her features were haggard and careworn—her dark eyes, which I had seen a comparatively short time back so full of lustre, were dimmed, as well as being sunken and hollow—and altogether she was but the ghost of her former self. A blush of shame and confusion—a blush of utter humiliation—mantled upon her countenance when she beheld me; and then sinking upon a chair, she burst into tears. I was myself deeply affected; and for upwards of a minute could not give utterance to a word.

"You are still staying in Reading?" she at length said, being the first to break silence: "or have you only come hither on a passing visit?"

"I am living here altogether," was my answer.

"And I hope—most sincerely hope, that you are happy and comfortable, Joseph, wherever you may be living, and whatever situation you may hold," said Mrs. Foley in an earnest tone. "You are a good young man, and deserve to thrive."

The reader will recollect that I was dressed in plain clothes; and therefore my apparel constituted no indication of my position. It was evident that Mrs. Foley had not the slightest idea what that position was, nor in whose service I was living. I was glad that she was thus ignorant: because had it been otherwise, I should not have known how to conceal from her the name of the charitable donor of the money which I was about to place in her hand.

"I thank you, ma'am," I said, "for your kind wishes; and I can assure you that I make no complaint against the position which I occupy. It has grieved me much to learn that your circumstances have not been——"

"O Joseph, I am righteously punished for many, many things that I have done in my lifetime!" interrupted the unfortunate woman, with passionate vehemence. "This is kind of you, thus to bear me in recollection! And you have not forgotten——"

"I have not forgotten my promise to intercede with Mr. Henley on your husband's behalf, and get him to urge a recommendation to mercy. No—I have not forgotten my pledge to do so: and rest assured that it shall be fulfilled."

"Thank you, Joseph—thank you," answered Mrs. Foley, seizing my hand and pressing it with grateful fervour. "Even if you fail in your gene-

rous aim, I shall not the less cherish a deep sense of your well-meant endeavours."

"Mrs. Foley," I observed, after a brief pause, "you will not be offended at what I am about to say: but I am charged by a gentleman, who will not however, suffer his name to be mentioned, to offer you a little assistance:"—and I placed the five guineas in her hand.

"No, Joseph—I cannot take this money," she cried. "I am sure that——"

"I know what is uppermost in your mind," I interrupted her: "but you are wrong. This sum comes not from my purse: on my honour I have told you the truth—though heaven knows that if I had not thus been the almoner of another's bounty, I should have freely placed my own little all at your disposal."

The unfortunate woman believed the representation I thus made her in respect to the remittance being from a charitable gentleman: and she accepted it.

"Say everything grateful—express my warmest and most heartfelt thanks to the humane giver of this gold," she murmured, in a voice half stifled with her emotions. "If it had not been for the goodness of some of the inhabitants of Reading, I know not what would have become of me. The time is approaching when the ordeal must be passed through," she continued, thus alluding to the trial; "and I shall be glad when it is over. I think when Ferdinand himself knows the worst—whatever it may be—he will grow more calm; and he will have more fortitude to meet his fate. It is on my account that he suffers so dreadfully! Yes—and it was on my account too that he took to these ways to which I have not the courage more distinctly to allude: for whatever his faults, want of love and kindness towards me has never been one of them. Sit down, Joseph—and let me tell you something of my earlier history."

I accordingly took a chair; and Mrs. Foley, wiping away the tears from her eyes, continued to address me as follows:—

"The name which we bear is an assumed one: it is not really Foley. Neither is my husband's Christian name Ferdinand. Circumstances, at which I will presently glance, induced him to veil his identity as much as possible beneath a fictitious denomination. But let me first speak of myself. I belong to a good family, in which there was wealth on one side—though none of it was in the possession of my parents. My mother was the sister of a man of title: she married for love—and her husband was an officer in the Army, who had nothing beyond his pay. His name was Granby: he was not merely of exceedingly handsome personal appearance, but also high-spirited and honourable. That alliance which my mother thus formed, gave umbrage to the rest of the family, by whom she was so far discarded that they would do nothing for her in a pecuniary sense, and treated both her husband and herself so coldly that their pride prevented them from obtruding themselves any farther upon the notice of relatives who were thus harsh and implacable towards them. Shortly after their marriage, my father's regiment was ordered to Malta: my mother accompanied him—and there I was born. I was their only child; and on me — the little Amelia — they doted to the utmost extent which parental fondness could possibly reach. The regiment, after being some years at Malta, proceeded to Corfu; and thence it returned to England, where it was quartered at a place very remote from my mother's own native county. I was fourteen years of age when my father, who had attained the rank of Major, died after a short illness. Ten months later my poor mother was likewise snatched away from me; and then it was that her brother, my uncle, appeared to relent in respect to the feeling of harshness, if not of aversion, which he had hitherto entertained in respect to his deceased sister and her offspring. He came to superintend the funeral; and when it was over, he took me with him to his own mansion in a distant county. I will not mention his name, Joseph, because he yet lives—that uncle of mine; and I would not have him in any way dishonoured by the ignominy which has overtaken myself."

Here the unfortunate Mrs. Foley paused; and for some minutes she was so overcome by her emotions as to be unable to proceed with her narrative.

"My uncle," she continued, "had long been a widower: he had a daughter who was married, but whom he had not seen for some years, and whose name he never mentioned. She had incurred his displeasure by some means or another: but the truth of the history never came to my knowledge. Nor have I ever seen her—I do not even know the name that she bears, nor whether she be still alive. Let me therefore continue to speak of myself, and hasten on to say that my existence was not a happy one during the two years I remained beneath my uncle's roof. He was not a man to make allowances for the disposition of a young girl of my years. First of all, the bitter grief which I experienced on account of my parents' loss, appeared to provoke him, and was construed by him into evidences of discontent on my own personal account. Then, as that grief wore off, and the natural cheerfulness of my temperament revived, I was pronounced giddy, wayward, and thoughtless. In a word—for my narrative must be brief—I could not give satisfaction, do what I would. Accident threw me in the way of a young gentleman, whose name was Howard Leslie; and in a short time we came to love each other fondly. He had been left an orphan at an early age: he was brought up by an old female relative enjoying a small independence; and at her death, Howard Leslie inherited a sum of money producing about three hundred a-year. Such were his circumstances at the time I first became acquainted with him. His attentions soon grew marked; and they were observed by my uncle, who took an opportunity to tell me one day with more candour than kindness, that if I dared follow the example of my mother and marry without his consent, I should be treated just as that mother was, by being for ever discarded from his notice. I possessed a high spirit, Joseph—I was deeply attached to Howard Leslie—and I was indignant at the terms in which my uncle had addressed me. In a word, I eloped with Mr. Leslie—and we were married."

"And Mr. Howard Leslie," I observed, interrogatively, "is doubtless——"

"Have patience, and I will explain," interrupted Mrs. Foley: for by this name I shall for

the present continue to call her. "Yes—we were married; and I wrote to my uncle,—not in a cringing, grovelling style—nor yet with hardihood or defiance. But I penned my letter in a proper spirit,—declaring that I had consulted my own happiness by espousing one whom I loved, and who was worthy of all my affection—expressing my regret that by this proceeding on my part I should have flown in the face of my relative's wishes—but concluding with the assurrance that if he vouchsafed his pardon, he should never repent it. That letter was returned to me in an envelope: it had been opened, and no doubt read: but the mode in which it was thus sent back, unaccompanied by note or comment, was a sufficient indication that my harsh relative's threat was being fully carried out. I accompanied my husband to London, where we settled. He was naturally of a liberal and generous disposition—fond of society—and hospitable in his entertainments. He launched out into expenses far beyond his income; and I was too inexperienced in pecuniary affairs to institute a comparison between our mode of life and the amount of means which we possessed. The consequence was that Howard gradually sold out his capital from the Funds, and at the end of three or four years after our marriage we were completely ruined. Our furniture was seized by sheriff's officers; and my husband himself was borne to a debtor's gaol, for an aggregate of debts which he had no earthly means of paying. I wrote to my uncle: but my letter remained unanswered. I wrote again, thinking that the former appeal might possibly have miscarried: and then the two letters were sent back to me in a blank envelope. There was no possibility of mistaking the cruel significancy of this act:—hope in that quarter was annihilated. My husband could not endure the thought of passing through the Insolvents' Court to release himself from incarceration: but the false pride which brooked not the notion of appealing to that tribunal, hesitated not to stoop to an alternative which I am forced in all candour to confess was far more derogatory and degrading. He escaped from the debtors' gaol in which he was confined—and we fled together to France. A reward was offered for his apprehension; and these were the circumstances which induced him to adopt the name of Ferdinand Foley. For two years we resided on the Continent:—and now you will ask how we lived. I scarcely know why I am entering, Joseph, into all these details with you—unless it be that you have displayed so kind and generous a feeling towards my unfortunate husband and myself, that I am led to give you my confidence in this sisterly spirit. Well then, since I have entered upon the narrative, I must continue it truthfully: and truth compels me to confess that the gaming-table furnished my husband with the means of our support. Thus, alas! you comprehend, Joseph, that the unfortunate Howard was sinking lower and lower in the scale of morality, and that he was preying upon that society of which he might have continued no mean ornament if he had been frugal and steady. Some quarrel at the gambling-table led to a duel, in which my husband was the second of one of the combatants; and it resulted in the death of the principal individual on the opposite side. The authorities, when investigating the circumstances, demanded my husband's passports. He had none—and was accordingly ordered to quit France within four-and-twenty hours. We returned to England; and on account of the circumstances already mentioned—I mean Howard's debts and his escape from prison—he was forced to seek some secluded abode. An advertisement in a newspaper led us to become the occupants of the little cottage near Bagshot. We had some money on taking possession of the place: but those resources were soon exhausted; and then——But wherefore add another syllable? You can understand the rest: and you can likewise comprehend the policy which induced us to have a female-servant who by her physical misfortunes would be least likely to perceive what was going on, or to betray my husband's proceedings even if they came to her knowledge. And now, Joseph, I have briefly sketched the history of my life: and you see that I am deservedly punished for my own misdeeds, as well as for my complicity in those of my husband. Yes—my disobedience towards a relative who, whatever his own faults and failings might have been, had nevertheless given me a home and had adopted me as his daughter,—that disobedience on my part is now meeting its condign chastisement!"

Mrs. Foley ceased speaking: she fell into a profound meditation—and the tears slowly coursed their way upon her cheeks. Suddenly the neighbouring church clock struck two: she started up—and taking my hand, pressed it warmly,—saying, "Again do I thank you for your generous sympathy; and again do I beseech that you will express my heartfelt gratitude towards the benevolent unknown who has made you the instrument of his bounty. I now go to my husband."

She was hastening from the room, when a thought struck her; and turning back, she said, "Joseph, all that I have been telling you is in the strictest confidence. You will not repeat elsewhere the mournful narrative which you have learnt from my lips."

"No," I exclaimed: "I would not be guilty of such an action! I will not betray your secrets for the world."

Mrs. Foley flung upon me a look of gratitude—and hastened forth to rejoin her husband in his prison-dwelling. I retraced my way slowly homeward, pondering upon all I had learnt, as well as upon the conduct of that affectionate wife who devoted as much time as the prison-regulations would allow, to the society and solace of her unfortunate husband. Without attempting to justify that husband's past conduct, yet I could not help being touched by all the evidences of devoted love which reigned between this unfortunate pair: for it was easy to comprehend that the dread of beholding an adored wife reduced to starvation, had been the source of the man's misdeeds.

On returning into the presence of Sir Matthew Heseltine, I merely said, "I have seen Mrs. Foley, sir—I have placed in her hands the amount with which you entrusted me—and she desires me to express her heartfelt gratitude."

"But you didn't tell her from whom the money came?" screeched forth the old Baronet, in his most querulous tones: and he looked at me as if

he thought that an abominable lie was about to issue from my lips by way of response.

"No, sir—I did not mention your name," I answered: "though I can assure you I had a very great mind to do so—for so much benevolence ought not to be concealed."

"You impertinent young rascal!" vociferated Sir Matthew, making a half-start from his chair as if he were almost impelled to fly at me and inflict personal chastisement: "how dare you presume to dictate? This is always the way with you! I hired you to be a servant; and I really do believe that you are endeavouring to become the master. But it is entirely my own fault: I deserve to be whipped at the cart's-tail for having taken a young fellow like you without proper references."

"Then why, sir," I asked, "did you not write to Mr. Rowland, as you said you would do?"—and there was a faint tinge of covert sarcasm, though perfectly good-natured, in my accents.

"Ah, I dare say you flatter yourself that you are all safe there—that I had forgotten everything about it—and that I don't mean to write. But I shall—and this very day too. Come, come! you need not take up your pen and arrange your papers. *You* are not going to write that letter to my dictation. I shall write it myself. You shan't word it according to your own style. But what about that poor woman——Pshaw! poor indeed; I am mad to talk of her in such terms. She richly deserves her fate."

"That she has been guilty of connivance and complicity in her husband's misdeeds," I observed, "there can be no doubt—nor does she deny it. But that she is terribly punished, and that she is in some sense an object for sympathy——"

"Go along with you!—out of my sight directly!" vociferated Sir Matthew. "Sympathy with a highwayman's wife——it is abominable! Go along, sir——and—and—get your dinner."

I really thought at the moment he was going to bid me get out of the house—though I should have known perfectly well that he did not actually mean it: and I could not help smiling as I turned to leave the library.

CHAPTER LX.

THE BAGMEN.

A MONTH passed: it was now October—and the Autumn Assizes were about to commence at Reading. I ascertained which hotel was principally used by commercial travellers, as I had little doubt that Mr. Henley would take up his quarters there: nor was my conjecture erroneous—for on the evening previous to the arrival of the judges, I found Mr. Henley at that tavern. I explained to him the object of my visit; and represented in terms as touching as I could use for the purpose, the romantic attachment which subsisted between the prisoner and his wife.

"It is all very fine talking, my young friend," said the commercial traveller,—though I saw that he was more or less moved by what I had told him,—"but the fellow attacked me twice; and how do I know what would have happened if I had been robbed of my money? The firm for whom I travel, might have looked rather suspiciously upon the account which I should have had to give."

"Do you not think, Mr. Henley," I said, "that your own character would have been a sufficient guarantee for the truth of your explanations?"

"Well, well, it might—no doubt it might," rejoined the commercial traveller, still more softened by what he took to be a compliment—though in the vulgar significancy of the term I certainly had not intended it as such. "You see, Joseph, that we gentlemen of the bag have a particular interest in rendering the road safe, and in making an example of malefactors whenever we have an opportunity. Besides, several of my friends in the same line have urged upon me the necessity of prosecuting this fellow Foley with the utmost rigour. I promised that I would; and it is almost a point of honour that I should stick to my pledge."

"It will be far more to your credit, Mr. Henley," I urged, "if you show mercy in the present instance. I am told that a recommendation from the prosecutor always has its weight; and if you were only to see the wretched man's wife for a few moments, I am convinced that you would yield to her entreaties and her prayers."

"But what the deuce should I say to my fellow-bagmen?" exclaimed Henley, who was evidently anxious to give me an affirmative answer, but who hesitated simply upon the punctilio which he had specified. "There are eight or ten of them in the commercial room now: we have been talking the matter over, and it is scarcely ten minutes since I faithfully promised that I would make out the case in its very darkest colours."

"Will you come with me," I asked, entreatingly, "and see Mrs. Foley?"

"Is she so very much afflicted?" inquired Henley.

"You would pity her from the very bottom of your soul if you were to be five minutes in her presence?" I exclaimed vehemently.

The commercial traveller reflected for a few moments; and then said, "I tell you what, my young friend—I won't see Mrs. Foley; but you shall come with me and sit for an hour amongst my friends. We will talk it over; and I will be guided by their decision. Don't you understand? There is a sort of identity of interests amongst us—a feeling of brotherhood—and it won't do for one bagman to go against the opinions of all his acquaintances in the same line. Come along—we will drink a glass of wine together; you will meet some pleasant fellows—and I dare say it will be all right in the end."

It was between eight and nine o'clock when this conversation took place in the coffee-room of the hotel; and though I knew that I ought to be returning home, in case Sir Matthew should require my presence,—yet I was resolved to fulfil my pledge to Mrs. Foley to the very utmost. I accordingly followed Mr. Henley up-stairs to the commercial room. The candles were dimly visible through a haze of tobacco-smoke; and in the midst of that cloud some eight or ten gentlemen might be distinguished seated round a large table. The sideboard and the side-tables, as well as the window-recesses, and even some of the chairs,

were crowded with packages and parcels of all shapes and descriptions,—amongst which were several portable writing-cases. Great coats, cloaks, and glazed waterproof capes, were suspended to the pegs against the wall; and over them hung large comforters, some of woollen and others of shawl materials. Umbrellas and whips were also conspicuous articles in the room. The gentlemen themselves who were the proprietors of these miscellaneous effects, exhibited as much of the variety of the white species of the human race as such a limited number of individuals could possibly display: but upon these divers characteristics it is by no means my purpose to dwell descriptively, though I may anon glance passingly at them in a few words. For the present I have to observe that the eight or ten bagmen in question, evidently had a great idea of comfort. All of them had put off their boots, and had on slippers: one sat lounging back in an immense easy chair,—another, while occupying one chair, had a second on which to repose his legs: a third, with his chair tilted back, lolled against the wall: a fourth had unbuttoned his waistcoat, and thrown off his stock and false collar, so that he might feel loose and easy: a fifth, doubtless apprehensive of a cold draught from the door or window, wore his hat; while a sixth, for the very reason that the room was hot almost to suffocation, had tossed off his wig, and looked very much like the picture of the bald gentleman whom you see in the advertisement of ventilated peruques. All were smoking either pipes or cigars: all, too, had the means of libation upon the table before them. A couple had joined in a bottle of wine: a third had a huge tumbler of rum punch, ladling it out into a wine-glass, whence he imbibed it: a fourth was moistening his clay with bottled stout: a fifth, *ditto* ale; and steaming glasses of spirits-and-water were in front of the rest. The impression made by the general aspect of the company was that of persons who having done a good day's work, considered themselves entitled to appropriate the evening to their own special enjoyment; and they all looked as if this sort of entertainment was by no means a rare indulgence, but a process to which they were uncommonly well accustomed—so that as one day for them told another, the evening in the same way certified all the rest.

"Here's a young friend of mine," said Henley, as he introduced me into the room, "who is going to have a glass and a cigar with us for an hour."

"Welcome, sir," said a stout pimply-faced man, who sate at the head of the table. "Sit down, sir. Make yourself at home. Here's the waiter: give your orders."

"Will you permit me," I whispered to Mr. Henley, "to order a bottle of wine—and a cigar for yourself? I never smoke."

"We will drink a bottle," responded the commercial traveller; "but we will share the damage. Now, Charles you villain," he added, thus pleasantly addressing himself to the waiter, who glided noiselessly into the room with a placid smile upon his countenance and a napkin under his arm; "go and bring us a bottle of that prime old Port—you know which bin I mean—and one of the best Havannahs for me. Don't get the cigar out of the ordinary box: but just tell the landlord to give you one out of the little nook there, on the shelf behind the door of the bar-parlour."

The waiter disappeared: there was a few moments' silence, during which the commercial gentlemen all looked at me over their pipes and cigars, just as if the aforesaid pipes and cigars were ranges of longer or shorter proportions, specially intended and used to assist their visual organs in thus concentrating their rays upon any particular individual.

"Now then, Smudge," said one of the gentlemen, at length breaking silence—and he was a very thin, pale-faced, red-haired, pinky-eyed young person of about one-and-twenty, but who had all the airs of the oldest of the company—"now then, Smudge, give us that song you promised just before Henley came in with his friend."

Mr. Smudge, the gentleman thus appealed to, was a short, stout, jolly-looking individual, with an immense face as round as the full moon, but as red as the sun when seen through a morning mist; and his nose bore unmistakable proof of his loyal adhesion to the punch which he ever and anon ladled out. After sitting very quiet for about three minutes, and looking fixedly at one of the candles, as if inspiration were to be thence derived, he slowly laid down his pipe, and commenced a well known air in the following manner:—

Hi give thee hall—I can no more,
Though poor the hoffering be—

"That's too high," said Mr. Smudge, abruptly leaving off: and having taken three sips and five whiffs, he recommenced—but this time in a lower key, though without any diminution of the aspiration of the h's.

He again broke off at the same point as before,—this time however because he was too low; and after some more sips and whiffs, he tried again. Again too he broke off—whereupon one of his friends kindly recommended him to take his time—another not to be in a hurry—a third to try again—and so forth: but the end of it all was that Mr. Smudge was not in voice to-night—he couldn't manage it—and he must beg Mr. Tarbox to sing for him by deputy. It however appeared that Mr. Tarbox was incapacitated from accepting the vicarious office, from the plain and simple fact that he was just in the midst of his seventh glass of hot whiskey-and-water, and so far from being able to settle his ideas to a song, was at a loss to settle them as to the right comprehension of whether he stood on his head or his heels.

"Well, gentlemen," said a shabbily dressed individual, who appeared to have been out for a whole fortnight without ever once performing his ablutions, combing his hair, or changing his shirt,—"I'll give you a recitation:"—and up he sprang from his seat.

"Bravo, Mummery!" cried one gentleman.

"Brayvo!" vociferated another.

"Bra—a—vo!" exclaimed a third: and there was a chorus of fists rapping upon the table with such violence that all the glasses and bottles danced as if they were mad. Mr. Tarbox's tumbler tumbled over; and Mr. Tarbox himself tumbled down on the carpet.

"Halloa, old fellow!" exclaimed one of the gentlemen at the opposite side of the table; "that's a fine to be drunk before nine o'clock."

This ejaculation was greeted with vociferous peals of laughter, in the midst of which Mr. Tar-

box managed to pick himself up—but not before, by way of diversifying the scene and adding to the interest thereof, he had pulled his chair down upon himself. However, up he did get at last, and with the evident intention of making a speech. Amidst a perfect succession of hiccoughs, he expressed himself to the effect that he had known his friend John Brobscomb going on for thirteen years—that he yielded to no man in that room, nor in any other room in England, Ireland, or Scotland, in admiration of his friend John Brobscomb's personal character and good qualities—that he had even felt for that man a brotherly attachment—that he could testify to the urbanity, the conviviality, and the liberality of his friend John Brobscomb's disposition; but for all this, he felt himself aggrieved and insulted by Mr. Brobscomb's observations. It pained him more than he could express (and heaven knows it was with difficulty he could express himself at all) to be compelled to adopt the present course—but he must in justice to himself proclaim his friend John Brobscomb to be no gentleman; and he wound up with the firm resolution of punching his friend John Brobscomb's head unless he apologized for his conduct then and there.

Having thus acquitted himself, Mr. Tarbox sank back into his seat, holding with both hands to the table to steady himself in that perilous descent; and he then sat gazing upon Mr. Brobscomb with a look of inane grimness. As for Mr. Brobscomb, who was a funny looking little man, with spectacles—he rose and expressed his desire to throw himself upon the Chair. He made a speech of a quarter of an hour's duration, in which he expatiated upon the many excellent qualities of his friend Tarbox; and after this varied and interesting eulogy, he sat down with the express determination of seeing Mr. Tarbox in the very hottest place he could think of at the moment, before he would make any apology whatsoever.

Much confusion followed. The chairman, Mr. Squiggle, was convinced Mr. Tarbox would withdraw his accusation to the effect that Mr. John Brobscomb was no gentleman: but Mr. Tarbox was equally convinced that he could *not* withdraw it. Then Mr. Brobscomb himself was appealed to—but with equal fruitlessness. Mr. Smudge rose to order—a proceeding which only increased the disorder. There were cries of "Chair! chair!" but when the Chair rose, he could not get a hearing, because Mr. Tarbox and Mr. Brobscomb thought fit to exchange compliments across the table,—those very dear friends mutually threatening in most unmistakable terms to inflict serious damage on each other's nose, eyes, and head. So the Chair sat down, and another gentleman rose up. He was a sleek, oily-looking, smooth-tongued, but consequential personage; and he rose with the air of one who felt certain of obtaining a hearing, for he was evidently a favourite. A hearing too he did obtain; and in a very neat speech he exhorted the gentlemen present to be mindful of their position. Commercial travellers never occupied so high a standing in the country as they did at the present time. He was happy to felicitate them on this fact; and he was sure that they would not impair the advantages they had thus gained. The eyes of the world were upon them at that moment. When he looked around him and behold those friends with whom it had been his pride and satisfaction to associate for so many years, he could not find words to express all he felt. (Here the gentleman's emotions were so overpowering that he was compelled to imbibe half a tumbler of hot brandy-and-water; while cries of "Bravo, Honeysett!" echoed around.) Mr. Honeysett continued. He felt that he enjoyed the confidence of those present. Perhaps his deeds had acquired it: perhaps they had not. At all events he could lay his hand upon his heart, and solemnly declare that he had never shrunk from upholding the rights, privileges, and prerogatives of gentlemen travelling in the commercial line. He now met his reward: it was conveyed by the approval of the enlightened and intelligent company whom he was then addressing. (Cheers; and a hiccoughed "Hear, hear!" from Mr. Tarbox). Mr. Honeysett, resuming his eloquent speech, considered that he belonged to a most important and influential class of the community. There were two kinds of travellers. There were the travellers who visited foreign parts, came home, and wrote books: there were travellers who were engaged in promoting the commerce of the country. Well, without for an instant drawing invidious comparisons, Mr. Honeysett was nevertheless bound conscientiously to express his opinion that the latter, as a class, were far more useful, more valuable, more influential, more important—and he would even say more patriotic, than the other class to which he had alluded. For these reasons, Mr. Honeysett considered that Messrs. Tarbox and Brobscomb ought to shake hands; and having arrived at this logical deduction from his preceding remarks, Mr. Honeysett sat down, leaving it to the honour and good feeling of those gentlemen to act upon his advice.

This eloquent speech was greeted with a tremendous thumping of the knuckles on the table; and it produced such an impression on Mr. Tarbox that he was moved to tears (though Mr. Smudge did most uncharitably whisper to me, that it was *not* the speech, but that Tarbox was "crying drunk"). However, the result was that the belligerents shook hands, Mr. Tarbox vowing that he loved Mr. Joseph Brobscomb better than his own brother—and Mr. Joseph Brobscomb as warmly declaring that if there were any one in the world for whom he would gladly and cheerfully go through fire and water, his friend Tarbox was that man.

Thus, at the end of half-an-hour's interlude, matters were placed upon the most pleasant and amicable footing imaginable: the waiter was summoned—the glasses were refilled—and Mr. Squiggle, the chairman, intimated to Mr. Mummery that he would now be permitted to enter upon his recitation. Mr. Mummery however broke down at the end of the first minute; and after seven different attempts—each one carrying him on a trifle farther than before—he was compelled to give it up altogether.

I whispered to Mr. Henley a few words, to remind him of the object for which he had brought me thither: but he responded that it wasn't yet time, and that we had better wait till the company had got to the end of the fresh supply of

liquor,—especially as Squiggle, the chairman, was very severe when sober, but wonderfully merciful when in his cups. The delay brought on ten o'clock; and my whisperings were renewed, accompanied with a hint that I could not remain much longer. Mr. Henley—observing that his friend Squiggle was now properly "primed"—accordingly introduced the subject to the company, and called upon me to explain how Mrs. Foley had suffered the direst poverty—how a feeling of sympathy had been excited on her behalf amongst the townspeople—and how a truly romantic attachment existed between the unfortunate creature and her husband. I acquitted myself much better than I could have anticipated: but my speech of course gave rise to sundry others. Mr. Smudge was for the display of all possible rigour on his friend Henley's part: Mr. Mummery begged to dissent *in toto* from the observations which had fallen from the lips of his honourable friend. The subject was continued by a tall, prim, long-faced, wiry-haired individual, who was very dogmatic in his assertions, and who declared that the matter lay in a nutshell,—the point for decision being whether the interests of the commercial order should be sustained, or whether they should be sacrificed to maudlin sympathies and sickly sentimentalism? Mr. Honeysett rose to reply; and his speech was altogether in favour of mercy and leniency. He was exceedingly pathetic—quoted poetry from Byron—and concluded with some verses on the subject of Woman, which were "of his own composition." Mr. Tarbox got upon his legs, but immediately afterwards got off them again, inasmuch as he disappeared under the table: whereupon Mr. Brobscomb followed on the same side as Mr. Honeysett. Ultimately the question was put to the vote; and it was decided by the majority of the company that their honourable friend Mr. Henley should be empowered, and was thereby so

empowered, to recommend the delinquent Foley to the mercy of the tribunal.

"Now, Joseph," whispered Mr. Henley, nudging me with his elbow, "you must return thanks. It is your business, you know: you are Mrs. Foley's champion and advocate. There, up with you, my boy!"

I accordingly rose and said a few words complimentary to the commercial gentlemen on the decision to which they had come; and during my speech Mr. Honeysett kept nodding to me with a smile of bland and patronizing approval, which was as much as to give me to understand that even *he*—the great orator of the bagmen—the luminary of eloquence in the commercial travelling line—thought that what I said was by no means amiss. When I sat down, the knuckles again played in chorus all round the table; while Mr. Tarbox, who had been asleep in his chair throughout the whole of my oration, woke up and vociferated, "Hear, hear!" He then asked the chairman what was going on; and being made to understand that I had delivered myself of a speech, he swore I was a capital fellow, and invited me to dine with him on the following day. This honour I however declined; and shaking hands with Mr. Henley, made my bow to the company, and took my departure.

The clocks of Reading were proclaiming the hour of midnight as I emerged from the hotel. I made up my mind to receive a good scolding, and very likely an abrupt dismissal from my situation, at Sir Matthew Heseltine's hands, when I should encounter him on the following morning: but it could not be helped—and I philosophically abandoned myself to whatsoever fate might be in store for me. I must inform the reader that I was perfectly sober, having merely partaken of two or three glasses of wine, though I had paid for my share of a couple of bottles. When I reached the house, I saw that there was a light in the front parlour; and I naturally supposed that the housekeeper Mrs. Hodgson had chosen to sit there to await my return, as I knew that she would not go to bed until she had seen the premises all safe after my entrance. The door was opened by Mrs. Hodgson; and by the light which she carried in her hand, she surveyed me attentively for a few moments.

"Well, Joseph," she said in a low whisper, "at all events you are not tipsy—and that is something in your favour. Sir Matthew is sitting up in the parlour, and desires that you will go in to him directly."

I accordingly entered the parlour; and there sat Sir Matthew, looking as if he had for an hour past purposely and studiously settled himself in a manner that should be best calculated to overwhelm me with a sense of his displeasure. He sat bolt upright in his chair,—his mouth drawn in so that the lips were invisible, and his horrid-looking eyes fixed with a sinister gleaming. I remained standing near the door, which I had closed behind me; and for upwards of a minute the Baronet continued to stare at me in that ominous fashion. At first I met his gaze steadily: but not choosing to be guilty of the rudeness of persisting in a counter-stare, I bent down my eyes, and could scarcely suppress a smile at the ludicrous appearance which the old man wore at the time.

"Are you drunk?" was the question which abruptly thrilled forth from his lips: and he continued to survey me searchingly.

"No, sir—I am not," was my answer; "and you can judge for yourself whether I am telling the truth."

"How do I know?" he vociferated: and then he yelled forth in a yet shriller key, as if he were speaking with a forty punchinello power, high pressure,—"I never was drunk in my life!"

"And I repeat that I am not now, sir," I rejoined.

"Where have you been?" demanded Sir Matthew.

"I am certainly very sorry to have remained out so late——"

"No evasions!" he exclaimed,—adding vehemently, "Come, out with the truth! Where have you been?"

"To see Mr. Henley, the prosecutor in Foley's case, sir—and to beseech him to recommend the prisoner to mercy when the trial comes on to-morrow."

"Oh!" ejaculated Sir Matthew abruptly. "You went out at eight o'clock, and it takes till past midnight—does it?—to put so simple a question as that?"

"I could not get Mr. Henley to come to a decision, sir, until about half-an-hour ago."

"Why not?" demanded the Baronet. "Was he drunk? and had you to wait till he got sober?"

I briefly explained the circumstances under which I had been kept at the hotel; and while I was speaking, Sir Matthew kept his regards fixed upon with his wonted viperish stare, and with his lips sucked in,—all his features being completely rigid, and his forehead a mass of wrinkles by the way in which his brows were elevated.

"A pretty party, according to your own account!" he at length shrieked forth; "and I dare say ten thousand times worse than you have chosen to represent it. Were they *all* drunk?"

"Oh, no, sir!—not all, by any means!" I exclaimed.

"Elevated—eh?" cried Sir Matthew, with a horribly sarcastic grin.

"Something of that sort, sir."

"Oh! jolly fellows, I have no doubt!—and perhaps you would like to go back to their most delectable society to-morrow night—and the night after—and every night, in fact?"

"I have no such inclination at all, sir," was my response. "I neither like drinking nor late hours; and if it were not for extraordinary circumstances, I should not have transgressed the regulations of your house this evening."

"Evening do you call it?" he literally screamed out: "it's past midnight—it's the morning of another day! But what makes you go and bother yourself so about this Foley's affairs? Are you in love with his wife?"

My countenance flushed with indignation; and I was about to quit the room abruptly, when Sir Matthew vociferated, "Stop! stop! I did not give you leave to retire. But you don't think I am such a fool as to believe that it is through mere feelings of humanity that you have been taking all this trouble—spending your money in wine—and risking the loss of your situation?"

"You may believe me or not, Sir Matthew Heseltine, as you think fit," was my answer: "but if it were the last word I had to speak in this life, I can solemnly declare that I had no motive beyond that which I have described. There is something on the part of the unhappy couple which excites one's sympathy, and makes one partially forget their misdeeds."

"Pretty morality! very pretty indeed!" exclaimed Sir Matthew. "And now be off to bed with you at once, sir."

I turned as I opened the door to wish Sir Matthew "good night:" he did not answer me—but was lying back in his chair gazing after me in his wonted manner, and with his mouth drawn in, —so that it was scarcely possible to form an opinion as to the real sentiments which he entertained of my conduct.

CHAPTER LXI.

THE TRIAL.

The trial of the highwayman produced a considerable sensation in Reading; and Mrs. Tibenham, the charwoman, who came to the house at an early hour in the morning—she being engaged for a day's work,—brought the intelligence that crowds were already flocking towards the entrance of the court and the doors of the prison, to obtain a view of the delinquent when the hour should come for him to be conveyed into the presence of the judge. Immediately after breakfast, Sir Matthew Heseltine summoned me into his presence; and in a harsh and abrupt manner, he gave me to understand "that he neither wanted me to read to him nor to write for him all this day, as he had something better to do than to be pestered with my presence." This intimation was as much as to give me to understand that my time was my own; and I could not help thinking that his conduct was for the purpose of affording me an opportunity to go and hear the trial, if such were my wish—but for fear lest I should penetrate his really well-meant design, he had endeavoured to conceal it beneath a display of a harsher demeanour and of more taunting language than it was even his wont to adopt. I however said nothing—but left the room; and having done a few little things for Mrs. Hodgson, I took a volume up into my own chamber and sat down to read.

As I was descending to the kitchen at one o'clock to dinner, Sir Matthew screeched out from the library, ordering me to come in.

"Well, where have you been all the morning?" he demanded, fixing his horrid speaking eyes upon me.

"In my own room, sir—reading a book," was the response.

"The History of celebrated Highwaymen, or a volume of the Newgate Calendar, I'll be bound!" he ejaculated.

"No, sir: here is the book. It is one which I took the liberty of borrowing from your shelves."

He snatched it instantly out of my hand; and glancing at the title-page thrust it as rudely back upon me, exclaiming, "Natural History indeed!—what should *you* know about Natural History? And how is it you have not been to gratify your morbid feelings by witnessing the trial? Come, young man, no lies—but let us have the truth for once in a way."

"I did not consider it seemly, sir," I answered, "to be present at the painful ordeal through which a person whom I had known is now being dragged. I reflected also that if he himself beheld one amongst the curious spectators with whom he had under very different circumstances been acquainted, it would add to his own humiliation and bitter sense of shame. The poor wife too may be present: she may be there to sustain his fortitude—and she would not like to meet the eyes of an acquaintance."

"Oh, it's all very fine!" ejaculated Sir Matthew, regarding me with his wonted scrutiny: "but how do I know that you are telling me the truth?"

"Of course I cannot convince you, sir:"—and then I added, "Perhaps you wanted me to be present at the trial?"

"I wanted you to be present, you young rascal?" vociferated Sir Matthew. "Be off with you—and get your dinner. Be off, I say!"

I quitted his presence; and after dinner reentered the library to inquire whether the Baronet would not take his usual walk. He yelled forth a shrill "No!" and then desired me to go and take a walk by myself, as it was ridiculous for a young man of my age to mope in-doors all day. I said nothing; but instead of obeying him, ascended again to my chamber, and endeavoured to while away the time with the book: I did not choose to go out and walk, for fear lest he should think that a morbid curiosity had at length got the better of me and had irresistibly led my footsteps to the tribunal. Nevertheless, I felt most anxious with regard to the trial,—wondering whether it were over—and, if so, longing to ascertain what the sentence was. At five o'clock I descended to the kitchen; and Mrs. Tibenham, the charwoman, reentered the house at the same moment,—she having been home, as she alleged, to see that "her dear childers" had got their tea: but as there was an odour of gin floating around her, I had no doubt she had called at a wine-vaults on her way,—even if her journey had extended any farther than such half-way house at all.

"Well, Mrs. Hodgson, mem," she said with a look of mysterious confidence, "it's all over—and there were such a scene in court, as I have just heerd tell at the *Grapes*, where I dropped in quite permiscuous, bekase I seed a neighbour of mine—Mrs. Grooge, which keeps the mangle—just passing in at the door to get her evenin' quartern. And they wos all a talkin' of it in at the *Grapes;* and Mr. Sankey the landlord had been one of the—what-d'ye-call-'em——the joory."

"Well, Mrs. Tibenham," I asked eagerly, "and what is the result?"

"Deary me, Joseph, how you do flabbergast one with the harum-scarum way in which you put a kevestion. As I says to Mrs. Grooge, says I, 'Mrs. Grooge mem'——"

"Oh, hang Mrs. Grooge!" I ejaculated impatiently. "What is the result?"

"I beg your parding, sir," cried Mrs. Tibenham, bridling up with a mighty wrathful air: "but did you say as how you should like to see my friend

Mrs. Grooge hanged? And when I say my friend, young man, I would have you know that you've insulted my own feelin's in their nicest and most delicatest pint."

"Come, come, I did not mean to offend you. But do tell us what is the result."

"If you axes me civilly, Joseph, it's another thing," responded the charwoman, suffering herself to be softened down. "Well, as I was a-sayin', there was such a scene in court. The prisoner looked so downcast and unhappy that, as the landlord of the *Grapes* was telling us, the ladies in the gallery was all melted to tears, bekase close by the dock stood his poor wife with her eyes fixed on him so that she never took 'em off. Well, the case begins: the judge looks as grave as a Italian boy's monkey a-sittin' on the top of the orgin; and the big-vigs makes speeches as long as your arm. Then the genelman comes for'ard which was a-persecutin' the prisoner——"

"Prosecuting," I interjected correctively: and a most unfortunate interruption it was—for it caused Mrs. Tibenham to bridle up again and enter upon a long digression on "my imperence in attempting to put her right, just as if a respectable o'oman which had brought up a family and never applied to the parish, was unbeknowing in the Queen's English." However, she was at last softened again; and was induced to continue her narrative.

"Well," she said, "the genelman which was a persecuting——exkoos me, young man, but I chooses to pernounce the word in that way——well, he gets up into the vitness-box—he takes the hoath—and he tells his tale. But he draws it so mild that Mr. Sankey of the *Grapes* says he hasn't got no fourpenny ale in his cellars which is milder;—and the genelman vinds up by begging his ludship to have massy on the prisoner. Then the ladies in the gallery fell a-veeping agin; and Mrs. Foley sobbed so that it seemed quite ketchin—and the judge his-self took off his barnacles to vipe 'em with his white kembrick ankercher. All of a sudden up jumps a big-vig vich was counsellor for the prisoner; and he says, says he, 'My lud, this here business can't go no furder: it's like a sieve that won't hold no water.'—So it seems there was what is called a sensation in the court; and the big-vig goes on to explain that there was summut—I forget what they calls it——Oh! a raw——"

"A flaw!" I ejaculated, instantaneously catching at the idea which the woman meant to convey.

"Exkoos me, young man," said Mrs. Tibenham indignantly: "but I says a flaw as plain as if it was the last blessed word I ever had to speak. To be sure! a flaw in the excitement."

"Ah, I comprehend!—a flaw in the indictment! Well, well—go on, Mrs. Tibenham! You tell the story so excellently——"

"The judge shakes his head—vispers with the big-vig which was counsellor for the persecution—and then says he must go and consult his brother. But it wasn't no brother at all: it was t'other judge as was a sitting in t'other court; and I maintains that the fust judge is unfit for his sittywation. What right has he," demanded Mrs. Tibenham sternly, "to come down to Reading and humbug the people that a chap's his brother when he is never a brother at all? Howsomever, he goes and consults with t'other judge; and when he comes back, he says as how, says he, that the whole proceedings must be squashed bekase of the raw in the excitement."

"Good heavens!" I exclaimed, with joy in my heart—perhaps more joy than under the circumstances I ought to have experienced; "he has got off!"

"Pretty nigh as good," answered Mrs. Tibenham: "for the judge says as how he must be discharged to-morrow evenin' when the 'sizes is over, if there's no other case agin him. Then there were a rare scene in the court. Mrs. Foley springs into the dock; and she goes off in her husband's arms. He was took back to prison; and a couple of kind ladies bore away his missus. That's the whole history, chapter and werse."

I hastened up to the library; and without knocking at the door, rushed in—so that Sir Matthew eyed me for a moment as if he thought I had suddenly gone mad.

"And what do you mean," he demanded, in his shrill voice, "by rushing into my presence in this rude fashion? Is it to tell me that the highwayman is sentenced to be hanged?"

"No, sir—quite the contrary," I ejaculated: "he has got off!"

Sir Matthew Heseltine made no answer—but gazed upon me in his wonted incomprehensible style, his horrid speaking eyes vibrating in his head, and his lips sucked in.

"Yes, sir," I continued, "Foley has got off. There was some flaw in the indictment; and the proceedings are quashed."

"How do you know?" demanded the Baronet abruptly.

"The charwoman, sir——"

"You fool! you stupid young ass!" vociferated Sir Matthew, looking as if he were ready to spring up from his chair: "do you put confidence in what a miserable, ignorant, drunken charwoman says? Go out, sir—and ascertain the facts for yourself——that is to say, if you are interested in them—which I am sure I am not."

This time I did not hesitate to obey my master's commands; and putting on my hat, I hastened to the hotel to see Mr. Henley. I found him smoking a cigar at the entrance of the establishment; and he at once gave me the explanations I sought. Mrs. Tibenham's tale was substantially correct. The indictment had specified a wrong date; and another technical objection, of a still more fatal character, had been taken against it by the prisoner's counsel: but what that objection was, I do not exactly remember. However, the result was the quashing of the proceedings, with the understanding that the prisoner must be discharged at the close of the assizes if no other case should be brought against him. I thanked Mr. Henley for his kindness in dealing so mercifully with the delinquent; and resisting his invitation to share a bottle of wine with him, I returned home. It had struck me more than once during this day that Sir Matthew Heseltine partook to some little extent of the sympathy which animated myself in respect to the Foleys,—although he did his best to conceal it, and would no doubt have been very angry if I had let him perceive that such *was* my suspicion. But still I *did* entertain this suspicion

and accordingly, on entering the house, I turned into the parlour, where he was now seated after his dinner.

"Well," he exclaimed, "you have come to pester me again with your nonsense about people that I do not care a fig for. I suppose that Mrs. Tibenham's story was all a falsehood——"

"It was perfectly true, sir:"—and I explained what I had learnt from Mr. Henley.

"And you are glad?" he vociferated shrillily and abruptly.

"I should be telling a wilful falsehood if I were to declare the contrary," was my answer.

"Sit down. No—not out there. Here!"—and he pointed to a chair on the opposite side of the fire-place: then, after eyeing me with his wonted intentness for nearly a minute, he exclaimed, "Take a glass of wine."

I obeyed him: he watched me while I drank it; and methought that there was a certain softening of his looks, coupled with a degree of restlessness—a kind of fidgetting about in his seat—as if he were struggling against an inclination either to be more sociable, or to address me in a way which he had never done before.

"So you are glad—are you?" he at length broke silence. "Well, I can't find it in my heart to blame you: it is all well meant enough on your side. I really do begin to think that you are not quite so bad a young fellow as I took you for at first. You have got one or two good points about you. If I didn't think so," he added, raising his voice till it swelled into a shrill screech, "I should have bundled you out neck and crop when you came home so late last night. Take another glass of wine."

"I would rather not, I thank you, sir."

"Take another glass, I say!" he cried imperiously; "and pour me out one also:"—having looked at me very hard for a few minutes, he said in a lower and milder tone than he had ever yet used towards me, "I once possessed sympathies as generous as your's, Joseph Wilmot: but they have been blunted—crushed—deadened within me."

"No, sir!" I exclaimed, enthusiastically: for it did me infinite good to hear the old man speak thus—and I felt at the moment as if I almost loved him: "do not say so! You are kind and benevolent—after your own fashion; or else you would not have sent the money to that poor afflicted creature."

"After my own fashion—eh?" he ejaculated, with a sudden recurrence to his wonted irritable and sarcastic semblance of look and tone: but immediately softening again, he went on to observe in a low voice, and which was even tremulous with inward emotions, "You know not all that I have suffered in my life—the ingratitude that I have experienced! Those whom I have loved the fondest and cherished as the dearest, turned against me. Disobedience and ingratitude——Ah! these are sufficient to sour the temper of an angel!"

He ceased—and I said nothing: but I had the intuitive presentiment that he was about to make me his confidant, and that circumstances were irresistibly leading the old man so far beyond the influence of his habitual cynicism as to prompt him to unbosom himself unto me.

"Yes, Joseph Wilmot," continued Sir Matthew Heseltine, "if you knew all, you would not wonder that I am what I am. There are cares and circumstances within the range of human experience, which warp the feelings of the heart and change the natural sentiments of the soul. Perhaps you have fancied that I was heartless and soulless——aye, and I am too—I am too!" he added fiercely, with the shrill intonations of his disagreeable voice. "I have been merciless and implacable towards those who have offended me! Why should I speak of these things to you? You are a stranger to me; and yet some unaccountable feeling attracts me towards you. Pshaw! I am a child. Begone—leave me!"

I rose slowly from my seat, and was as slowly advancing towards the door—though in my own mind perfectly well convinced that I should be ordered to remain. I however reached the door without another word being spoken by my master: I turned my eyes towards him—he was looking at me with his wonted fixedness, but yet with a certain visible softening and even mournfulness of the features;—and then, as if still obedient to the irresistible influence that was upon him, he suddenly pointed with his long skinny hand towards the chair which I had just left. I returned to that seat; and he continued in the following manner:—

"If I were to set about giving you a narrative of the many painful experiences which have characterized my past life, I could not enter into minute details: I could merely sketch them briefly—I cannot linger upon them. It has only been by closing my memory as much as possible to the incidents of the past—by violently pushing away from me, as it were, those recollections which would have otherwise often and often crowded in upon me—that I have managed to enjoy anything like peace. I must go back for many long years to recall the time of a happy marriage state. I was rich——I am rich now——But if you dare go and blab this about——"

"I will not, sir!" I interjectingly observed.

"Well, well—I think I can trust you: something tells me that I can. Ah!" he ejaculated with a sudden recurrence of his wonted apparent spitefulness, "I have tried you, young man—I have done several things to try you; and you have come out well from the test. But to continue my narrative. Full forty years ago——yes, it must be forty years—a long time to look back upon—my young and beautiful wife, to whom I had been married eighteen months, presented me with a daughter. Oh, we were happy then!——such happiness that angels envy, but which gladdens the hearts of fiends because they know it is too bright and beautiful to last. Three years afterwards desolation was in the house; the voice of lamentation—the wail of sorrow, mournfully awoke the echoes of the Hall of my ancestors. My wife was no more: the mistress of the proud domain of Heseltine lay stretched upon the bed of death. That was the first really serious affliction which I had ever known since the death of my own parents. I had a sister several years younger than myself—and a sweet beautiful girl she was. I was almost as proud of her as of the wife whom I had lost. That sister of mine was sixteen at the time of my bereavement: her education was just finished—she had quitted the boarding-school to return thither no more; and when Lady Heseltine

breathed her last, my sister besought me to be comforted, for that she would devote herself to the care of my infant daughter, then only three years old. Time passed on: my affliction became softened and mellowed down into a pious resignation:—my daughter was all in all to me. No—not *all:* for a large portion of my love was given to that sister who performed a mother's part towards my little girl. She was beautiful, as I have already said, that sister of mine: I was wealthy and proud—I felt that the title which I bore was an old and a haughty one—but the family to which it belonged, was far more ancient still. I flattered myself that my sister would form an eligible alliance; and she had every opportunity. The noblest and the best families of the county——you know the county, Joseph: it is the one whence I have so often received the letters that you have answered to my dictation."

"Westmoreland, sir," I observed, profoundly interested in the Baronet's narrative.

"Well," he continued, "it was my hope that this beautiful sister of mine would accompany to the altar a man of rank and wealth. But I was doomed to experience a bitter disappointment. At the age of three-and-twenty——Ah! that must be a good thirty years ago——she eloped with a man who had not a single shilling beyond his pay as an officer in the army."

"Good heavens!" I ejaculated, as a strange and bewildering suspicion flashed to my mind: and I half started from my seat at the bare thought. Incidents which I had heard before—coincidences of dates and circumstances—all crowded in upon my recollection; and I literally shook with suspense as I hoped that what I fancied might be the case would really prove so.

"Why do you cry out like that?" demanded Sir Matthew, with his usual manner of irritability and petulance. "Come, sir—speak! Don't sit staring at me in that fashion. You are a fool—and I am an ass—worse than an ass, to have been for a moment betrayed into these confidential revealings! Be off with you, sirrah—and leave me to myself."

"Oh, sir!" I exclaimed, "you know not wherefore I gave vent to that ejaculation, nor why I regard you thus. For heaven's sake answer me a question——the name of that officer whom your sister married?"

"His name?" cried Sir Matthew. "What has his name got to do with you? *You* never knew him!"

"His name, sir—his name?" I cried vehemently. "Perhaps I can tell you something——But his name, I conjure you!"

"The boy's mad!" shrieked forth Sir Matthew.

"No, sir—I am not mad. But there are strange coincidences——Oh, so wildly strange!——The name of your sister's husband, I conjure you?"

"Well then—his name," responded the Baronet, gazing upon me with a sort of mistrustful astonishment, "his name was Granby."

"Ah!" I ejaculated: and I experienced such a sudden revulsion of feeling at being thus relieved from suspense, and at having my suspicions all in a moment confirmed, that I sank back in the chair, with a faintness coming over me.

"What on earth ails the boy?" cried Sir Matthew, not knowing what to think. "Are you ill? Come, speak! I did not mean to be harsh with you. No, no, Joseph—I rather like you——but it is after my own fashion!"—and he could not help flinging upon me a sarcastic look as he thus repeated a phrase which I had ere now addressed to him from my own lips.

"No, sir—I am not ill——a sudden faintness——but it has gone. Do bear with me while I speak to you seriously. That sister of your's who married Captain Granby — afterwards Major Granby——"

"How the deuce do you know anything about it?" vociferated Sir Matthew.

"They left behind them a daughter," I continued, heedless of the interruption.

"Well—a daughter—yes. But will you, or will you not tell me——"

"And that daughter, sir—do you know whether she still lives?" I continued.

"She did what my sister did—she did what my own daughter did!" shrieked forth Sir Matthew Heseltine: "she eloped and married without my consent! *That* was what my niece Amelia did!—and whether she is alive now, I don't know——and—and—I—I don't care."

"Yes, sir—you *do* care!" I exclaimed, encouraged thus to speak by the hesitating tremulousness of his voice as he gave utterance to those few last words.

"How dare you address me thus?" vociferated Sir Matthew. "To tell me that I *do* care when I tell you that I don't! What is it to me? I would have made my niece rich—she should have inherited all my wealth — she should have had my estates——but she went away from me—I discarded her for ever!"

"Oh, sir, if you knew that this niece of your's was living now," I exclaimed, "you would be moved towards her; and if you knew that she was unhappy and in affliction, you would forgive her—you would welcome her to your arms!"

Sir Matthew Heseltine started visibly, and seemed about to yell forth something: but the influence that was upon him—an influence stronger than himself—held his words back; though he sat gazing upon me in a strange and scarcely comprehensible manner.

"If I were to tell you, sir," I continued, "that your niece Amelia Leslie is alive—that I know her——"

"Is this the case, Joseph?" asked Sir Matthew, in a low voice, and so altered in its deepness from its naturally shrill penetrating tones, that a listener beholding not who the speaker was would not have recognised it as coming from his lips.

"Not for worlds would I deceive you, Sir Matthew!" I exclaimed. "Yes—your niece lives—she is not far distant——say but the word——Oh! say but the word — and within a few minutes she shall kneel at your feet to implore your forgiveness!"

The old man gazed upon me with his mouth drawn in: but his features were not altogether rigid *now:* there was a certain muscular quivering which showed that he was much moved inwardly;—but he spoke not a word.

"Your heart will relent, sir," I continued,—"Oh, yes! it will relent! It is not a mere acci-

dent which has led you thus to address me to-day: the hand of Providence is visible in all this—and it was ordained that I should become the medium, humble an individual though I am, in reconciling you to your niece. Let me not plead in vain. With her own lips has she assured me that she is righteously punished for her disobedience towards you. Oh, sir! if I were in your position, not for one single moment should I hesitate what to do."

"Well, well—I must think over it," said Sir Matthew: "I must think over it. You are a good young man——Ah! but don't run away with the idea that it is a *very* high compliment I am paying you: you are good after a fashion, I mean. Pshaw!—this is levity on my part! I am retorting upon you with your own words. But my niece—she is unhappy, you say?"

"Unhappy, sir—and you know it!" I responded, with a significant look.

"I know it?" ejaculated the Baronet. "The boy is assuredly mad!"

"You know it, sir: for you have succoured her—and if you had not forbidden me to mention your name——"

"Gracious God!" cried Sir Matthew, as a light suddenly flashed in unto his brain: "you do not mean me to understand——"

"I mean you to understand, sir, that she who bears the name of Foley, is none other than your own niece, Amelia Leslie!"

The Baronet fell back in his chair, and gazed upon me in speechless bewilderment, not unmingled with dismay.

"She has been guilty—and she has been punished," I continued, speaking in the most persuasive tone. "Remember, sir, that the blood of the Heseltines rolls in her veins, and that though she married against your will, it was too severe a punishment which you inflicted upon her. You discarded her—you sent back her penitential letters without a word of comment! If you had but stretched forth a helping hand in the moment of her own and her husband's bitter need, how much wickedness might have been spared to them—how much infamy—how much distress! Oh, sir—if you punish me on the spot by discharging me from your service, yet am I bound to proclaim the truth: and this truth is, that you yourself have not been altogether innocent in respect to the circumstances which drove that man to desperation and ultimately plunged him into a felon's gaol!"

Sir Matthew Heseltine was evidently touched by all that I had said: his eyelids and his lips quivered—he looked at me furtively—and then averted his eyes: he sat uneasily and nervously upon his chair.

"I go, sir, to bring your niece hither," I said, rising from my seat, "that she may fling herself upon her knees before you, and implore that forgiveness which you will not have the heart to refuse."

"Joseph, you will do no such thing!" cried the Baronet. "If you do, I shall never pardon you. You are assuming too much! What the deuce——why, I have all along been telling you that you mean to be master in this house. Go up to your own room, sir. What an obstinate dog it is!—he will not obey me! Well, if you do go to my niece——But mind, I order you *not*—and you will do it at your peril——But if you do go, don't hold out the least hope of forgiveness!—don't bring her hither! If once she entered the house, she would force her way into my presence——But I will lock the door! Ah, I see what is passing in your mind: you would batter it down? Egad, a nice fellow I have got in my service! I wish to heaven I had only written to Mr. Rowland about you: I dare say I should have heard some nice things—and then I never should have taken you. What? you will persist in going——But of course you won't be mad enough to let anybody know what is taking place—you won't create a scandal in the town and get a crowd round the house. If you do persist in bringing Amelia hither, you will have the good sense——"

"Rest assured, sir," I exclaimed, "that I will conduct this business with all imaginable discretion."

"But mind, if you bring my niece hither to-night," vociferated Sir Matthew, "I discharge you to-morrow morning."

"Very good, sir. I consent to be discharged on condition that you receive your niece."

"Wilful boy that it is!" cried the Baronet, throwing himself back in his chair: and the next moment the door closed behind me.

I did not merely run—I flew to Mrs. Foley's lodging. Never was so joyous a heart borne so lightly and so swiftly along!—never was a human being so exultant with the consciousness that he was the bearer of good tidings, as I was on that occasion. In a few minutes I reached my destination. Mrs. Foley was at home. I told the good-natured landlady that I wished to speak to her lodger on very particular business. Mrs. Foley was soon with me—and the woman of the house left us alone together in her own little parlour. The poor lady was naturally in much better spirits than when I had last seen her: she pressed my hand—and in a voice full of emotion, said, "I know, Joseph, that you fulfilled your promise in respect to Mr. Henley: it was apparent in the way that he gave his evidence—and I felt deeply, deeply grateful to you at the time."

"And I congratulate you," I answered, "on the result of to-day's proceedings."

"Oh, a result so utterly unexpected—so unlooked-for!" cried Mrs. Foley, clasping her hands fervidly together.

"And to-morrow evening," I continued, "your husband will be restored to you."

"He will!" was her response. "This afternoon we have had a long and serious conversation together. Deeply, deeply does he repent the past; and he is resolved to do anything—even to the breaking of stones in the road—to earn an honest livelihood. I am sure that the sorriest crust acquired by honourable means, is a luxury in comparison with the richest dainties nefariously procured."

"Thank heaven," I exclaimed, "that you are both in this condition of mind! But I have not come merely for the purpose of congratulating you on the result of to-day's proceedings: I have a very important duty to perform."

"You, Joseph!" exclaimed Mrs. Foley, surveying me with wonderment and suspense.

"Yes, ma'am—a most important duty," I

answered impressively. "Prepare yourself to hear good tidings—your fortunes are turning——"

"Oh, speak!—what mean you?" she cried, her suspense now becoming painfully feverish.

"Come with me—hasten and put on your bonnet and shawl—I am going to conduct you to a place where you will see some one——that same gentleman who sent you the money a month ago——"

"Who is he?" she inquired.

"I am in his service," was my answer. "He is a very old man——Prepare yourself for a revelation——"

"Is it—is it—my uncle?" she gasped forth, trembling visibly from head to foot.

"It is!" I rejoined. "Sir Matthew Heseltine is a resident in this town. He will receive you with open arms—he will grant you his forgiveness!"

The poor creature sank down upon a chair; and if I had not hastened to give her a glass of water, I believe that she would have fainted. The tears streamed forth from her eyes: she was overcome by the weight of happiness itself.

"O Joseph, what do we not owe you!" she murmured, pressing both my hands in her own. "From the very first moment I ever saw you, you have been so good—so generous—so kind! Good heaven! if I were a woman untainted with wickedness, I would proffer you such love as a sister might bear towards a very dear brother!"

"I shall see you happy yet," I responded, deeply affected. "But come—come quickly—and in a few minutes you will be in your uncle's arms—and all shall be forgiven!"

Mrs. Foley hastened up to her own chamber, and quickly re-appeared with her bonnet and shawl. She was trembling with suspense; and as we proceeded through the streets, I said all I could to reassure and encourage her. I gave her, too, a hasty sketch of how it had been brought about that her identity with Sir Matthew's niece came to my knowledge. When she reached the door of the house, she quivered so that she leant against the wall for support: but I implored her to summon all her fortitude to her aid. I had provided myself with a latch-key previously to issuing forth: I opened the door, and gave her admittance. Then I opened the parlour-door; and Sir Matthew, starting up from his seat, cried, "What the deuce, Joseph——how dare you——hey-day! what is the meaning of this?"

His niece had thrown herself at his feet,—murmuring amidst convulsive sobs, "Pardon me, uncle—pardon me!"

"Joseph, you young rascal," cried the Baronet, "I'll—I'll——"

"Your niece, sir, is at your feet," I exclaimed—and then hurried from the room, closing the door behind me.

Procuring a light, I ascended to my own chamber; and I was melted to tears by the very luxury of my feelings. I felt that heaven had rendered me the instrument of a good action; and I rejoiced unfeignedly. An hour passed; and at the expiration of that time, I heard the front door open and close gently. I made sure that it was the Baronet's niece who had gone forth; and I was equally sure, from the length of the interview, that the reconciliation between her uncle and herself was complete. I descended the stairs; and was proceeding to the kitchen, when the Baronet called forth, bidding me enter the room. The next instant I stood in his presence. That he had been deeply affected, was visible in his looks: but yet that sort of cynical pride which had become habitual to him, still prompted him to conceal as much as possible the real state of his feelings.

"So you have done it," he said; "and you have acted in contravention of my strict orders? Very well, young man—you will take the consequences—that's all I have got to say. But I sha'n't tell you in this house how I mean to punish you. Of course I shall discharge you: but not till your month is up. Don't irritate me more than you have done, by going and blabbing in the kitchen. And look you, sir—pack up all your things, and mine too, in readiness for a journey. We set off early to-morrow morning. Good night to you, you young scamp!"

With these words, he abruptly seized my hand—for a moment pressing it in his own.

"By heaven, I am making a fool of myself!" he screeched forth. "Don't run away with the idea that I meant to do it. You are—you are—a—self-willed young rascal; and by Jove I'll—I'll write to Mr. Rowland to-morrow. There!—go along with you—and good night."

For a moment he patted me on the shoulder—and then pushed me out of the room.

CHAPTER LXII.

HESELTINE HALL.

The reader has seen that Sir Matthew Heseltine entertained not the remotest suspicion of the identity of his own niece being concealed under the pseudonym of Mrs. Foley, until the truth was so suddenly made apparent to myself and proclaimed by me to his knowledge. Yet all along the old Baronet had entertained a certain degree of sympathy towards the afflicted wife, whose romantic attachment and unswerving devotion to her guilty husband had been the talk of the town of Reading. The reader has seen, too, how Sir Matthew endeavoured to conceal that sympathy beneath an air of cynicism, which though real, or at least habitual, to a very great extent, was nevertheless not so complete as to choke up all the avenues of his heart and render them inaccessible to an occasional good and kindly feeling. That sympathy which had been more or less excited in his mind on behalf of Mrs. Foley, was no doubt fostered by the frequent allusions which I had made to her condition, as well as by the example of the feeling which I myself entertained towards the unfortunate creature. Yet though this sympathy had all along a certain existence in the Baronet's heart, it did not appear ever to have risen into a presentiment, nor to have been associated with any mysterious inward promptings to the effect that the highwayman's wife was in reality his own niece. The intelligence had come upon him as abruptly and as unexpectedly as I have described it to the reader;—and therefore, striking him as it were a sudden blow, and giving

him as sudden a shock, it had naturally produced a powerful revulsion of feeling within him. Thus I have no doubt that from the very moment he learnt who she was, he intended to be reconciled to her: but his pride—the pride of a morbid cynicism—felt itself bound to make a sort of stand, so as to have the appearance of only yielding gradually and decently to the earnest entreaties and persuasions which I addressed to him. As for his threats of discharging me from my situation, I did not for a single moment believe that they were genuine: though, even if I had, they would not have deterred me from speeding to the humble lodging and escorting Mrs. Foley thence, to throw herself at her uncle's feet and receive his forgiveness.

I rose at an early hour in the morning, and proceeded to pack up all my own things. When I informed Mrs. Hodgson that Sir Matthew was about to undertake a journey, she was quite astonished—but asked no questions; for the simple reason that she doubtless knew her master well enough to be aware that he had not thought fit to enlighten me as to his views and intentions. As for all that had occurred in respect to Mrs. Leslie—as I shall henceforth call her—Mrs. Hodgson and the other female domestic, together with Mrs. Tibenham, remained in perfect ignorance of the whole proceeding. Immediately after breakfast I was ordered to procure a post-chaise; and on its arrival at the house, Sir Matthew at once entered it,—telling Mrs. Hodgson that she would probably hear from him in the course of a few days. I was about to ascend to the dickey; but Sir Matthew ordered me to occupy a seat inside along with himself. His instructions were given to the post-boy to take a northern direction; and I could not help thinking that he was about to return to his long deserted family-seat in Westmoreland.

During the journey Sir Matthew conversed but little, and was for the most part absorbed in his own reflections. When however he did speak, there was an unmistakable softening of his tone and look towards me—though his habitual cynicism made him endeavour to conceal it. He placed in my hands a well filled purse, ordering me to liquidate the expenses of the journey, "as he did not choose to be pestered with such matters, and had moreover hired me that I might make myself useful." Our journey was continued northward, and was prosecuted with considerable rapidity,—the old gentleman bearing its fatigue far better than, from his infirmities, I could have anticipated. In the evening of the second day we reached Manchester; and as we entered that great manufacturing town, Sir Matthew, abruptly breaking a long interval of silence, exclaimed, "Ah, I dare say you now begin to get frightened!"

"Frightened at what, sir?" I asked, with an air of indifference, though I perfectly well knew to what he was alluding.

"Why, you think that I shall take this opportunity to go and call on the Rowlands—always supposing that there *are* such persons in existence."

"If I have time, sir," was my response, "depend upon it I myself shall call and pay my respects to them."

"Well, well—I do really begin to believe that there are such people," cried Sir Matthew. "But whatever they may say of you, they would not alter the opinion I have already formed. Oh! I dare say you flatter yourself it is a good one; and—and I am disposed for once to leave you in the comfortable security of your own self-conceit."

I understood full well that these were really kind concessions which Sir Matthew was making in his own peculiar fashion—but that the pride of cynicism to which I have so frequently referred, would not permit him to exhibit too much friendship for me all in a moment. That I was however far advanced in the good books of the eccentric old Baronet, I had no doubt.

It was eight o'clock in the evening when we alighted at an hotel in Manchester; and, Sir Matthew at once informing me that my time was my own, I proceeded to Mr. Rowland's house. The tall footman opened the door; and he was well pleased to see me. Mr. and Mrs. Rowland were not however at home: they were on a visit to their nephew and his wife, who were living in London. I learnt from the footman that the marriage was a very happy one—and that in the love and affection of his beautiful Gertrude, Mr. Stephen was amply recompensed for the haughty coldness which the Chilham family continued to exhibit towards himself and his own worthy relatives.

On the following morning the journey was resumed; and though Sir Matthew had not once told me what our destination was, I had no doubt my original suspicion was correct. We arrived at Kendal, in Westmoreland, at about five o'clock in the afternoon; and there the post-chaise was dismissed. The portmanteaus and boxes were left at an hotel, with the simple intimation that they would be sent for on the morrow; and thus, without naming himself, Sir Matthew hurried me away. I had no longer any doubt that we were destined for Heseltine Hall; as I knew it to be in the neighbourhood of Kendal, from having directed letters to the bailiff at the Kendal post-office.

"It is near twelve years," observed Sir Matthew, as leaning upon my arm he led me through the town, "since I was last here. Twelve years!" he repeated in a voice that was strangely subdued for *him:* and methought that a half-stifled sigh reached my ear. "I will just see what the people at the Hall are about," he continued, suddenly resuming his wonted shrill irritability of accents. "Servants and dependants are the same everywhere—a set of people that one can scarcely trust——with now and then a decent exception," he added: and this was another friendly though covert concession towards myself.

It was now dusk, on this October evening of which I am writing,—as, emerging from the town, we entered upon a broad road in the opposite direction from that by which we had arrived. I felt the arm that rested on my own quivering somewhat; and I was at no loss to conjecture that the Baronet must be experiencing an unusual degree of inward emotions at the thought of returning to his ancestral home after so long an absence. He must have reflected that the lapse of twelve years had made no small change in his appearance; while it had borne him with fearfully long strides all that much nearer to the grave!

We continued our way, through the increasing obscurity of the evening, for about two miles; and then we reached a porter's lodge at the large iron-gates forming the entrance to what appeared to be a spacious park, so far as I could discern objects through the gloom of the hour. But no lamps were blazing at that entrance-way: nor amidst the trees were any lights visible in the distance. Through the chinks in the shutters of the lodge a glimmering shone forth, indicative that the place was tenanted.

"Don't address me by name," said Sir Matthew in a low hasty whisper. "It suits my fancy to see how my people have borne themselves during my absence—and whether that bailiff of mine has written all sorts of lies to Reading, or whether he has told the truth."

Having thus spoken, he rang the bell; and forth from the lodge came a tall female, bearing a lantern; and as she drew close up to the iron gates, I saw that she was about four-and-twenty years of age, well grown, and exceedingly good-looking.

"Who are you?" demanded Sir Matthew, in his wonted abrupt manner.

"I should rather ask who you are," responded the woman, half in a good-natured manner, but half in a tone of rebuke at the rudeness and strangeness with which the query was put.

"Well then, I am a gentleman—a friend of Sir Matthew Heseltine's—and I want to see some one at the Hall."

"Here, father!" cried the young woman: and out came a man of about sixty, who was eating a crust and butter, as if he had been just disturbed in the middle of his tea. "These gentlemen want to come in to see some one at the Hall."

"Who do you want to see, gentlemen?" inquired the porter civilly.

"Mrs. Barclay the housekeeper," replied Sir Matthew.

"Very good, gentlemen," answered the porter.

and the gate opened. "My daughter shall conduct you with a lantern up to the Hall."

"Your daughter!" yelled forth Sir Matthew. "Why, she was a little brat——"

But here he suddenly checked himself in the midst of the reminiscence which was evidently called up to his mind, and which told him how the child of twelve years old, as she was when he saw her last, had grown up into the fine, tall, handsome woman. But those words of the Baronet's were more than half a revelation for the old porter; and taking off his hat, he said with a low bow, and in a voice that was tremulous too with emotions, "Is it possible——I don't know——and yet I think it must be——You, sir, are——my——master!"

"Well, well—perhaps I am—perhaps I am," said Sir Matthew. "There!—put on your hat, my good fellow. The wind blows cold."

"Pray step in a moment, sir, and warm yourself," said the porter, in a voice more tremulous than before. "There is a good fire in the lodge."

"Well, we *will* just step in for a moment," said the Baronet: and his arm clung more heavily to mine—while at the same time I could detect a certain quivering in his own voice.

We entered the porter's lodge,—where we found a fine-looking labouring-man, of healthy appearance, and with frankness on his open embrowned countenance, seated at the tea-table, together with three children, the eldest of whom might be five and the youngest two.

"Stand up and make your bow, Reuben," said the old porter. "Sir Matthew has come back!"—and this announcement was made with a look and tone of exultation on the part of the old man.

"What! is this Reuben Giles the gardener's son?" exclaimed Sir Matthew,—"the troublesome, impudent, roguish boy of fourteen, as he was when last I saw him—always climbing up the trees to steal the fruit, and tumbling through the cucumber-frames. Whose children are these?" demanded the Baronet: though the likeness which existed between them and their parents, rendered the question by no means necessary.

"Reuben's and my Phœbe's," answered the porter: while the son-in-law smiled with paternal pride upon his offspring — and Phœbe herself blushed with the glow of maternal satisfaction, as she hastily wiped the children's faces, which were somewhat smeared with bread-and-butter.

"Those whom I knew as children, have sprung up into full-grown men and women; and other children have come to take their places:"—and as he thus spoke in a low voice, which was now unmistakably tremulous with deep inward emotions, Sir Matthew Heseltine sank down upon a chair. At the same instant his hand was drawn rapidly across his eyes—I have no doubt to wipe away a tear: but the next moment he fixed those eyes upon me with their old and well-known expression —while his mouth was drawn in, and his look was as much as to say, "Ah, you think that you surprise me in a moment of weakness, you impertinent young dog!—but you see how quickly I can be myself again."

The Baronet nevertheless remained in the porter's lodge for upwards of a quarter of an hour,—pretending that it was to rest himself; though I have not the slightest doubt it was to tranquillize the emotions already excited, and to nerve his mind with a becoming fortitude ere proceeding to that mansion where his eyes would have to encounter so many, many objects conjuring up scenes and recollections of the past. At length we continued our way, Phœbe's services as a guide being dispensed with. The obscurity was not too great to prevent my idea of a spacious and well-wooded park being confirmed, as we threaded a broad gravel-road which was slightly on the ascent. The mansion was a good quarter of a mile from the entrance-gates; and as it gradually stood out of the evening's gloom, I received an impression of its spacious extent, and a partial notion of its appearance. The frontage of the main building seemed to be of Bath-stone, or else was coloured in imitation thereof: the wings were of red brick. All the windows were closed with Venetian blinds; and not a single light was anywhere visible. The gravel-road branched off into two distinct arms, enclosing an immense grass-plat with a piece of ornamental water in the middle;—and thus forming the carriage-drive, the road swept round to the front of the mansion. A portico, with an ascent of three or four steps, constituted the entrance; and when I knocked and rang, several minutes elapsed ere the door was opened. At length a young servant-girl made her appearance with a candle in her hand; and her first impulse was to close the door again. But I prevented her; and Sir Matthew screeched out, "What the deuce is the girl afraid of?"

"Oh, pray don't——don't do me a mischief!" she faltered out, trembling all over: but on perceiving that it was a very old man, accompanied by a very young one, who had knocked at the door—and that we were both respectably dressed—she visibly regained her self-possession.

"Why, what did you take us for?" demanded Sir Matthew.

"Thieves, sir," was the girl's answer, more ingenuous than flattering.

"Oh, thieves—eh!" cried the Baronet. "But where is Mrs. Barclay?"

"I will call her in a moment, sir:"—and tripping across a spacious hall, she cried out, at the commencement of a diverging passage, "Mrs. Barclay, ma'am, you are wanted!"

Presently an old dame, whose age was certainly mid-way between sixty and seventy—neatly dressed in a black silk gown, and with a cap of snowy whiteness—made her appearance. She wore a pair of horn spectacles, with great circular glasses, through which she took a view of Sir Matthew and myself; and I saw by the gradual alteration of her looks that she suspected who my companion really was, and that every instant this suspicion was growing stronger.

"Is it possible," she at length exclaimed, her features indicating respectfulness blended with joy and amazement,—"is it possible?——Sir Matthew at last!"

"Yes, yes—*at last!*" responded the old Baronet: and quickly averting his countenance, his hand was again hastily drawn athwart his eyes. But the next moment he seized the candlestick from the girl's hand; and pushing me towards the girl herself, said quickly, "There! go with her—she

will show you the way—and mind and have everything you want. Mrs. Barclay, I am going to retire at once. I—I—am very much fatigued."

But I knew full well that it was not altogether fatigue which was now overpowering Sir Matthew Heseltine: no, nor did it even enter largely into the various influences that he felt at the time. His emotions—those emotions which were so stirred up by a return to his ancestral home after an absence of twelve long years—were the predominating cause of that overwhelming sense which was upon him.

I accompanied the girl to the servants' hall; and a comfortable repast was soon spread before me. There was another female domestic in the apartment; and I soon learnt that these two, together with Mrs. Barclay and the steward—who was absent at Kendal on some little business—constituted the household. The land-bailiff occupied a cottage on the estate, midway between the mansion and the town. In about a quarter of an hour Mrs. Barclay came into the servants' hall; and hastily prepared a tray of sandwiches and wine, which she herself took up to the room whither she had conducted Sir Matthew. But before she thus disappeared again, she placed some wine on the table for my own use,—expressing a hope, in a civil and kind tone, that I should find everything as comfortable as it could be under the circumstances which had taken her so unawares,—and assuring me that matters would be upon a better footing on the morrow. When she again returned, having administered to all Sir Matthew's immediate wants, she began to converse gaily and affably with me upon a variety of indifferent topics: but she asked me no questions of any kind, though her demeanour and her attention showed that she had received Sir Matthew's instructions to treat me in a suitable manner.

The following day was one of considerable bustle and excitement at Heseltine Hall. The tenants on the Baronet's domain flocked thither to pay their respects to their master, whom many of them had never seen before, while others were in their childhood when last they saw him:—and the neighbouring gentry and their families called to leave their cards in token of welcoming the old man back to the home of his ancestors. Additional servants were likewise engaged; upholsterers from Kendal came to refurnish some of the principal rooms; and all requisite preparations were made to restore the establishment to its former condition. I wandered through the almost countless rooms, and was surprised to find in what an excellent state the building and the furniture had been kept during Sir Matthew's absence of twelve long years. That he himself all along knew everything had gone on thus well in the care of trustworthy domestics, I had not the slightest doubt; and I comprehended that the misgivings which he had expressed upon the subject while we were on our way thither, were partly the result of his cynical humour, and partly a pretext for concealing who he was, so that it might be broken gradually, and thus spare his own feelings from the chance of being too abruptly and powerfully worked upon. In short, he had come back to his home that evening, inobtrusively, unostentatiously, and on foot,—first suffering it to be believed that he was a stranger-visitor instead of at once proclaiming who he was,—so that he might thus gradiently accustom himself to such emotions as circumstances were irresistibly calculated to conjure up.

Some few days passed: there were no letters to write—nor did Sir Matthew once require me to read to him. We were alone together for a few minutes only, morning and evening, when I assisted him with his toilet; and then his countenance was perfectly inscrutable, as if he studiously meant to defy me to penetrate what his ulterior views and intentions were in thus returning to his home. Nevertheless, his conduct became more and more kind, after his own peculiar fashion; and there were certain things which he would suffer no one to do for him except myself. In a word, I saw plainly enough that he had conceived not merely a very good opinion of my character, but likewise a certain degree of friendship for me—though he would have considered it a humiliation to his pride to have unbent all in a moment. He had for so many years shut himself up in an eccentric cynicism, that he could not bring himself suddenly to depart from it; and indeed it had grown too habitual to permit him to do so.

In the evening of the sixth day after our arrival at Heseltine Hall, a post-chaise drove up to the door; and Mrs. Leslie alighted. She came alone: her husband was not with her. I hastened forth, together with Mrs. Barclay and one of the footmen who had been engaged, to receive her; and it was a kind smile of recognition, blended with a rapidly-darted look of fervent gratitude for the past, which she bestowed upon me. It was evident that she experienced deep and varied emotions on thus returning to a mansion from which she had been absent so long: it was with tears in her eyes that she grasped the good old housekeeper's hands—that housekeeper who in a few broken words welcomed her to Heseltine Hall again! She was conducted up to the drawing-room, where Sir Matthew awaited her presence; and I saw no more of her during the evening. I need hardly observe that the domestics of the household remained in perfect ignorance of all that had happened in respect to her husband; and though Sir Matthew Heseltine had not breathed a single syllable to the effect that I was to keep the seal of silence upon my lips, I of course did so most religiously; and I felt gratified that he should thus have trusted to my honour and good feeling on the point, instead of formally enjoining secrecy.

Mrs. Leslie stayed a week at Heseltine Hall, during which time she kept herself perfectly secluded from the visitors who called: she was almost constantly with her uncle—and once or twice when I had occasion to enter the room where they were seated together, I found them in deep and earnest conversation. At the expiration of that week it was whispered amongst the household that Mrs. Leslie was about to take her departure; and I soon learnt that such was indeed the fact. But the manner in which the report was thus fully confirmed, belongs to the incidents which must be related in another chapter.

CHAPTER LXIII.

FAMILY MATTERS.

It was about three o'clock in the afternoon that I was summoned to the library, where I found Sir Matthew Heseltine and his niece seated together As I made my appearance, the Baronet rose slowly from his chair—fixed upon me one of his peculiar looks, but in which there was no longer any mistrust—and without speaking a word, he walked forth from the room. I remained alone with his niece; and she at once bade me be seated. I should here observe that though but little more than a fortnight had elapsed since I had conducted her, pale, emaciated, and careworn, to her uncle's house at Reading, a considerable change had taken place in her appearance; for if affliction has the power to make speedy ravages upon the human frame, so in like manner has the sense of happiness the power to renovate all that has been marred and to revive beauties that were fading. Amelia Leslie was again looking something like her former self, as I had known her in the recent and best days of her loveliness at the white cottage near Bagshot: her form no longer appeared emaciated—and a casual observer would not have seen that the traces of late woe and haggardness were still upon her cheeks.

"Sit down, Joseph," said Mrs. Leslie, treating me rather in the light of a friend than of a dependant, and with that subdued softness of manner which showed the sentiments cherished by a grateful heart; "I have important subjects whereon to converse with you. But first let me tell you some particulars relative to my husband and myself. On that evening when with so much admirable magnanimity, and with such true Christian feeling, you became the means of reconciling me to my uncle, I passed an hour alone with him,—during which we spoke of many things. You may be well assured that your name was frequently mentioned by my lips; and I think you know sufficient of me to be equally certain that I expressed myself in such terms as your noble conduct deserved. You are aware of all the eccentricities of Sir Matthew Heseltine: but you do not know him so well as I. He has conceived a friendship bordering upon affection for you: he loves you, I believe, with a warmer feeling than for many and many a long year his heart has experienced towards any human being. However, that such is really the case you will presently have sufficient proof in the confidence which my uncle purposes to repose in you, and in the delicate mission with which you will be entrusted,—a mission, Joseph," added Mrs. Leslie, "which I am certain you will gladly undertake—for it is entirely consistent with the generosity of your disposition."

Sir Matthew's niece paused for a few moments—collected her ideas—and proceeded as follows:—

"During that hour which I passed with my uncle on the evening of our reconciliation, he sketched out the course which it was desirable under all circumstances should be pursued by my husband and myself. Sir Matthew could not consent to see my husband: nor dared I make the slightest endeavour to alter his determination on this head. But he wished to have me to pass a few days with him at Heseltine Hall—not only that our reconciliation might become the more complete, but that he might have sufficient leisure to counsel me for the future conduct of Howard and myself. He placed in my hands, ere I left him that night, a sum of money for our immediate purposes; and it was understood that after my husband's emancipation from prison, we should proceed to Liverpool to make the arrangements requisite for our departure to the United States. These preliminaries being carried out, according to my uncle's views, I came to pass a few days with him. To-morrow I leave Heseltine Hall to rejoin my husband at Liverpool; and within a week we shall quit England—perhaps never to return. We go to another clime, where under our real names our identity with the criminal Foleys of our native land may be concealed,—and where we may hope to carve out another and a better career for the future. My uncle has liberally provided for us: we have every chance of success—every desire to achieve it—and every inclination to become worthy of it."

I was deeply touched by this language which flowed with a real and unaffected pathos from Mrs. Leslie's lips. The tears were trickling down her cheeks: but hastily brushing them away, she continued as follows:—

"You know not, Joseph Wilmot, how much good you have been the means of accomplishing, and how much good is yet to be achieved through your instrumentality. It was heaven which threw you in my uncle's way, that by your agency his heart might be touched, and better feelings than those which he has long experienced should be awakened within him. The sympathy which you displayed on behalf of my husband and myself, at a time when you knew us only by the name of Foley, and when neither you nor my uncle had the remotest suspicion who we really were,—failed not to make its impression upon him. Then, on finding that by a truly providential combination of coincidences he was brought through your agency to discover who we were, he seemed to feel as if God himself were speaking to him through the medium of all these strange and mysterious circumstances. It appeared as if Heaven's warning voice were whispering in his ear, enjoining him to bestow forgiveness wheresoever his wrath had hitherto lain heavily; and that Heaven's finger pointedly and unmistakably indicated a new path into which he was to turn. Much as his feelings had been warped—deeply as long years of cynical seclusion from the world had changed his natural disposition—he nevertheless could not possibly remain inaccessible to those heavenly manifestations, nor refuse to obey them. Therefore, under the influence of these new feelings—or rather I should say of those naturally good ones which, having long slumbered, were now re-awakened into wholesome vitality——his resolve was promptly taken. He decided upon returning to the home of his ancestors, and likewise upon awarding his forgiveness where it was so much needed. And now you understand, Joseph, under what influences my uncle came back to Heseltine Hall. Everything I have just been saying is but a necessary preface to the important revealings I am about to make."

Again Mrs. Leslie paused for a few moments to collect her thoughts: but she soon continued in the ensuing strain:—

"You are already aware,—for I know that Sir

Matthew has made you acquainted with some little portion of his earlier history,—you are aware, I say," continued Mrs. Leslie, "that forty years ago Lady Heseltine became the mother of a female infant. Three years afterwards her ladyship died; and for a while my widowed uncle was inconsolable. His sister however performed to the utmost of her power a mother's part towards Sir Matthew's little daughter. But after a time that sister of his eloped with Captain Granby; and this was the second severe and terrible blow which Sir Matthew Heseltine was doomed to feel at that particular period of his life. With regard to his sister and Captain Granby I have no more to say: they were my parents—and you are already acquainted with everything that relates to them. It is in reference to Sir Matthew's daughter that I have now to speak. Before however I proceed, I must inform you that it is only within the last hour that I myself have learnt all the particulars which I am about to relate. My uncle was desirous that they should be made known to you: but he chose not to reveal them with his own lips. He has therefore entrusted the task to me: and now I crave your earnest attention."

"I am all attention, Mrs. Leslie," I said. "Pray continue."

"Sir Matthew Heseltine's daughter was ten years of age when her aunt eloped with Captain Granby. That was thirty years ago. Sir Matthew was overwhelmed with mingled rage and affliction; and he began to look with mistrust upon the whole world. No: there was *one* exception—and that was his own charming and interesting little daughter. The sister whom he had loved so fondly had fled from him; and that love turned into hatred towards her. All his affections therefore became centred in his daughter. He had no thought of marrying again: he would not even risk the unkindness which a step-mother might possibly show towards his daughter. He seemed to have no other earthly aim than to live for the welfare of that dearly beloved child of his. He would not part with her that she might pursue her education at a boarding-school: he kept her here, at Heseltine Hall—and procured an efficient and respectable governess to tutor her mind and embellish it with accomplishments. Thus the time passed on; and at seventeen Miss Heseltine's education was finished. Sir Matthew was most careful in the selection of the acquaintances whom she was to form, and of the circles which she was to visit. I have no doubt that his supervision was carried to a nicety—I will not say to an extreme—which savoured somewhat of parental tyranny. Proud of his rank, of his wealth, and of his position, he naturally looked to the formation of a brilliant alliance on the part of his beautiful, accomplished, and much-loved daughter. He had no heir to his title: *this* he knew must die with him: but his estates are hampered with no conditions of entail—and he had therefore the power to bequeath them according to his inclination. I need not say that he intended his daughter to become his heiress; and little he recked that she should derive no titular distinction from himself, when his hope was flattered that by means of marriage she would obtain a higher and loftier title. She was eighteen when Lord Burleigh, who had a large estate in this same county, began to pay his addresses to her. But his lordship was nearly forty—a desperate fox-hunter—given to the pleasures of the table—and of manners but little calculated to please a young and delicate-minded girl who had been brought up in so secluded a way. If parents only knew the evil of endeavouring to force the inclinations of their children they would recoil from the bare thought: but they are too often apt to imagine that wealth and rank constitute the main elements of happiness, and that therewith the heart's feelings are but little interested. Miss Heseltine was one day stricken with amazement when Sir Matthew bade her receive the addresses of Lord Burleigh, and look upon him as her intended husband. She had become so accustomed to regard her father's slightest wish as a permanent law, that she dared not utter a word of remonstrance. But alas! her heart was already engaged; and the object of her love was a young curate attached to one of the churches in Kendal. Mr. Bentinck—for that was his name—had only just taken holy orders: he was scarcely four-and-twenty—and from what I have ere now learnt from my uncle's lips, he was certainly a young man whose personal beauty, mild but elegant manners, soft pleasing voice, and fine intelligence were full well calculated to win a young creature's heart. Sir Matthew entertained not the slightest suspicion of the mutual love which subsisted on the part of his daughter and Mr. Bentinck: nor did she dare make the avowal, even when compelled to receive the addresses of Lord Burleigh. Bentinck was poor: indeed he had nothing beyond his curacy, which gave him about a hundred and twenty pounds a year. What hope had the lovers? Certainly none of obtaining the consent of Sir Matthew Heseltine to their union. There are at present no means of ascertaining beyond mere surmise, as to how their secret meetings were managed—nor whether the young lady required much persuasion to take the step which she adopted. The bridal day for her union with Lord Burleigh was fixed; and Sir Matthew remembers full well that when he announced it to his daughter, she gazed upon him with the stupor of consternation—though at the time he was far from rightly comprehending the real state of her feelings: for, as I have already told you, he had not then any reason to suspect that her affections were engaged elsewhere. But the truth speedily struck him with the force of a terrific blow; for on the eve of the day appointed for her marriage with Lord Burleigh, Miss Heseltine disappeared from the Hall. A note which she left upon her toilette-table, and which was couched in terms indicative of mingled frenzy and despair, acquainted her father with the fact that she had fled to become the wife of Mr. Bentinck; and that in a few days she would return with her husband, that they might throw themselves at his feet and implore his forgiveness."

Mrs. Leslie paused; and I awaited with considerable interest the resumption of her narrative.

"Sir Matthew Heseltine," she at length continued, "became all in a moment an altered man. Alas! I do not mean, Joseph, that he became altered in a sense leading him to show mercy and forgiveness unto his daughter and her husband—but altered so as to become implacable against them. He just now explained to me all that he felt when he read that note which his daughter

had left behind her. He displayed no excitement: no ejaculation of rage escaped his lips: no tear trickled from his eye. It appeared as if his entire being had all in a moment become changed by the magic touch of an enchanter's wand. His sister had eloped against his consent: his daughter had now followed that example:—it seemed as if those who were nearest and dearest, were destined to abandon and desert him,—not merely abandon and desert him, but act in defiance of all his wishes and plans. Thus was it that in a single moment his heart grew steeled against his daughter whom he had so fondly loved and who was once all in all to him! The very next morning he quitted Heseltine Hall, and repaired to the Continent,—leaving behind him a letter for his daughter when she should call, to the effect that he cast her off for ever. He travelled alone—without a single attendant—over the greater part of Europe,—wandering like an unquiet spirit from place to place, shunning society, and gradually acquiring those cynical habits which have since become as it were his second nature. Thus he remained a year abroad; and during this interval numerous were the letters which followed him from England,—the addresses being in the well known handwriting of his daughter. He read not one of them: they were consigned to the flames the moment they successively came to hand. At length, at the end of that year, matters of business recalled him into Westmoreland: and a few days after his arrival at the Hall, he received another letter, the direction of which was in the handwriting of his daughter—but the envelope had the broad black rim of deep mourning. He could not resist the impulse which prompted him to open it. It was a long letter, couched in terms of deepest pathos and frenzied affliction, as well as of most imploring entreaty. Her husband Mr. Bentinck had just died,—died of a broken heart at the misery which his fatal love had entailed upon his adored wife and infant offspring; for within a few weeks previous to her husband's death, the unhappy Mrs. Bentinck had become a mother. During the year of their married life, they had experienced the utmost privations. Bentinck had lost his curacy at Kendal: vainly had he endeavoured to procure fresh preferment; and it was by the precarious occupation of giving classical lessons and writing for theological magazines, that he had procured a pittance. His health had rapidly sunk under the weight of those sorrows which that ill-starred marriage had brought down upon himself and his adored wife; and it was in a wretched garret in London that he had breathed his last. Now that he was gone, the afflicted widow besought her father's forgiveness, and implored that if this should be denied her, he would at least allow her the wherewithal to save herself and her innocent offspring from starvation or the workhouse."

Mrs. Leslie ceased speaking for a few minutes, during which she was profoundly affected; and the tears were trickling down my own cheeks.

"I now come, Joseph," she at length resumed, in a low and solemn voice, "to one of the saddest phases of my uncle's conduct. He himself—seated as he was an hour back in that very chair which you occupy—wept convulsively as he reached this point of his narrative. He admits that his heart yearned at the time towards the daughter whom he had once loved so tenderly, and who was then plunged in such bitter, bitter affliction: but that yearning too soon passed away—and all his implacability revived. He enclosed a bank-note for fifty pounds in a letter, with but a few accompanying lines, to the effect that it was the last succour she need ever expect at his hands, and that thenceforth her letters would be consigned unread to the flames, as all her previous ones had been with the single exception of that mourning epistle to which this cruel missive was the response. Having transacted the business which brought him to England, Sir Matthew Heseltine returned to the Continent, where he remained two years, wandering about from place to place like an unquiet spirit, as before. During this interval several letters in the same well-known handwriting reached him: but he read them not—and at length he received no more. He returned to England, and settled himself once again at Heseltine Hall,—seeing but little company, and sinking deeper and deeper into those cynical habits which now characterize him. He learnt by some indirect means, that his daughter had married again, and that her second husband was a man of wealth and eminence in the city of London. Still he made no overture on his own part towards a reconciliation; and as letters from his daughter had for some time been discontinued, he supposed that as she was now in a state of independence, her own pride prevented her from again appealing to her father for forgiveness. About four or five years after this second return of my uncle from the Continent to Heseltine Hall, the death of my mother threw me upon his hands; and here my own history ought properly to be interwoven in the narrative which I am reciting. But as you are already acquainted with it, I pass on to other matters. It was soon after the time (as I have this day learnt) when I was first brought an orphan to Heseltine Hall, that Sir Matthew again heard of his daughter; and to be particular in dates, the incident I am about to mention occurred thirteen years ago. Her husband suddenly failed in business, and under circumstances reflecting considerable dishonour upon himself. Sir Matthew's daughter wrote to her father, explaining what had occurred, and expressing the earnest heartfelt hope that as eight years had then elapsed since she had quitted the paternal roof, his anger against her had become softened down. Sir Matthew opened this letter amongst a number of others, without observing the handwriting of the address; and having once opened it, he perused its contents from beginning to end. Thence did he become acquainted with the fresh sources of affliction which his unhappy daughter was doomed to experience: but the circumstances of her second marriage, as they thus turned out, proved but little calculated to soften or subdue the implacability engendered by her first matrimonial alliance. He wrote to her in a brief and peremptory manner,—sternly refusing to afford the slightest assistance either to her husband or herself, and as cruelly forbidding her to trouble him with any correspondence for the future. But every additional circumstance of this nature tended to sour the temper and confirm the cynicism of Sir Matthew Heseltine. His mind fell more and more into a morbid condition. When he looked back upon three elopements,—that of his sister first of

all—that of his daughter next—and that of myself, his niece, the third,—it is really scarcely to be wondered if such retrospection should have produced those disastrous effects upon him. It seemed as if all whom he had ever loved or cared for—all whom he had ever wished to benefit, though it might be after his own peculiar fashion—were destined, in his view of matters, to reward him with the deepest ingratitude. He could not bear to think upon the past: but having no pleasure in the present, and no hope for the future in this life, the entire world itself appeared to him under the darkest and most unnatural colours. He resolved to seclude himself as much as possible from such a world: he quitted the home of his ancestors—and having no farther taste, inclination, nor energy for Continental travelling, he journeyed southward to seek some place in which he was a perfect stranger, and where he could bury himself in the seclusion which he courted. I know not precisely what accident or circumstance made him fix upon Reading: but there—in that comparatively humble abode, with a household meanly limited—has he spent the last twelve years of his existence. At length, as old age and infirmities incapacitated him from dispensing with certain assistance, he resolved to take a young man into his service: he advertised his requirement—and thus were you thrown in his way. All the incidents which have occurred within the last few weeks, have aroused him, as you perceive, into a better state of mind. His resolve to repair the past as much as possible, both for himself and those who have kindred claims upon him, was taken on that same evening when through your generous agency I was brought into his presence to receive the assurance of his pardon. With that eccentricity which has become habitual, his mind was made up in a moment. He would return to the home of his ancestors—he would see me, his niece, once more within these walls—he would devote himself to the welfare of that tenantry whom he has so long neglected—he would expend in good works and benevolent purposes, large portions of that wealth which, always great, has been for the last dozen years accumulating immensely—and what is more, Joseph," added Mrs. Leslie, in a voice tremulously subdued, "he would become reconciled to his daughter and acknowledge her offspring as his grand-children. These were his resolves; and to execute them did he abruptly return to Heseltine Hall."

Mrs. Leslie paused again; and I was about to ask her what mission was about to be entrusted to me, and to what aim all these revelations were tending, when she concluded her explanations as follow:—

"Yes, Joseph—Sir Matthew Heseltine will receive his daughter to his arms! Through the medium of his solicitor in London, he has from time to time heard a few stray particulars concerning that daughter; and he thinks that there will be little difficulty in discovering where she resides with her husband and her children. Now, do you begin to comprehend the duty which is required at your hands—the mission to be entrusted to you? Sir Matthew Heseltine not merely gives you a proof of his confidence, but likewise of his friendship, in selecting you as the bearer of good tidings to his long disowned and discarded daughter. But he would not tell you all these things with his own lips. You can understand him: his cynicism has amounted to a pride which cannot unbend in a moment—or at least would rather unbend in the presence of myself who am his relation, than before you who are otherwise situated. It would wound and hurt him to display too much feeling before your eyes. Tell me, Joseph—will you undertake this mission? and will you depart at once?"

"Oh, most cheerfully will I accept the trust," I exclaimed: "and infinitely delighted as well as honoured am I by the confidence which Sir Matthew Heseltine thus reposes in me. Yes, Mrs. Leslie—I will depart at once. I shall be rejoiced to bear such intelligence to a long disowned daughter,—rejoiced," I added, "as I was unfeignedly, when but a short time back I sped to bring you into your uncle's presence at Reading?"

"You are not to see Sir Matthew before your departure," continued Mrs. Leslie. "He has desired me to make every arrangement with you. On arriving in London, you will proceed to Mr. Tennant, the solicitor, for whom a letter is already written. He will give you farther instructions. Here, Joseph, is the letter—and here is a purse containing a sum of money for all the expenses which you may have to incur."

"But the name of Sir Matthew's daughter? the name of her husband?" I said, as I received the sealed letter and the well filled purse.

"Ask no more question," responded Mrs. Leslie, with an affable smile. "You know that Sir Matthew has his own peculiar way of managing things; and I am sure you will not hesitate to humour him thus far."

"No—assuredly not," I exclaimed. "Let him order matters to be managed according to his own fashion: it is enough for me that he is pursuing the right path—and it is a source of infinite gratification that I should be selected as the instrument of his generosity. I will depart at once. My preparations will speedily be made; and I will take the night-coach from Kendal."

"You had better order the gig to be in readiness to convey you across to Kendal," said Mrs. Leslie; "and God speed your mission! I must now say farewell to you, Joseph. We are about to part; and heaven alone knows whether we are ever to meet again in this life. But you shall hear from us: my husband will write to you from time to time to tell you how we are getting on: we shall have no difficulty in being aware of your address—for I need hardly assure you that it will be your own fault if you ever leave Sir Matthew Heseltine so long as he lives; and I am equally confident that when he departs from this world you will not find yourself forgotten. As for Howard and myself, we shall always think of you with the kindest, the sincerest, and the most grateful feelings. Nothing will ever afford us a deeper joy than to receive tidings of your welfare: nothing would afflict us so profoundly as to hear of any misfortune happening to you. But you are sure to prosper! A young man with your excellence of heart, with your generosity of disposition, with your lofty and ennobling sentiment, cannot possibly do otherwise than thrive. There would be no justice in heaven if the contrary were to take place. I could say more, much more, Joseph—for I entertain for you the sincerest friendship, as well as an illimitable gratitude: but my feelings overpower me——Farewell!"

She gave me her hand: I pressed it with friendly warmth—and snatching up the letter and the purse, I hurried from the room, deeply affected at all that had taken place, and not least so by this parting scene.

I hurried up to my chamber—packed a carpet-bag with such necessaries as I should require—and, without seeking an interview with Sir Matthew Heseltine, jumped into the gig which was in readiness to take me across to Kendal. The horse was a good one—the groom who drove, made the animal speed along; and in a quarter of an hour we entered the town. It was now six o'clock in the evening; and I learnt that in half-an-hour there would be a coach which would take me a considerable distance on my way. I secured a place inside, and thus commenced my journey to the metropolis, from which I had now been absent ever since I was embarked by the iniquity of Mr. Lanover on board an emigrant-ship at Blackwall.

CHAPTER LXIV.

THE ECCLESTONS.

Yes—it was about twenty months since I was thus packed off from the metropolis on board the ill-fated vessel which was doomed to swell the number of those that had gone down to the insatiate depths of the Goodwin Sands; and it was almost a year since I had fled from Mr. Lanover's presence at the hotel in Perth. The image of the dreadful humpback had frequently haunted me like the

recollection of a horrible nightmare: but I certainly stood far less in terror of him than I had previously done—and at all events, whatsoever lingering apprehension I might still entertain of his manifold capacities for mischief, was by no means strong enough to deter me from undertaking the mission on which I had now entered.

I wondered often and often during the journey to London, whether I should be enabled by any means to obtain an interview with Annabel; and I revolved a thousand plans in my mind on this subject. But on each occasion a shadow would steal across the brightness of the dream in which I was thus indulging:—that shadow bore a human form—it was a female shape—and it carried something in its arms. Lady Calanthe and my child!

Then I fell to wondering whether chance would throw me in the way of Calanthe; and I know not whether I most desired an affirmative or a negative solution of my question. My heart yearned towards my child: but yet, if its secret depths were probed, I must candidly confess that there was a certain feeling of thankfulness on account of the incidents which had prevented me from consummating the ruin of all my hopes by an alliance with that dear child's mother. And as for Annabel——Oh, how could I dare dream of seeking an interview with her, when another had a stronger claim, if not upon my heart, at least upon my hand?—how could I hope to look the pure-minded, the angelic Annabel in the face, without a blush? These questions would intrude themselves upon my mind: but love is strong—and love is hopeful—and love furnishes arguments which, whether right or wrong, over-rule all others. Yes—assuredly I longed to see the bright and beauous Annabel again! Something told me that I was still dear to her—that my image continued to occupy her heart—and that she often and often thought of me. And then I pictured to myself the improvement which must have taken place in her; no—not improvement: such a word is improperly applied to one of such faultless beauty as Annabel. But I thought that as she was now in her twenty-first year, the charms of girlhood would be developing themselves into the richness of womanhood; and that she was entering upon the best days of her remarkable and almost preternatural beauty. Yes—I longed to see her; and those who have loved as tenderly and as well as I, can easily comprehend how during my journey to London I devised a thousand projects for the accomplishment of that aim.

I reached the metropolis without any adventure worthy of note; and took up my quarters at an hotel in Holborn, so as to be near Mr. Tennant, the solicitor, whose offices were in Furnival's Inn. It was about ten o'clock in the morning after my arrival in London, that I proceeded to the place just named; and on stating to the clerks that I was the bearer of a letter from Sir Matthew Heseltine, I was at once shown into the lawyer's private office. Mr. Tennant was an old man, with a shrewd, yet by no means unprepossessing countenance:—he had a business-like reserve and precision of manner, yet not deficient in urbanity. He bade me sit down; and taking the letter, was for some time occupied in the perusal of its contents—for it was evidently a long one.

"Sir Matthew Heseltine speaks of you, Mr. Wilmot," the lawyer at length said, "as a confidential young gentleman to whom he has entrusted a commission of great delicacy. I was rejoiced to learn by a letter from Sir Matthew, received about ten days back, that he has abandoned his retirement at Reading and returned to Heseltine Hall. This is acting like a sensible man—and indeed is following out the advice which I have on several occasions ventured to give him. However, with regard to the contents of this letter. Sir Matthew enjoins me to make certain little inquiries before your services can be put in requisition. You must therefore amuse yourself for a day or two in London; and when I have anything to communicate, I will drop you a note. Where are you staying?"

I named the hotel, which was at no great distance.

"Oh! that is very convenient," said the lawyer: "and you can be with me at any time on a short notice. I will not delay in making the inquiries which Sir Matthew enjoins, and the results of which, as I see by his letter, must constitute to a great extent the basis of your proceedings in the mission entrusted to you."

I saw that Mr. Tennant had no more to say to me on the present occasion: but though I rose from my seat, I lingered in his office—for I felt somewhat disappointed at not being at once initiated more deeply into the matter which had brought me to London.

"I perfectly well understand, Mr. Wilmot," he said, "that there are certain particulars which you have yet to learn: but you must really restrain your impatience for a day or two. You of course know Sir Matthew well enough to be aware that he has his own particular way of conducting matters; and those who wish to retain his favour, must follow his instructions."

I bowed, and issued from the office: I had no pretext for remaining any longer, nor for putting another question. I strolled out into Holborn, not knowing exactly what to do with myself, but more than half inclined to go up into the neighbourhood of Great Russell Street, Bloomsbury—from which indeed I was at no great distance—to make inquiries relative to the Lanovers. A second thought however reminded me that by seeking an interview with Annabel, I might only be compromising her, and draw down upon her head her father's wrath: for that he hated me for some reason or another, there could not be the slightest doubt; and that after everything he had done towards me, he would look complacently on my love for his daughter, was not for an instant to be thought of. I therefore determined to reflect a little longer upon the course which was the best to be pursued; because I would rather make any sacrifice of my own feelings than do aught which should harm a single hair of the beloved Annabel's head.

While I was strolling back to the hotel, the thought suddenly struck me that I had meditated a visit to Delmar Manor in order to give into the hands of Mr. Mulgrave that leaf of the Enfield register which I had picked up in the lodging of the Rev. Mr. Dorchester at Oldham. I had purposely brought it with me in my carpet-bag: and I entered the hotel to procure it. Having

obtained it from my chamber, I proceeded to the coffee-room to make some inquiry of the waiter as to the starting-place of any conveyance which would take me to Delmar Manor. But while I was questioning the waiter, I was suddenly struck by a familiar voice coming from the other extremity of the room; and even if the tones of that voice itself were not thus familiar, the style of language would have proved in a moment recognisable.

"It's just that, my dear friend. I prefer a Scotch lunch to an English one. You remember the Widow Glenbucket, when you used to dine with me in the Grass-Market——let me see—it must have been the Grass-Market—it couldn't have been——"

"You are getting absent, Dominie. Take another glass of this ale—which, if not exactly true Preston Pans beer, is nevertheless as decidedly Scotch as the snuff in my mull:"—and these words were spoken with a broad Caledonian accent which I will not attempt to convey by any description of my own.

I hastened to the end of the coffee-room; and there, at a table in one of the boxes, sat Dominie Clackmannan on one side, and a most extraordinary-looking being opposite to him—with a copious repast between them. It was barely noon: but it was decidedly a luncheon worthy of the table of the Chief of Inch Methglin himself. The Dominie looked as gravely stolid as ever, and not a single day older. His friend was a man of about fifty,—short, stout, round, and podgy—with a head just like a ball—very small features and twinkling gray eyes. He was completely bald on the crown; and a circlet of bushy gray hair passed from one ear round the back of that strangely-shaped head to the other ear. His whiskers were also gray. His face was as red as if he had been steeped for the last forty years in port wine; and his bald crown, though scrupulously clean, shone as if with a gloss: or in other words, it looked as if it had been well washed with yellow soap, and rubbed dry with a hard towel. He was the most good-natured jovial-looking little man I had ever seen in my life—and evidently one who had no small attachment for good cheer of every description. He had just set down a large tumbler as I first caught a glimpse of him; and as he wiped the froth of the ale from his lips, he smacked them with an expression of ineffable delight. But his dress remains to be described. It was all of one colour—coat, waistcoat, and trousers;—and that colour was not exactly gray, but a light kind of pepper and salt, with a large proportion of the latter. His neckcloth was gray; and his stockings—for he wore somewhat clumsy low shoes—were gray likewise. His hat, which was on the seat near him, was a grayish felt; and gray silk gloves lay over the brim. The very handkerchief with which he wiped his lips, was of a similar colour. In short it appeared to be his deliberate study to clothe himself as much as possible in garments and articles of a corresponding hue.

"Mr. Clackmannan," I said, "I recognised your voice—pardon me for introducing myself to your notice——"

"It's just that," said the Dominie, clutching my hand in a good-natured way, but staring upon me with stolid bewilderment. "I do recollect that we have met before. It must have been at Sandie Macwheeble's——"

"Nonsense, Dominie!" cried his friend, with a hilarious laugh. "Poor Sandie has been in his grave for the last fifteen years—and this young gentleman can't be much above twenty: so unless you saw him as a little child——"

"It's just that," said the Dominie: then turning to me, he exclaimed, "Ah, I recollect you now! But how is your uncle the Baillie? and how is Mrs. Owlhead? and all the little Owlheads? To be sure, this is the Baillie's nephew! I remember when you and your worthy uncle came to dine with me at the Widow Glenbucket's—the widow was taken ill——let me see? Ill was it——no, it must have been drunk——"

"Nonsense, Dominie!" exclaimed his friend, who had just bolted half of a mutton chop, while Mr. Clackmannan was thus endeavouring to elucidate something from his confused reminiscences. "The Widow Glenbucket never got drunk!"

"It's just that," said the Dominie: "to be sure—she did only get boozy. But now that I bethink me, I would write to the widow and apologize—only that she is dead. By the bye, what was that you were saying to the widow one day when I came in and found your mouth very close to her ear——I think it must have been her ear—it might have been her lips——However, I shall recollect presently. Won't you sit down, Mr. Owlhead?"

"However flattering, my dear sir," I answered, "it might be to my feelings to claim relationship with the Owlheads of Glasgow, I can assure you it is not my name. You don't recollect me. I am Joseph Wilmot."

"It's just that!" cried the Dominie, a light now suddenly breaking in upon him. "I remember, I wrote to my friend the Laird of Tintosquashdale, and told him how you helped Emmeline Vennachar to run away with Duncansby the lawyer——no, it wasn't Duncansby——it must have been Sir Alexander Carrondale: but I shall recollect presently. Sit down and take a glass with us: you are quite welcome. And now I bethink me, you are looking different from what you were when last I saw you. To be sure!—you have put off your livery——"

"Livery?" ejaculated his friend: "nonsense! This young gentleman never wore livery, I can tell. Come, sir—sit down and make yourself at home. Waiter, more ale! Dominie, you have omitted to introduce us."

"It's just that," observed Mr. Clackmannan. "This is my young friend——I forget his name again——it must be Joseph Wilmot. Mr. Wilmot, my friend"——and here the Dominie, looking across the table, breathed the previously often-heard and renowned nomenclature—"Mr. Saltcoats!"

Ah! I ought to have known at once that this was none other than the veritable Saltcoats *in propriâ personâ*. His dress should have told me. Who but a man bearing such a name, could have worn such a costume? I had however always had a suspicion that the Dominie's numerous catalogue of friends, whose names he was so incessantly lugging into his half-finished anecdotes, were mere phantoms of his own imagination: but now at last I had positive proof that there was at

least some foundation for the existence of the category—inasmuch as one human item thereof sat before me in the round, comfortable, sleek, oily-looking Mr. Saltcoats.

I declined refreshments; and inquired of the Dominie what had brought him to London.

"Ah! it's just that," was the response, given with the slightest degree more of animation than the worthy Dominie was wont to throw into his speeches. "You see, my young friend, that my kinsman Mr. Clackmannan of Clackmannanauchnish has gone out of this world into a better, it is to be hoped. He took his departure——let me see, how was it? Not in a one-horse chaise——No, it was under the dinner-table, where he had fallen down—I grieve to say—in a fit——"

"Yes—of drunkenness," added Mr. Saltcoats, with a roar of boisterous laughter.

"It's just that," added the Dominie, relapsing into his wonted stolid gravity. "My kinsman died—it wasn't of fever—no, it was of three bottles of wine; and lo and behold, I received a letter——yes, it must have been a letter——though I remember it was on the same morning that I also received that blow with a brick-bat which a mischievous urchin in the village of Methglin threw at me round a corner——However, I shall recollect presently."

"At all events, Mr. Clackmannan," I said, "I may now congratulate you on having become the Laird of Clackmannanauchnish."

"It's just that, my young friend," responded the Dominie—or rather the new Laird of Clackmannanauchnish, as I ought now to denominate him. "And so, you see, it was necessary for me to come up to London on some little business touching and concerning money in the Funds—yes, it must have been for the money in the Funds—it couldn't be only for these mutton-chops——However, I shall recollect presently:" and then the worthy Dominie stuck his fork into one of the interesting articles of food which he had just mentioned.

"The fact is," said Mr. Saltcoats,—"for if I don't tell it to you, I'll be hanged if you will ever get it out of the Dominie,—he has inherited something like a thousand a year, and as he wanted a friend to come up to London to take care of him, my services were at his disposal. We are going to live together for the rest of our lives. I have got a thousand a year—and he has got a thousand a year. We are both jolly young bachelors:"—and here Mr. Saltcoats made the whole coffee-room echo with his uproarious mirth, in the midst of which he pulled the bell violently, exclaiming, "Waiter, more ale!"

"It's just that," said the Laird of Clackmannanauchnish: "and more chops. And now I bethink me, as I one day said to the Widow Glenbucket, when she served me up collops——"

"Might I venture to ask, Mr. Clackmannan," I said, "concerning the Chief and his family?"

By dint of numerous questionings and a vast amount of patience, I at length succeeded in eliciting from the Laird of Clackmannanauchnish a few particulars relative to the Inch Methglins. It appeared that the Chief had become reconciled to his niece Lady Carrondale—and that Mr. Lennox Vennachar, shortly after his disappointment, had plunged headlong into politics, and got himself elected as Member of Parliament for a borough on his father's estate: he had spent several months in London during the last session—and on his return to Inch Methglin, he had of his own accord made friendly overtures towards his cousin Emmeline and her husband, Sir Alexander; and he had since remained on terms of generous friendship with the Carrondales. I was not astonished to hear all this in respect to the Chief and his son: for notwithstanding their pride and arrogance, there were many good points in their characters;—and in respect to Lennox it only needed contact with the world and the experience of refined society, in order to develop his own better qualities.

I left Mr. Clackmannan with his friend Saltcoats enjoying their third dish of mutton-chops and their sixth or seventh bottle of Scotch ale—and proceeded to the office whence a stage-coach started at two in the afternoon for Enfield. In due time I was put down in the vicinage of Delmar Manor. My heart beat under the influence of many recollections as I approached the iron gates of the park. At that mansion I had donned my first suit of livery: there I had first become acquainted with Mr. Lanover; and there too I had been a witness, so to speak, of the frightful tragedy—as mysterious as it was frightful—which deprived me of a benefactor. I rang at the entrance, expecting to see my old friend the porter: but it was a stranger who came forth. I inquired what had become of him whom I had known five years back?—and was informed that he had been gone long ago,—the man adding that when Lord Eccleston took possession of the property, he changed most of the servants.

"Lord Eccleston?" I exclaimed, in astonishment. "How long has he been the proprietor of the Delmar estate?"

"Why, for these last five years, to be sure!" was the porter's response: "ever since Mr. Delmar's death. But if you ask me how long he has been Lord Eccleston, my answer is—only within the last three weeks."

"I understand," I said. "The gentleman whom I knew as the Hon. Mr. Mulgrave, is now Lord Eccleston."

"That is precisely what it is," returned the porter. "Do you particularly wish to see his lordship? If so, you had better call at the house in Manchester Square."

I thanked the man for his information; and observed, "But I always understood that the late Lord Eccleston had a large family?"

"Only one son, and seven or eight daughters, I believe," responded the porter; "and the son died about a couple of years ago—thus leaving Mr. Mulgrave the heir presumptive to the title. His brother's death has now given him that title."

"Have you lately seen Mr. and Mrs. Howard at the Manor?" I inquired.

"Oh, no!—not for a very long time," replied the porter. "I do not think that his lordship and my lady are on very good terms with their relations. So at least it is said; and it looks as if it was the case, as the Howards never show themselves at the Manor."

I next inquired respecting several of the servants whom I had known at the time I was a page in Mr. Delmar's household: but I found that not

one of them was now remaining there. I had consequently no excuse for proceeding up to the mansion: though I longed to wander once more amidst the spacious grounds;—for those scenes which the incidents of bygone years have rendered familiar to the memory, are ever fraught with interest, notwithstanding that the incidents themselves may have been sad and mournful. But I dared not request permission to penetrate into the park without any definite object; and again thanking the man for his civility, I took my departure.

When I got back to London, it was too late to think of calling at Manchester Square; and I accordingly postponed that business till the morrow. On reaching the hotel I found Mr. Clackmannan and his friend Saltcoats discussing a bottle of Port wine after their dinner; and when I had partaken of my own repast, they invited me to join them. This I did for a little while; but being fatigued with my recent journey from Westmoreland—as well as with the day's proceedings—I soon retired to rest.

On the following morning the Dominie and his friend took their departure for the north,—the former having terminated the business which brought him to London; and as he shook hands with me, he assured me that I should receive a hearty welcome if at any time I would pay him a visit at Clackmannanauchnish. Mr. Saltcoats,—who, though still labouring under the influence of a luxurious breakfast, had fortified himself for travelling with a bottle of strong ale,—likewise shook me by the hand; and I saw them take their departure,—the Dominie's last words being "that he should write to the Widow Glenbucket to announce his prosperity——only that she was dead."

It being now eleven in the forenoon, and no communication having come from Mr. Tennant, I set off to Manchester Square, in which was situated the town-mansion of the noble family of Eccleston. A hatchment emblazoned with the armorial bearings, was suspended between the upper windows—as if this ostentatious pomp could in any way benefit the spirit of the departed; I knocked at the door: it was opened by the hall-porter; and I requested an interview with Lord Eccleston.

"It is rather an early hour, sir, to think of seeing his lordship," responded the man in a very courteous tone: for he evidently supposed that my situation in life was superior to what it really was. "But I will send in your name; and his lordship will decide."

"Say, if you please, that Joseph Wilmot requests an interview with his lordship on very particular business."

The message was sent in; and after the lapse of a few minutes I was conducted to an elegantly furnished breakfast-parlour, where Lord and Lady Eccleston were seated at the well-spread table. The former wore a morning gown—the latter a *déshabillée;* and both were of course in mourning. His lordship was now about forty-three years of age, and was little altered in his appearance since I had last seen him. Her ladyship was thirty-eight: she had grown stouter—but it was the splendid *embonpoint* of a rich commanding beauty. Her complexion was however paler than when I had last seen her; and the traces of fashionable dissipation were more visible upon her countenance: but I had no doubt that these disappeared of an evening when the mysteries of the toilet were accomplished. As I entered the room, they both surveyed me with considerable attention—and it likewise struck me with a certain peculiarity of look, which I could not rightly comprehend. I knew not whether there were uneasiness, annoyance, or any other feeling expressed in that look: but it was identical with both of them;—and then, as they averted their eyes, it struck me that they exchanged rapid glances, significant of some idea which was uppermost in the mind of each, but which was as unfathomable on my part as the peculiar looks themselves had just been.

"You wish to see me?" said Lord Eccleston, in a somewhat subdued tone of voice; and I fancied that it was slightly tremulous.

"I hope, my lord, that I am not intruding," I answered: "but circumstances have thrown in my way a particular document which may more or less concern your lordship; and I deemed it my duty to place it in your hands. Perhaps your lordship does not recollect me?"

"Yes, yes," he exclaimed: "I recollect you well enough—I saw you at Delmar Manor. But this document——"

"It is here, my lord:"—and producing from my pocket the leaf of the Enfield register, I placed it before him.

Never shall I forget the strangeness of the ejaculations which burst from the lips of both Lord and Lady Eccleston; nor the *then* incomprehensible wildness with which their looks were flung upon me. I actually started,—fearing that I had done something wrong. A sudden faintness seemed to come over her ladyship; and clasping her hands, she murmured something—but what it was, my ear did not catch.

"Clara!" said her husband, almost sternly: and the look which he fixed upon her, was evidently for the purpose of recalling her to her self-possession. This she instantaneously recovered: but again were her glances thrown with a singular and incomprehensible expression upon myself.

"Sit down, Joseph Wilmot," said Lord Eccleston, speaking in a kind voice; "and tell me how this document fell into your hands."

"Accident, my lord, threw me in the way of a certain Mr. Dorchester——"

"Ah, the villain!" cried Eccleston. "But proceed. Where did this happen? and when?"

"At Oldham, my lord—not quite a year ago. The Rev. Mr. Dorchester," I continued, "plundered me of a sum of money, and disappeared from his lodgings in a hurried manner,—having previously turned out the contents of his writing-desk, the greater portion of which he burnt or tore up. But this document remained entire; and I took possession of it. Perhaps he did not intend to leave it behind him——"

"And this is the only business you have with me?" inquired his lordship hastily.

I thought the question a very singular one: for it seemed to me that the business was of a sufficient importance to justify my visit—especially considering the degree of emotion which the production of that document had caused Lord and Lady Eccleston to experience.

"I had nothing else to say to your lordship," was my observation.

"You are prosperous? you are doing well? you are comfortably situate?" said Lady Eccleston: and her deep blue eyes were fixed upon me for a moment with a certain degree of interest;—but they were instantaneously averted again; and bending down, she trifled with a beautiful little spaniel that lay upon the hearth-rug.

"I am comfortably situated, I thank your ladyship," was my response: and rising from my seat, I was advancing towards the door,—when Lord Eccleston called me back,

"Where are you living? what are you doing?" he inquired.

"I am in the service, my lord, of Sir Matthew Heseltine," was my answer; "and he lives in Westmoreland: but he has sent me up to London on a little private business, which will perhaps detain me here a few days."

"And then you go back to Westmoreland?" exclaimed his lordship: and on my responding in the affirmative, he glanced towards his wife,—who, it struck me, bent upon him a peculiar look, at the same time shaking her head in a deprecating manner: but what she meant I could not for the life of me conceive.

"Well, if it happens that circumstances compel you to leave the service of the gentleman whom you have named," said his lordship, "let me know at once. You have rendered me a service in bringing me this document; and I should be glad to have an opportunity of benefiting you. Indeed, to show my gratitude, you must permit me——"

"No, my lord!" I interrupted him, as he drew forth his purse. "The little service which I have been enabled to render your lordship, has cost me nothing; and I can accept no pecuniary reward."

I thereupon bowed, and hastened forth from the room: but as I turned to close the door, I caught the last look which her ladyship's deep blue eyes flung upon me—a look which was as incomprehensible and as peculiar as the former glances whereof I had been the object during this interview. I issued from the mansion, wondering what it could all mean. There was an evident mystery of some sort which I could not possibly fathom: it perplexed and bewildered me—it even haunted me. I was dispirited, I knew not why: and anxious to throw off this unaccountable oppression—having, too, plenty of time upon my hands—I went and visited the public picture-galleries and museums, thus whiling away the hours until five in the evening. The natural cheerfulness of my disposition had regained its empire: the sadness of the forenoon had worn off: and if I still thought of my interview with the Ecclestons, it was merely to wonder what the peculiar incidents of that half-hour could mean. On returning to the hotel, I found a letter from Mr. Tennant the solicitor, desiring me to be with him at eleven o'clock on the ensuing morning.

Punctual to this appointment, I entered Furnival's Inn as the clock was striking the hour; and in a few minutes I found myself closeted with Mr. Tennant, in his own private office.

"I may now safely enter upon those explanations, Mr. Wilmot," said the man of business, "which I was not permitted to unfold the day before yesterday. You know that Sir Matthew Heseltine is an eccentric character, and has a singular way of doing things. However, that is not my business: all that regards me, is to follow the instructions of a long-standing and excellent client. You are aware, Mr. Wilmot," continued the solicitor, "that Sir Matthew's heart has been softened towards a long disowned and ignored daughter. Indeed, from certain passages in the letter which you brought me, it is evident that you yourself were mainly instrumental in imbuing Sir Matthew Heseltine with these better feelings. But Sir Matthew, while seriously thinking of becoming reconciled to his daughter, was resolved first of all to ascertain whether her conduct has all along continued worthy of the good opinion of the world—whether she has done her duty as a wife and as a mother—and whether, in short, he could receive her to his arms without dishonour and degradation to himself. On this head I was ordered to institute the most searching inquiries; and, according to my instructions, the result of these inquiries was to decide whether any farther steps should be taken in respect to your particular mission to London. Suppose, for instance, that it had come to my knowledge that Sir Matthew's daughter had fallen into an evil course of life, and that she had become utterly unworthy of the reconciliation which he yearned to bring about,—utterly unworthy too of being recognised as the heiress of his wealth,—*then*, in this case, a particular course was marked out for me to pursue. I should have sent you back to Westmoreland with the intelligence; and you would not have had the pleasure and satisfaction of making a certain communication to the lady of whom we are speaking—nor of escorting her to Heseltine Hall that she might be received into her father's arms. At the same time, I must inform you, Mr. Wilmot, that Sir Matthew would have left it to my discretion to render pecuniary assistance to his daughter, if she stood in need of it—as well as to adopt whatsoever plan I thought fit for the benefit of her family."

"But it has all turned out otherwise, I hope?" was my eager exclamation; "and the result of your inquiries——"

"Is completely favourable," answered Mr. Tennant emphatically.

"Oh, I am rejoiced!" I cried, my heart swelling with emotions of joy at the thought of being the instrument of reconciliation between a long separated father and daughter.

"Yes—my inquiries have been completely favourable," continued the solicitor. "The unfortunate lady has a brute of a husband, whom I am sure that Sir Matthew Heseltine will never receive with pleasure. Fortunately, however, this man—as I have ascertained—is now on the Continent, engaged in some particular business; and he is not expected to return for some weeks. His wife therefore can accompany you to Heseltine Hall: and it is perhaps all for the best that her husband should not be of the party. When once Sir Matthew's altered and more tender sentiments towards his daughter are confirmed and settled, he will perhaps be in a better frame of mind to encounter her husband."

"How many children has she, Mr. Tennant," I inquired: "for doubtless she will wish to take them with her; and moreover I should like them all to be presented to their grandfather——that is to say, if his instructions to you have given me the power to adopt such a course."

"It appears from what I yesterday learnt, she

has but one child now living," returned the lawyer. "I thought she had more. But I knew very little indeed about this family: it was only from time to time that their name came across me,—thus showing me that they were resident in the metropolis; and on each such occasion I communicated to Sir Matthew what little I had learnt. But being well aware that it was a very sore subject, I was careful to allude to it in my letters as distantly and as gently as possible; and if I made any such allusion at all, I can assure you it was with the best possible motives. I thought it better to keep his daughter as much in his memory as I dared——"

"I understand you, sir!" I exclaimed. "Your conduct was most generous. You always looked forward to the possibility of a reconciliation."

"That was precisely my hope, Mr. Wilmot," returned the solicitor; "and now I am about to see it accomplished. Yes—the inquiries which I of course instituted with all becoming delicacy, and in a manner to prevent the objects of these inquiries from knowing that they were being made——I allude to the lady and her daughter——"

"You have not, then, seen them, Mr. Tennant?" I inquired.

"No—not yet. But I expect to see them every moment," he added, looking at his watch. "I sent a note last evening, requesting them to favour me with a call at half-past eleven this forenoon,—merely intimating that it was on a subject of the utmost importance. But I was about to tell you that the inquiries have proved perfectly satisfactory; and Sir Matthew Heseltine will have every reason to be proud of his daughter and granddaughter. The breath of scandal has never tainted their reputation; and though the man himself is far from being all that we could wish, yet the neighbours with one accord speak in the highest terms of his amiable wife and charming daughter."

"And their name, sir?" I inquired: "what is it? For, as you may perceive—though entrusted with this important mission—a great deal of mystery has been observed."

"Oh, that is just like Sir Matthew Heseltine!" exclaimed the solicitor. "If, for instance, the inquiries had proved unfavourable, I was strictly enjoined *not* to mention the name and abode to you at all. I dare say Sir Matthew fancied you would go and see them all the same; and that you were quite capable of hurrying them off with you into Westmoreland, even in defiance of the instructions I should have given you to the contrary. You see, Mr. Wilmot," added the lawyer with a smile, "what it is to have a character for too much generosity. And that character seems to be your's."

"I thank you, sir, for the compliment," I answered: "but fortunately there is no need in the present case for the exercise of a false generosity—after the admirable character you have given me in respect to these ladies."

"They will be here immediately, no doubt," said Mr. Tennant; "and you shall have all the pleasure and satisfaction of communicating the intelligence which awaits them. This much is your due;—and it was precisely because such was my impression, that I did not call upon them myself in the first instance, nor enter into any explanations in the note I transmitted them last evening."

"And their name, sir?" I again said.

But at this moment the door of the private office was thrown open; and a clerk announced, "The two ladies, sir, whom you expected."

The two ladies entered the room; and an ejacution of mingled joy and astonishment burst from my lips, as I at once recognised Mrs. Lanover and Annabel.

CHAPTER LXV.

THE JOURNEY.

EJACULATIONS of surprise too—aye, and of pleasure likewise—were re-echoed by Mrs. Lanover and Annabel; and the next instant my hands were clasped warmly in their own. In the rapture of my delight at thus encountering the angelic object of my heart's devoted love, the business which had brought me to London vanished from my recollection like a dream of no moment; and all my thoughts were thrown into the whirl and confusion of an intoxicating joy.

How beautiful did Annabel seem!—what a personification of exquisite feminine loveliness! A subdued and modest joy was dancing in the softness of her large azure eyes: the rich masses of her golden hair, floating down by the side of her fair cheeks and escaping beneath her bonnet, shone as if with a glory. A smile of happiness was upon her vermilion lips, revealing the pearls within. Her form had taken the developments proper to her age: but it had lost none of its exquisite symmetry, and little of its sylphid lightness. She had grown taller—she had reached her full height: she was all elegance, grace, and loveliness. Her mother, who was now about forty years of age, appeared to be in better health than when I had last seen her five years back—and certainly much better than when Annabel had spoken of her as being stretched on a bed of sickness at the time I encountered the charming girl in Dr. Pomfret's house at Salisbury.

Mr. Tennant was himself stricken with amazement on perceiving that I and the two ladies were no strangers to each other. But now all in a moment flashed back to my mind the recollection of the business for which I was there; and I exclaimed, "What marvellous mysteries are these! what wondrous coincidences! Is it possible, Mrs. Lanover, that you are Sir Matthew Heseltine's daughter?"

"Yes, yes—it is so!" she cried, suddenly seized with a powerful agitation. "What means the question, Joseph?"

"Oh, my dear madam!" I exclaimed, "such tidings of joy—such happiness—for you, and for Annabel also——But compose yourself," I said, subduing my voice into a lower and gentler tone; for I saw that a sensation of faintness was coming over Mrs. Lanover; and I conducted her to a seat.

"Mother—dearest mother," said Annabel, in the soft soothing music of her clear pure voice, "nerve yourself for whatsoever intelligence is about

to be imparted. You see that it is joyous, dear mother!——Joseph is incapable of deceiving you."

I could have caught the charming girl in my arms and covered her with kisses for these words spoken in my favour, had I dared to do so then and there.

"Yes—I know that Joseph is incapable of deceiving me," said Mrs. Lanover, now reviving. "Proceed, Joseph—I am nerved for any communication, whatsoever it may be."

"Your father, my dear madam, is reconciled to you," I said, but speaking cautiously and gently: "his arms are open to receive you!"

Mrs. Lanover clasped her hands in fervid thankfulness; and the tears streamed down her cheeks. Annabel wept in sympathy; and the lawyer, with the most delicate consideration, said to me, "Let us leave the ladies together for a few minutes. We will return to them presently."

He hurried me out of the room, and conducting me to another, said, "It is better that they should thus be left alone to tranquillise themselves. Perhaps the mother may have something to say to the daughter—some revelations to make in respect to the past: for I noticed that Miss Lanover surveyed you with bewilderment when you spoke of Sir Matthew Heseltine as her mother's father."

"Yes," I exclaimed, "there are doubtless revelations to make: for I know that a short time back Annabel was completely ignorant on many, many subjects—and she may be so still. She is not the daughter of Mr. Lanover—and I bless God for it!"

"No—she is the daughter of the unfortunate Bentinck, her mother's first husband," responded the solicitor. "But how came you to be acquainted with those ladies?"

"I knew them some time ago. Mr. Lanover did me much wrong—but upon this subject I would rather not speak. He says that he is my uncle: this however I scarcely believe—I never could fully believe it. Have you ever seen him?"

"Three or four times," answered Mr. Tennant. "Whenever he was in trouble and difficulty, he used to come and endeavour to persuade me to write to Sir Matthew Heseltine on his behalf. You are aware that he was once a very rich banker?"

"I know it," was my response. "But how, in heaven's name, could the amiable and once beautiful daughter of Sir Matthew Heseltine have married such a monster?"

"That she did marry him, Mr. Wilmot, should be reckoned to her honour and to her credit," rejoined the solicitor solemnly: "she sacrificed herself for the sake of her children. You know that her former husband Mr. Bentinck died at the expiration of the first year of their marriage,—leaving his afflicted widow with twin-daughters, then only a few weeks old. Sir Matthew Heseltine sent her some small sum—fifty pounds, I think,—accompanied by a letter to the effect that it was the last succour she was ever to look for at his hands. The fond deep love of a wife prompted her to give her husband's remains decent interment: his illness had led them to contract debts; and thus by the time the funeral expenses and those liabilities were paid, a considerable portion of Sir Heseltine's remittance was swallowed up. The unhappy widow — then only twenty years of age—discarded by her father, utterly inexperienced in the world, with health and spirits awfully shocked by her sad bereavement—was left to her own resources. She struggled on—heaven knows how she struggled on!—for I was not *then* acquainted with all the circumstances which have since come to my knowledge. Had I known them, Mr. Wilmot—and had I been aware of her abode—rest assured that she would not have wanted a friend. However, the unfortunate lady struggled and battled as best she could against the world: but how could she hope to succeed in earning even a livelihood by her needle, when the greater portion of her time was engrossed by her twin-infants? The result was inevitable: the direst penury overtook her—want not merely stared her in the face, but fastened its gaunt hand upon her. She beheld her beloved children perishing before her eyes. Accident somehow or another threw her in the way of Mr. Lanover, then a partner in a great banking-house. He made certain overtures to her, which were indignantly rejected: she would sooner die together with her babes than save their lives and her own by the gold of dishonour! Lanover was so deeply enamoured of her that he offered her marriage,—coupling however the proposal with the specific condition that the children should be brought up to bear his name and consider him as their father. All these particulars I gleaned from his own lips on the occasion of the first visit he ever paid me,—which was a few years after his marriage, and when his bankruptcy prompted him to seek through my agency Sir Matthew's assistance."

"But what could have induced him," I asked, "to annex that stipulation in respect to the children, to his proposal of marriage?"

"He did not explain his motives to me, and I never asked him," responded Mr. Tennant. "Perhaps it was that the man's vanity at the time would feel itself flattered by being looked upon as the father of children whose beauty was already of an angelic character: for they were eighteen months old when the offer of marriage was made. Or perhaps it was that he feared the world would fancy he had espoused a cast-off mistress of some other individual, and had adopted the children of an illicit connexion: whereas by presenting them as his own, he would escape this suspicion. However, such was the fact—the stipulation was made: Mrs. Bentinck wanted bread for those children; and if she could procure it honourably, there was no sacrifice of feeling that she was not prepared to make. She accordingly married Mr. Lanover; and I think you will agree with me that it was a deed which redounded to her credit much more than otherwise."

"Oh," I exclaimed, "Sir Matthew Heseltine may well feel that an atonement is due to a daughter whom he treated so cruelly:"—and as I thus spoke, I felt at the time downright indignant against the old Westmoreland Baronet.

"Now let us return to those ladies," said Mr. Tennant.

We accordingly went back to the private office; and there we found Annabel seated by Mrs. Lanover's side, her hand clasped in that of her parent, and her countenance gazing up with angelic softness into her mother's. They had evidently been passing the interval of our absence in a discourse of profound and pathetic interest.

"This excellent young man," said the lawyer, placing his hand with kindness on my shoulder, "is the author of that reconciliation which he was sent expressly up to London to announce. To him belongs all the credit: he it was who by his own admirable example, and by certain *other* incidents which he magnanimously brought about, succeeded in softening your father's heart, Mrs. Lanover, and in warming it once again towards yourself."

"Dear Joseph!" said Mrs. Lanover, taking my hand and pressing it with effusion: "never, never can I forget your goodness!—never, never can I repay it! Henceforth I shall love you as if you were my own son:"—and she kissed me upon the forehead.

Tears of joy trickled down my cheeks. Annabel also took my hand; and through the tears which likewise filled her own eyes, she bent upon me a look full of the sweetest gratitude—a look replete with the modest assurance that her virgin heart cherished the love of which she had to a certain extent made an avowal at Dr. Pomfret's. But she could not speak a word: her heart was evidently too full to allow the utterance of all she felt. And *my* heart, was it not full also?——Oh, it was a moment of ineffable joy and rapture for me Calanthe was utterly forgotten——and truth compels me to confess that my own child dwelt not at the instant in my memory!

"During the half-hour that you, Mr. Tennant, and Joseph left us alone together," said Mrs. Lanover, after a long interval of silence, "I have explained many things to my daughter. Annabel now knows who her grandfather is: she knows to what family I belong: she knows likewise that Mr. Lanover is not the author of her being. Oh, if I have for so many years kept these things secret from this affectionate and excellent girl, I had many reasons for that silence. Alas! she has not enjoyed so much happiness that I could afford

to afflict her by describing how I was a discarded, a disowned, and an ignored daughter. No—I have until this day treasured up as it were the secret of my sorrows in that respect. But now Annabel knows all; and again, dear Joseph, let me assure you of my heartfelt gratitude for having brought about an opportunity and furnished an occasion for the revelation which has been made to her."

I now proceeded to inform Mrs. Lanover and Annabel that Sir Matthew had returned to the home of his ancestors, and that I was commissioned to conduct them thither that they might be received in his arms. They mingled their tears of joy—they murmuringly exchanged their congratulations—they proffered renewed thanks to me, as well as to the worthy lawyer for the share which he had taken in bringing about the present circumstances, and for the sympathy which he displayed. We took our leave of Mr. Tennant; and I accompanied Annabel and her mother to the house in Great Russell Street, which they still inhabited. It was perfectly true that Mr. Lanover was on the Continent: but, as usual, he had left his wife in total ignorance of the business which took him thither: all she knew was that some weeks would elapse ere his return.

The reader may conceive how joyous were my feelings as I once again sat down with my beloved Annabel and her mother, free from all restraint on the dreaded hunchback's part—free to converse as we chose, and enter upon such little additional explanations as there might be to give. I stated that I had been the means of effecting the reconciliation between Mrs. Leslie and her uncle: but I so shaped my tale as to render it unnecessary to go into particulars in respect to the circumstances which had led to that event. I mean that I suppressed the details of Mr. Leslie's guilty career when his identity was concealed under the name of Foley. Annabel and her mother questioned me as to what had occurred to myself since I left Dr. Pomfret's house at Salisbury; and in responding to these queries, there were again many particulars which I purposely passed over. The reader may be assured I said nothing about Lady Calanthe: neither did I allude in the slightest way to the infamous treachery I had experienced at the hands of Mr. Lanover when he beguiled me to the den near Aldersgate Street and shipped me on board the emigrant-vessel; for I saw—as indeed I had all along suspected—that he himself had remained silent upon all those points. I did however say that I had seen him in Perth—a fact which Mrs. Lanover and Annabel now learnt for the first time. In a word, I narrated just as much of my past adventures as could with convenience and propriety be described.

I remained to dinner with Annabel and her mother; and it was agreed that immediately after breakfast on the following morning, our journey should be commenced into Westmoreland. I had ample funds at my command; and I considered myself justified in making arrangements for travelling in a post-chaise: the daughter of Sir Matthew Heseltine—she who was now to be acknowledged as the heiress of his wealth—could return to the paternal home in no other manner. I took leave of Mrs. Lanover and Annabel at about ten o'clock; and sped back to the hotel.

But when alone in my chamber, I had many, many things to reflect upon; and some of these were very far from pleasurable. I had seen Annabel again—I was to be her travelling companion—we should dwell beneath the same roof in Westmoreland. But how altered were her prospects! Her mother would inherit enormous wealth; and was it to be supposed that Sir Matthew Heseltine would ever consent to an alliance between his granddaughter and an obscure young man who had served him as a valet? No: for I feared that the pride of the Heseltines was not altogether dead within him; and that though in three instances—namely, that of his sister, that of his daughter, and that of his niece—he had reaped such bitter experiences by sternly refusing to allow the heart's dictates to have full and natural play, he would not by a retrospection over those incidents be led to act in a different and more generous manner in respect to Annabel. True, his prejudices and his pride might be so far softened and sobered down that he would not reject, on his granddaughter's behalf, the suit of one who could prove himself to be a gentleman and who by station was entitled to claim that rank however poor in pocket he might be. But I felt that it would be thinking and hoping too much to expect that Sir Matthew would so completely bend himself as to suffer Annabel, with his consent, to accompany *me* to the altar.

These were the reflections which saddened me. But when Sir Matthew should be no longer a denizen of this world, would not Annabel be freed from such restraint? and would not her mother consent to our union? Yes—Oh, yes! and my heart leapt at the thought. But, Ah! wherefore again lowered the cloud of sadness over the train of my reflections? Might not Sir Matthew live yet some years? might he not in the meantime look out for some brilliant alliance on his granddaughter's behalf? That Annabel would prove faithless to me, I believed not for a moment: I knew that she loved me as tenderly as ever—with a tenderness, too, that was enhanced by a sense of profoundest gratitude. But what dire consequences might ensue if she were to prove rebellious against her grandfather's wish! Dared I—Oh, dared I hope that this wish on his part would not be asserted sternly and imperiously?—dared I hug the belief that he had indeed profited by the bitterness of bygone experiences? To these hopes I *did* seek to cling: but at the very instant that I was buoying myself up with them, a shape rose up before me—it was a female one—it carried something in its arms. Calanthe and my child! Oh, fatal, fatal love—that which Calanthe had borne for me! It filled me with wretchedness and despair; and I wept tears of anguish as my head pressed a sleepless pillow.

But I will not weary the reader with a description of all the reflections—all the conflicting thoughts—the hopes—the fears—the anticipations and the apprehensions—the reasonings and the counter-reasonings, which agitated my brain for several hours after I sought my bed that night. It was not until the neighbouring church-clocks had struck two in the morning, that I could get to sleep. I awoke at an early hour,—but, thank heaven! awoke with a heart comparatively light: for I now thought of little else than the pleasure

of being again with Annabel. Oh! how I loved her! Beautiful as she had ever appeared to me, more beautiful still had she seemed on the previous day. The immaculate purity of her thoughts made her countenance the face of an angel: heaven's own serene and blessed light shone in the azure of her eyes. It was as utterly impossible to connect the idea of ink with snow, as to associate aught of the grossness of this world with the mind of Annabel. And then to hear the soft music of her voice—to drink in its silvery tones—to feel the fragrance of the breath which wafted the dulcet words—to contemplate the pure vermilion lips that formed the coral portals through which came the gentle tide of harmony,—all this was rapture beyond description! No wonder that I was in haste to proceed to Great Russell Street: no wonder that I forgot Calanthe—and even my child; or that if I thought of them for a moment, I kept down the sigh which was rising up in my throat, and was instantaneously cheered again by the contemplation of the image of Annabel!

My carpet-bag was packed—my breakfast was hurriedly disposed of—my bill was paid—and I stepped into the post-chaise, which had been ordered for a particular hour. Then away to Great Russell Street! Mrs. Lanover and Annabel were in readiness for the journey: the former looked better in health, and was in spirits more elevated, than ever I had yet seen her: the latter was radiant. Yes—but not with that radiance of beauty which dazzles, bewilders, and overwhelms: it was the radiance of an angelic light which the eye can gaze upon, and which has softness and tenderness in the very halo of its lustre. I handed them into the post-chaise: I took my seat opposite to them; and away sped the equipage.

Need I describe in minute details all we said or all I felt during this journey? I could fill volumes: for the subject was to me *then*, and is to me *now*, one of such interest that I could dwell upon it for ever. But I must not fatigue the patience of the reader. Nevertheless, this same kind reader must bear with me for a brief space,—inasmuch as there are certain particulars which are to be recorded.

There was no artifice—no power of dissimulation about Annabel: she loved me—and she did not study to keep a strict, rigid, and prudish guard over her words or her looks in her mother's presence. Mrs. Lanover comprehended that we were attached to each other; and though she made no pointed remark upon the subject,—yet by an occasional word delicately dropped, she suffered me to understand that I was already as dear to her as if I were her own son, and that she was not displeased by my attentions to Annabel. Not a syllable was said relative to any course which must be adopted when we reached Heseltine Hall. Annabel knew too little of her grandfather to have the subject forced upon her thoughts: while Mrs. Lanover was either prepared to suffer circumstances to take their own development, or else purposed to seize some opportunity of mentioning to her father the attachment which subsisted between her daughter and myself. This much I gathered from the equanimity of her manner—from a knowledge of her own character—and from her avoidance of any formal observations on the subject when the circumstances of the journey occasionally left us alone for a few minutes together.

We journeyed with all suitable despatch. The first night we slept at Birmingham—the second night at Manchester; and in the afternoon of the third day, we came in sight of Kendal. At length the post-chaise dashed up to the iron gates of the grounds in the midst of which Heseltine Hall was situate. I perceived that the agitation which my companions had been experiencing for the last few hours, was now increasing; and this was natural enough. Mrs. Lanover was about to appear in the presence of a father whom she had not seen for more than one-and-twenty years: while Annabel was in a few minutes to be introduced to that grandsire whom she had never seen at all, and of whose existence she had only known within the last few days. The conversation ceased altogether as we approached the mansion. I observed that Mrs. Lanover turned aside her countenance to conceal the tears which the recollections of the past called forth: for she was now moving amidst scenes which were not so altered as to be unfamiliar to her recollection. Annabel's hand gently sought that of her mother; and the pressure it bestowed was meant to convey affectionate and endearing encouragement. Oh! as I regarded that charming creature, how often and often during this journey had I blessed heaven to think that she was not really the daughter of the hideous humpback!

The post-chaise drew up at the entrance of Heseltine Hall; and I marvelled whether the old Baronet himself would appear upon the threshold to give his daughter and his grandchild the fullest and completest welcome; or whether his cynical pride would induce him to await their appearance in some apartment, so that whatever betrayal of feeling there might transpire on his own side, should be veiled from the observation of the domestics. I was as much astonished as delighted when, as I leapt forth from the chaise, Sir Matthew descended the steps of the portico; and laying his hand upon my shoulder, said in a low tremulous voice, "Joseph, it is for me to assist them out."

Cheerfully under the circumstances did I make way for him; and the next moment Mrs. Lanover was clasped in her father's arms. Not a word was spoken: but he showed her by the warmth of his embrace that all was forgotten—all forgiven! Then he turned to Annabel: and for a few moments the old man was evidently smitten with delighted amazement at the ravishing beauty and incomparable loveliness of his granddaughter. Her too he folded in his arms; and my ears caught the words, "Bless thee, my sweet girl!—bless thee!"

Oh! the granite rock was completely stricken by the magic wand: the cynical heart melted beneath the influence of tenderest sympathy; and all the best feelings welled forth from that long-sealed fountain. Yes; heaven's own blessed love had come down to roll away the stone from the sepulchral heart of the old Baronet, and to sit therein with its angelic presence.

CHAPTER LXVI.

THE BARONET AND MYSELF.

SIR MATTHEW HESELTINE had retired with his daughter and grandchild to the drawing-room; and I was repairing to my own apartment, when Mrs. Barclay the housekeeper caught me by the arm, and said, "Please to follow me, Mr. Wilmot."

I was struck by this mode of address. Wherefore was I no longer plain and simple Joseph? She led me up the principal staircase, whereas I had been about to seek the back one, which the servants were accustomed to use;—and leading me into one of the handsomest bed-chambers, she said, "If you please, sir, this is henceforth your apartment."

I at once understood that the Baronet was recompensing me in his own peculiar way for the services I had rendered him: but still I was at a loss to comprehend the precise position in which I was thenceforth to live beneath his roof.

"I have had your boxes and clothes removed here, sir, during your absence," said Mrs. Barclay; "but you will *not* find amongst your effects the suits that Sir Matthew had supplied you with. He desired me to beg of you that you will henceforth wear your own clothes. One word more, Mr. Wilmot. You are expected to dine with Sir Matthew presently at his own table."

The worthy old housekeeper threw upon me a look which was replete with kind congratulation on this change in my condition; and she then quitted the room. I was profoundly moved by the Baronet's conduct towards me: he was raising me up to his own level—or at least placing me in a position of acknowledged gentility; and hope beat strong in my heart as I thus found one of the principal barriers which separated me from Annabel, levelled and destroyed by her grandfather's own hand. I opened one of my trunks to take forth my best suit,—when I perceived a letter lying on the top of the effects. It was addressed to me in the well-known handwriting of Sir Matthew; and on opening it, I found bank-notes to the amount of seventy-five pounds,—with simply these words written on a slip of paper:—"The first half-year's salary of my private secretary, Mr. Wilmot."

Here was another proof of Sir Matthew's genuine goodness,—a goodness of heart which must have been natural to him, but which had long lain dormant in many respects—or else was so hemmed in by other and sterner feelings that it was like a fair plant which briars and brambles had covered, concealed, and well nigh choked. I made my toilet with considerable care; and when the dinner-bell rang, proceeded to the dining-room. Sir Matthew at once advanced, and shook me by the hand: but he spoke not a word in acknowledgment of the services I had rendered him. He chose to repay them by deeds after his own fashion—and not to make them the subject of precise and formal mention. With the courtesy of a well-bred gentleman, he at once endeavoured to make me feel myself completely at my ease in my new position. Mrs. Lanover smiled kindly and sweetly upon me; and the look which I furtively darted at Annabel, showed me that she was radiant with the satisfaction which she vainly attempted to conceal.

About a week passed, during which I entered as it were upon another state of existence. I was no longer a menial—but was treated in the house with all the attention and respect due to a young gentleman. Sir Matthew, during my absence, had procured another valet; and for that week he had no letters to write—so that I was pretty well unoccupied, save in respect to looking over the land-steward's accounts, which Sir Matthew desired me to investigate. But during this week I did not see much of either the Baronet, Mrs. Lanover, or Annabel, except at meal-times, and of an evening when we were all assembled together in the drawing-room. The old man remained much alone with his daughter and granddaughter. It was evident that now he had them with him, he was not merely anxious to make every atonement for his past conduct towards Mrs. Lanover—but that he was likewise desirous to enjoy the society of both. At length one morning he sent me a message, requesting me to repair to him in the library.

The moment I entered into his presence, I felt convinced that Mrs. Lanover had spoken to him in respect to my attachment for Annabel. There was much of his old manner and appearance in the Baronet as I thus entered: he was seated bolt upright in his chair—his countenance perfectly inscrutable—his eyes fixed keenly upon me—his mouth drawn in. My heart sank: I thought there was something ominous in all this; and I have no doubt that my confusion and agitation betrayed themselves in my looks and in the hesitating way in which I advanced towards him. Without uttering a word, he pointed to a seat; and when I had taken it, he still continued to gaze upon me, as if he had hitherto comprehended me but partially, and was now resolved to penetrate into the previously unfathomed depths of my soul. It was an ordeal that filled me with painful misgivings and fluttering apprehensions: it seemed to me as if the beams of prosperity which had begun to irradiate my life's pathway, were about to merge again into obscurity and gloom.

"Joseph," Sir Matthew at length said—and he spoke in somewhat his old style—querulous, irritable, and schreeching,—"we have got plenty of time upon our hands: you have been pretty nearly idle for a whole week—and now I am going to give you occupation for an hour or two. Just have the goodness to tell me the entire history of your life. Do not think of suppressing a single detail; and be not afraid of wearying me. I sha'n't go to sleep. Tell it all in your own style; and if you have done anything of which you are ashamed, prove your contrition by a frank avowal. I suppose we have all done things which, when we look back upon them, we could wish undone. I know that *I* have; and *you* know too that I have," he added, fixing his eyes with a still more vivid keenness upon me. "Now then, take your time in telling me your tale. I know that you have suffered much at the hands of Mr. Lanover: my daughter has, with tears in her eyes, told me how he treated you. She has suppressed nothing that is within her own knowledge: she has even admitted to me that the wretch sought your life. So

you see that you need stand on no punctilios, nor entertain any false delicacy in the matter."

While Sir Matthew Heseltine was delivering himself of the latter portion of his speech, I had time to collect my confused and scattered ideas; and I prepared to address myself to the task which he demanded at my hands. Hope was again reviving within me. Wherefore should he wish to be acquainted with all my antecedents, if it were not to measure my deserts and judge of my worthiness to aspire to the hand of his granddaughter? But as this idea flashed to my brain, rekindling hope in my soul, I felt that I had more than ever a special reason for avoiding any mention of my amour with Lady Calanthe Dundas; and this was the only episode in my life of which I was ashamed. But there were several other matters which I was either compelled to suppress altogether, or else merely to gloss over. I allude, for instance, to my knowledge of the frailty of the Marquis of Chilham's daughter, Gertrude, before she became the wife of Mr. Stephen Rowland; and therefore I could say nothing of my adventures in respect to the room with the dreadful picture. Neither could I explain wherefore it was that I had quitted the Tivertons of Myrtle Lodge, or Mrs. Robinson's service in the Isle of Wight; because any explanation on those heads would have necessarily led me into certain avowals with regard to Lady Calanthe. But in respect to Mr. Lanover I no longer saw any need to conceal his treacherous treatment of me when I met him in Aldersgate Street, and how he had shipped me on board the emigrant-vessel. I felt persuaded that Sir Matthew Heseltine would never receive that man—would never again permit his daughter to live with him; and I was by no means sorry to be enabled to aggravate the Baronet's resentment, abhorrence, and disgust in respect to the humpback.

From the preceding observations the reader will comprehend how much of my narrative I revealed to Sir Matthew Heseltine. I told him how I had been brought up at school in total ignorance of my parentage—how I fled from Leicester, when in my fifteenth year, to escape consignment to the workhouse—how I entered Mr. Delmar's service—how I thence passed to Mr. Lanover's care—how I was taken into the household of Lord Ravenshill—how I thence changed to Myrtle Lodge. From that point I hastily skipped to my entrance into Dr. Pomfret's service—thence to Mrs. Robinson's—and thence to the household of the Chief of Inch Methglin. I related at full length the intervening episode in respect to Lanover and the shipwreck; and I was equally explicit with regard to all that I did to further the love-affair of Sir Alexander Carrondale in respect to Emmeline. I stated how Mr. Lanover's presence at Perth had frightened me away from that town,—thereby inducing me to renounce the excellent situation proffered me by Sir Alexander. I then came to my adventures with Mr. Dorchester, and how I had entered the household of the Rowlands at Manchester,—at the mention of whose name a smile, only slightly perceptible, wavered for a moment upon the previously imperturbable countenance of the old Baronet. I said but little in respect to those few months which I passed in the service of Mr. Shackleford, and not a syllable in respect to Lady Calanthe. I brought my narrative down to the point at which it is known to the reader; not forgetting to describe my interview with Lord and Lady Eccleston in London: but throughout the whole history I said nothing of my love for Annabel—no more than I spoke of Calanthe's unfortunate love for me.

Sir Matthew listened to me in total silence: he did not interrupt me once: he asked not a single question. Nor did I give him an opportunity to do so;—for despite the various omissions, suppressions, skippings, and glossings which I was compelled to observe in the progress of my tale, I rendered it so entirely consecutive that there was no actual halt nor perceptibly abrupt leap in the chain of incidents. And it was by no means easy to preserve this continuity: for I must frankly confess that I was compelled to dissimulate in certain parts, for reasons which must be obvious to the reader; and all the while Sir Matthew's eyes were fixed keenly upon me, as if ready to flash if for a moment he detected me in any untruth or misrepresentation. Indeed, during the hour that my history lasted, he never once took those piercing eyes of his off me. I do not think that he even once moved in his chair; nor did the expression of his countenance undergo the slightest change, save and except when that transient and scarcely perceptible smile appeared upon his lips at the mention of the name of Rowland. When I had ceased speaking, he continued silent for several minutes—but still without averting his eyes from my countenance. I could not for the life of me make out whether he had fathomed the little dissimulation of which I had here and there been guilty in respect to omissions, suppressions, and glossing over motives for leaving certain situations; or whether he felt perfectly satisfied with all I had told him. I therefore sat upon the tenter-hooks of suspense: but I have no reason to believe that my countenance betrayed anything of what was passing in my mind.

"Well, Joseph," said the Baronet, at length breaking that long and ominous silence, "I have heard all you have thought fit to tell me. But did I not at the very outset enjoin you to speak with the utmost frankness? Have you done so, sir? Come!" he screeched forth, in his old style when at Reading; "look me in the face, and tell me whether there isn't something that you have kept back?"

I certainly did now feel that there were confusion and trepidation in my countenance,—on beholding which, Sir Matthew's eyes became more and more keen and penetrating in the looks which they fixed upon me.

"Ah!" he cried, "your face, young man, pleads guilty. Now, what the deuce do you think I have been sitting here for all this time——But no! I won't talk in that strain," he suddenly interrupted himself, as if mindful of some resolve which he had taken to throw off as much as possible those cynical habits and modes of speech which had been so long habitual to him. "Come, Joseph," he added in a lower and milder tone, "confess the truth, young man! There is one feeling which you have experienced—one hope which you have cherished—one aspiration which you have formed——"

"Oh, sir!" I exclaimed, infinitely relieved by the words in which he was now addressing me:

for I saw that they pointed to my love for Annabel, and to nothing else: so that my amour with Calanthe remained unknown and unsuspected,—"Oh, sir!" I exclaimed, "do not—do not withdraw your confidence from me, because I dared not make a revelation which I was so fearful would offend you!"

As I thus spoke I fell upon my knees at Sir Matthew Heseltine's feet; and taking his hand, pressed it fervently in my own. I felt his other hand touch my head: he patted it caressingly, and said in a low tremulous voice, "Do not think I am unmindful of all you have done for me. Through you I was brought to bestow forgiveness upon a niece: through you I have had a daughter restored to me: through you likewise I have been made acquainted with a grandchild of whom any old man may be proud. Do not therefore fear *too* much harshness at my hands, Joseph. There, there!—rise, my poor boy, and go and sit down."

I did as I was ordered; and as I raised my eyes towards Sir Matthew's countenance, I was struck by the change which had taken place in it. It looked as it appeared at the moment when he received his long-ignored daughter in his arms: it was as full of kindness and sympathy as that strange countenance could possibly express. The sun may shine upon the face of a rock, bathing it in the softness of its mellowed lustre, and shedding a halo over the fissures, the crevices, and the asperities which may be thereon:—so seemed the light of kindness upon the wrinkled and deep-lined countenance of Sir Matthew Heseltine.

"Your's is a strange and eventful history, Joseph," resumed Sir Matthew; "and while in all respects you are to be pitied, in many you are to be praised. Everything that you did in respect to Sir Alexander Carrondale and the Chief of Inch Methglin's niece, shows real goodness of heart, and is akin to your proceedings in respect to my niece and her husband during their troubles and misfortunes. Rest assured that my daughter Mrs. Lanover has not spoken to me in your disfavour: nor is your attachment for Annabel unknown to me. Ah! by the bye, it is my resolve that henceforth Annabel shall be known by her proper surname: the one she has hitherto borne, has become for a thousand reasons hateful to me. Would to God that my daughter did not bear it!"

The old man stopped short, and for some moments appeared much moved.

"Your parentage," he presently continued, "is involved in the deepest mystery. I am not altogether deficient in shrewdness: but for the life of me, I cannot comprehend why this villain Lanover should have so persecuted you. If I thought that I could bribe him into a revelation of all his motives, I would cheerfully make the attempt: but inasmuch as he has evidently the strongest reasons for concealing them, it were hopeless to expect the truth from his lips. He would take my bribe, and invent some precious tale of his own—so that we should be no wiser than we are now. Heaven alone can ordain and bring about the elucidation of those mysteries which hang around your birth,—thereby proving whether Lanover has or has not a just claim to the title of your uncle. But I now pass to another and scarcely less serious subject. You are attached to Annabel; and Annabel has frankly acknowledged to her mother that she reciprocates your love. Not for a moment do I intend to re-enact the fatal part of a stern dictator where the soul's best and purest affections are engaged. At the same time, Joseph," added Sir Matthew Heseltine hastily, as he beheld the animation of rapturous joy expanding upon my countenance, "do not think that I am going to be so foolish as to assent to your immediate union——No, nor yet to your speedy alliance with Annabel. Let me see—how old are you?"

"Twenty and a half, sir," was my response: and my heart was fluttering with powerful emotions—hope mingling with apprehension—but the former nevertheless predominating over the latter.

"And that is just about Annabel's own age," resumed Sir Matthew Heseltine: and then he shrieked forth in his old manner, "Why, you are a mere boy and girl, and must not dream of marriage for the next two or three years!"

These words confirmed all my hope, and banished all my apprehension. They appeared to me to be tantamount to a promise that Annabel should become my own,—with the stipulation however that a certain interval of time must take place ere the period of my crowning happiness.

"Well, I do think that you are very much attached to her," proceeded Sir Matthew, in a calm tone once more; "and I see also that you have pretty well understood my meaning. Now listen, Joseph—for the subject is serious, grave, and important enough. You *may* aspire to the hand of my granddaughter: but there are certain conditions which it is my purpose to impose. In the first place you are inexperienced in the ways of the world—you are too apt to follow the impulses of your own heart without any other considerations; and though hitherto they have led to the working out of much good, they might nevertheless have just the contrary effect. Therefore you must travel: you must mix in society—you must study men and things—you must see the world. For this purpose you shall be supplied with ample means. And then, too, there must be a long separation between Annabel and yourself; so that you may both have leisure and opportunity to look down into your own hearts; and as your intellects go on maturing, you will arrive at a satisfactory conclusion as to whether this is a mere transient love—a boy-and-girl sentiment, inspired by mere personal beauty, and therefore transient and unstable——"

"Oh, no, Sir Matthew!" I exclaimed, with impassioned enthusiasm: "it is on my part a love so sincere—so profound——"

"Do not interrupt me, Joseph," said the Baronet, firmly though kindly; "I understand the world better than you. Remember that it is the welfare of my granddaughter which I am considering—that granddaughter whom I already love as if I had known her from her birth! And do not think, you young hot-head, that I am unmindful of your own welfare. In short, if on the one hand I am firmly resolved to play the tyrant no longer in respect to the feelings of the heart,—yet on the other hand I will have no hasty marriages wherever I have the power to interfere."

"You have given your consent, sir, to my eventual union with Annabel," I murmuringly responded; "and it is a happiness which hovers

in my mind like a dream. Oh, think not that I rebel against whatsoever conditions you may impose! My heart's fervid gratitude is your's, Sir Matthew Heseltine, for your conduct towards the poor, the humble, the obscure individual who has dared to love your granddaughter! Tell me, sir, what I am to do—and without a murmur shall I obey you!"

"You are twenty and a half—and this is the fifteenth of November, 1840," said Sir Matthew, speaking slowly and solemnly, and at the same time making notes of the dates in his memorandum-book. "For two years shall the separation between yourself and Annabel last:—for two years shall you have the opportunity of gaining a larger experience in the ways of the world:—for two years shall you both have leisure to read and study the secret recesses of your own hearts. Therefore, Joseph, you will to-morrow leave Heseltine Hall; and on the fifteenth of November, 1842,—precisely at the hour of noon—will you present yourself here again, to claim the hand of Annabel. I might, if I were in one of my old moods," continued Sir Matthew, with a significant stare and smile, "tell you that if at the expiration of this probationary interval of two years, you find yourself, by any misdeeds committed in the meantime, to be unworthy of an alliance with my granddaughter, you will be at least honourable, wise, and prudent enough to refrain from keeping the appointment. But if, on the other hand, this day two years you feel that you *can* return to the Hall in the consciousness of rectitude and virtue—if you can *then* present yourself before me the same excellent-hearted and worthy young man that you are now, but with enlarged experiences and a matured intelligence——then, come, Joseph—be sure to come—and rest assured that you shall be received with open arms! Yes—there shall be festivities and rejoicings; and God grant that I may be alive to welcome the wanderer home!"

Sir Matthew Heseltine became deeply affected as he addressed me in these last words; and averting his countenance, he proffered his hand. Again I sank upon my knees as I pressed it to my lips; and he—the next moment ashamed of that betrayal of his feelings—hastily dashed away a tear, exclaiming, "Rise, Joseph—and let this interview of our's have a speedy end."

My own heart was so full of indescribable emotions that I could not give utterance to a word: but my brain was intoxicated with happiness:—my fancy, rushing forward through the vista of two years, depicted to itself the term of that probationary interval; and I already felt as if I had come back from my travels and wanderings, to be welcomed home amidst festivities and rejoicings, and to receive the hand of the adored and worshipped Annabel. Oh! not for an instant did the recollection of Calanthe—no, nor the image of my child—overshadow this bright and rapturous dream in which for a few minutes I was so ecstatically absorbed.

"You may now seek Annabel," said Sir Matthew, thus after a pause breaking in upon my reverie—dispelling all that was perspectively visionary, and bringing me back again to the realities of the present moment;—"you may go to her—you may tell her all that I have said. But I charge you, Joseph——I charge you, my young friend, most solemnly and earnestly, not to bind her by any vows nor to pledge yourself towards her. If your mutual love be really as sincere as you have described it, and as I am willing to believe that it is, it will require no such obligations to render it permanent: whereas, on the other hand, if it should prove the transient dream of a mere boy and girl who erroneously read the true condition of their own hearts, it may be fatal to the happiness of both to shackle yourselves with pledges which you would both alike consider yourselves in honour bound to fulfil, though the feeling which engendered them should have passed away. Go to her, Joseph—and tell her all that has taken place. For the remainder of this day you will be together. To-morrow morning my carriage shall be in readiness to convey you a day's journey—say for instance to Manchester; and thence will you direct your steps whithersoever the inclination may prompt you. A letter will be placed in your hands at the moment you take your departure; and therein you will find funds sufficient to last you for two years."

"And during this interval, sir," I hesitatingly asked, "may I not from time to time——"

"Correspond with Annabel?" ejaculated Sir Matthew—and he reflected for a few moments: then he said slowly but firmly, "No—it will be better not. I wish you both to remain perfectly free for that interval of two years: I wish you both to stand the full test of separation and absence. If the feeling which inspires either of you be in reality an unstable one, I do not choose it to be morbidly and falsely fed by the interchange of love-letters: for, on the other hand, if it be a real and permanent sentiment, it will sustain itself. Moreover, it is my purpose that you shall be left entirely your own master for this space of two years. I want no account of your proceedings; and if you were to write, you must give such account. No—for the interval prescribed, go your ways, and be as a stranger unto those whom you will leave behind."

Having thus spoken, Sir Matthew Heseltine waved his hand for me to leave him alone: but as I reached the door, he beckoned me back towards him, and said, "Do not for a moment fancy, Joseph, that my mind will change in any one single detail of all that I have promised. Not for worlds," he emphatically exclaimed, "would I suffer myself to be dazzled by the brilliancy of rank or the magnitude of fortune possessed by any suitor who may present himself for the hand of my granddaughter. No!—if I have been harsh, stern, and implacable in my time, my honour as a man and as a gentleman has remained unsullied:—I am incapable of perfidy! Leave me, Joseph—and rest assured that Annabel shall be your's, if circumstances concur, as I have explained my views, to render the alliance a desirable one."

Again I pressed the old Baronet's hand; and issuing forth from the apartment, flew to the drawing-room, where Annabel was seated with her mother. That they both had a suspicion of something serious and important taking place between the Baronet and me, was evident from the joyous animation of their countenances when they saw me thus burst in upon them, my own features

radiant. A modest blush appeared on Annabel's face of angelic beauty; and I was bounding towards her to clasp her in my arms, when the thought struck me that the expression of my gratitude was first due to Mrs. Lanover, who by her explanations and representations to her father had proved the means of bringing all this about. I threw myself upon my knees before her—took her hands, and pressing them to my lips, murmured forth, "A thousand thanks, dearest madam! a thousand blessings on your head!——Oh, you are to me as a dearly beloved mother!"

"And you shall be unto me as a son," was Mrs. Lanover's softly uttered response, as she kissed me on the forehead, while tears of happiness trickled down her cheeks.

Then I sprang to my feet; and the next instant Annabel was clasped in my arms.

"You will be mine, dearest, dearest Annabel!" I exclaimed, in accents that were however broken with the feelings of indescribable rapture and joy which were revelling in my heart. "Your grandfather has promised it——Oh, yes! you will be mine!"

The blushing countenance of that seraphic being reposed upon my shoulder; and when we looked around, Mrs. Lanover had quitted the room. She had left us to ourselves,—knowing that we must have much to say. We sat down side by side,—Annabel's small white hand clasped in my own; and I explained to her what had just taken place between her grandfather and myself. A shade of sadness came over her countenance when she heard that we were to be separated for two whole years, during which period we were not to exchange even a single line of correspondence—much less to see each other: but that shade soon passed away—and smiling through her tears, Annabel said in the soft music of her voice, "The time will soon pass, Joseph; and then——"

"And then, dearest Annabel," I exultingly exclaimed, "we shall meet to part no more! We must exchange no vows: but even without this prohibition, I would not ask them from you!"

Annabel spoke not: but the glance of virginal tenderness which her lovely azure eyes bent upon me—while her cheeks were suffused with a modest blush—eloquently gave me to understand that she had an equal faith in me. We remained alone together until close upon dinner-time; and this interval of some hours passed away like so many minutes. We separated to repair to our chambers for the evening-toilet; and when we met again, at the dinner-table, neither Sir Matthew nor Mrs. Lanover imposed upon us the least restraint by either look or word, as we treated each other with all those little affectionate endearments which a young couple when formally engaged, are wont to bestow in the presence of approving relatives. The evening passed rapidly away—Oh, far too rapidly! and at length the parting moment came: for I was not to see Annabel in the morning ere I entered the carriage which was to bear me away from Heseltine Hall.

"Farewell, dear madam," I said, first bidding my adieus to Mrs. Lanover: "and may heaven bless you!"

"Farewell, dear Joseph," she answered, embracing me with tears in her eyes: "farewell, my dear boy! I will not insult nor wrong the natural goodness of your heart by any moral precepts: I know you will prove all that we could wish! Farewell!"

And now I turned to Annabel: the tears were raining down her cheeks, and down my own likewise. We embraced: but the words we uttered were broken and incoherent;—and when Mrs. Lanover hurried her daughter from the room, I felt as if the light of happiness had suddenly departed from me—as if the portals of that paradise from which a supernal lustre had been glowing out upon me, were all in a moment closed in my face!

"Farewell, my dear Joseph," said Sir Matthew Heseltine, in a voice tremulous with emotions: "you have no need to despair—you have everything to hope. Two years will soon pass away; and if in the meanwhile it should please God to call me hence, you will nevertheless find this your home on your return—and my daughter Mrs. Lanover will give you a fitting welcome. For that you will act worthily, and that you will come back the same good young man that you go hence, I have no fear. Farewell, my dear boy——and ——and——remember, Joseph—I—I—love you as if you were already married to Annabel, and had thereby become one of the family."

Sir Matthew Heseltine embraced me. I sobbed out a few words of gratitude: he waved me away; and as I glanced back for a moment from the door, I saw that he was bending over the mantel-piece, shading his countenance with his hand, and evidently deeply affected.

CHAPTER LXVII.

THE FIRE.

It was still dusk on the cold wintry November morning, when I crossed the threshold of Heseltine Hall, to enter the carriage which was in readiness to receive me. I looked up at the windows of that suite of apartments which was occupied by Mrs. Lanover and Annabel: two countenances were gazing down at me—two white kerchiefs were being agitated in token of adieu. I waved my own—and precipitated myself into the vehicle. Several of the domestics thronged forth to bid me farewell—for I was a favourite amongst them: and in order that this sudden departure from the Hall on my part should not be attributed to any erroneous cause, Sir Matthew had considerately dropped a few hints as to the real truth to his body-servant, with a view that they should be repeated amongst the domestics generally. The footman who closed the carriage door, placed a sealed letter in my hand; and the equipage rolled away.

I watched the Hall from the window until it was no longer in sight; and several times was my handkerchief waved forth in response to those kerchiefs that were still agitated at the casement whence Mrs. Lanover and Annabel had been observing my departure. The carriage was drawn by post horses; and the postilion, who had evidently received his instructions, took the road to Manchester, which town was between sixty and seventy miles from Kendal. For the first hour I was so entirely absorbed in melancholy reflections

on this separation from Annabel, that I thought not of the letter which lay upon the opposite seat. At length I felt the necessity of arousing myself from that sad train of meditations; and my eyes settling on the letter, I took it up. It contained bank notes to the amount of fifteen hundred pounds, and a short billet, in which were these lines:—

"My dear Joseph,

"You are to maintain the rank and appearance of a gentleman. The sum herein enclosed, will enable you to live in a becoming style, and to pursue your travels for two years. It is my advice—and indeed my wish—that you go upon the Continent. God bless you, my dear boy!

"MATTHEW HESELTINE."

My heart was again filled with grateful emotions at the evidences of generosity and kind feeling which the contents of the packet thus revealed on the part of the Baronet. I again fell into a train of reflections: but they were less mournful than the first hour of my reverie had been. What a change had taken place in my condition during the last few weeks! I was no longer a menial—I was now enabled to assume that rank to which I had been by education adapted, whatever were the mystery of my birth. Two years would soon pass away, considering the means of recreation and rational enjoyment which I had in my possession! I should visit foreign parts: I would avoid all the temptations of the world, while I would profit by its experiences. Oh! there was no doubt that when the memorable and happy day should come, I would present myself with the consciousness of integrity in the presence of those whom I had so recently left!

Such were my thoughts. But, Ah! what cloud was that which suddenly lowered over the dream of bliss which my fancy was again beginning in

rapture to weave? Fatal, fatal love was that of thine, O Calanthe!—and as I mentally ejaculated words to this effect, scalding tears of anguish suddenly started forth from my eyes. Good heavens; was I not a hypocrite and a dissembler? had I not withholden the tale of my amour with that patrician lady? had I not suppressed the fact that I was a father? In short, had I not wickedly and wilfully deceived Sir Matthew Heseltine—deceived Mrs. Lanover—and, what was ten thousand times worse, deceived the pure-minded and confiding Annabel? Oh, if it should be discovered that I had done all this, should I not be repudiated by those whose good opinion was more necessary to me than aught else in this world, and without which there would be no hope of happiness—no motive to cling to life? Fatal, fatal love of thine, O Calanthe!

But the tears which I shed, relieved me; and as the period of youth is that of hope, I abandoned myself to the reflection that my good genius would not eventually desert me altogether, and that something would transpire to crown my happiness in respect to Annabel. How this was to be brought about, I did not see, nor dared I trust myself to the serious deliberation of conjecture, which would only be prolonging a disagreeable train of meditations, from which I was most anxious to escape; and I accordingly did my best to shut out unpleasant topics from my brain, and revel only in the ideas and hopes of happiness in which I was once more enabled to cradle myself.

I reached Manchester in the afternoon—dismissed the carriage—and took up my quarters at an hotel. I lost no time in calling upon the Rowlands; and I now had the pleasure of seeing the old gentleman and lady, who had returned home. I gave sufficient explanations to account for my altered circumstances, without however violating the sanctity of any secrets connected with Sir Matthew Heseltine; and I received the warmest congratulations from Mr. and Mrs. Rowland, who invited me to dinner. I thus sat down as a guest at the table where in the earlier part of the same year I had waited as a menial. I learnt that Mr. Stephen and Lady Gertrude were very happy together; and I was rejoiced thereat. On the following morning I proceeded by coach to Birmingham, in which great manufacturing town I spent a couple of days. Thence I proceeded to London, and took up my quarters at the same hotel in Holborn where I had sojourned when I was last in the capital a fortnight back. As I knew Mr. Lanover to be still abroad—or at least had every reason to suppose that he was—I determined to tarry a few days in the metropolis, to visit such public places as I had not before found an opportunity of seeing.

As I was walking through the streets on the third day after my arrival, whom should I encounter but Mr. and Mrs. Linton?—and the meeting was a most cordial one. They reproached me good-naturedly for not having paid them my promised visit—informed me that they had come up to London to receive a little money which had been left by an uncle of Charlotte's—and that they were temporarily lodging in some street in the neighbourhood of Manchester Square. They pressed me to pass the evening with them; and I accepted the invitation. We then separated for the present: but true to my appointment, I found myself seated, at about seven o'clock, at their hospitable table, where I was made truly welcome. They were rejoiced to hear of my altered circumstances; but to them also I gave partial explanations, as I had done to the Rowlands. Our conversation was so pleasant, and my companions were so agreeable, that the time slipped away without my being aware of the growing lateness of the hour. At length, on consulting my watch, I found it was past midnight; and bidding my friends farewell, I set out to walk back to the hotel.

My road lay through Manchester Square; and as I approached that locality, I became sensible of a strong smell of smoke; and on looking up, I perceived an ominous oscillating glow hovering over one part of the Square. I was immediately struck with the idea of a conflagration; and on hurrying along the street, heard the confused sounds of voices, as of people raising an alarm. I now ran with all my speed; and on entering the Square, was stricken with awe and horror on beholding the flames pouring forth from the windows of a mansion, opposite which a crowd was rapidly gathering. Then there was the clattering din of a fire-engine speeding to the spot, and every instant the conflagration grew brighter.

As I hurried in that direction, the sudden thought flashed to my mind that it was the same side on which Eccleston House was situated; and then a glance showed me that if it were not that identical mansion itself, it must be one in the closest vicinity. But as I reached the outskirts of the crowd, the first words that I caught confirmed my suspicion that it *was* Eccleston House itself. Nothing could equal the mingled horror, sublimity, and excitement of the scene. The flames were now penetrating through the roof, and gushing forth from all the windows: the entire dwelling was enveloped by the raging element. From the adjoining houses the half-dressed servants were hurrying forth, with costly furniture, draperies, and valuables of every description,—which they piled up in front,—several policemen being on the spot to take charge of them. The engines began to play; and as I pressed through the crowd, I perceived several of Lord Eccleston's domestics running about half-dressed and as if they were frantic. The truth was soon learnt. His lordship was absent at a dinner-party; and her ladyship, who had remained at home through indisposition, had not been rescued. The flames had burst forth so suddenly, and had spread with such frightful rapidity, from causes to be presently explained, that the servants had barely time to effect their own escape,—each however thinking that some other would lend assistance to Lady Eccleston. It now appeared that this had not been done; and a fearful sensation prevailed amongst the crowd, when the horrified servants discovered from one another that her ladyship was still in the burning mansion.

All this I learnt in an infinitely shorter space of time than it has taken me to record; and I was seized with an enthusiastic spirit, prompting me desperately to risk my own life to save that of a fellow-creature.

"Which is her ladyship's room?" I inquired,

with feverish haste, of one of the half-dressed and well nigh frenzied footmen.

"Her room?" he said, with a wild vacant stare.

"Yes—her room—dolt, idiot, coward that you are!" I ejaculated vehemently.

"The second landing—first door on the left hand," was the man's response, mechanically given; and he was even too much bewildered to notice or resent the abusive appellations I levelled at him.

"It is certain death!" cried a well-dressed individual, seizing me forcibly by the arm as I was rushing into the burning mansion.

"He is mad!" I heard a dozen voices cry out at the same timo: but bursting away from the hand that had clasped my arm, I darted up the steps and plunged into the entrance-hall. For a moment cries of horror from the crowd, mingled with a few shouts of admiration, reached my ear; and then I thought of nothing more than the task which I had undertaken.

The hall was filled with smoke, which almost blinded me, and made the water pour from my eyes. I felt nevertheless armed with as much courage as if it were exercised in utter desperation on my own special account. I reached the staircase, and sprang up it. Thus I gained the first landing; and from the drawing-rooms the flames gushed forth with a power and intensity that made me retreat as if from the brink of a fiery furnace. The heat, too, was scorching—almost intolerable: I was about to rush back, when piercing cries from the floor above reached my ears. I was goaded thereby to desperation once more: I rushed through a perfect wall of flame; and, well nigh suffocated, reached the second ascent of stairs. Thus a single moment placed me beyond the reach of those lambent flames which streamed forth, like huge serpent-tongues, from the drawing-room doorways.

A few instants more—and I reached the second landing, which was completely enveloped in fire. Again for a moment I stood irresolute: but in the twinkling of an eye a part of the ceiling fell down, just missing the spot on which I stood. I closed my eyes against the otherwise blinding dust; and opening them again the next instant, found to my joy that the falling of the masonry had extinguished the fire on the landing to a very considerable extent. Without another moment's hesitation, I plunged into the chamber which had been indicated; and there I found Lady Eccleston lying senseless on the floor. She had nothing on but her night-dress. A glance, swept around, showed me a morning-wrapper: I hastily enveloped her form in it; and bearing the inanimate lady in my arms, began the descent of the stairs.

Under no other circumstances could I have so easily carried such a weight: but I was now inspired with the energy and strength of a thousand: all my moral and physical capacities seemed to have expanded to a preternatural degree:—it was a feather that I was carrying! Fortunately some circumstance—whether it were a sudden change in the wind, or the giving way of some portion of the back part of the premises, I know not—had almost completely extinguished the rage of the element on the staircase; and I got down with my burthen in safety. The hall too was still clear of the fire: it was only through the almost stifling smoke and the blinding dust, as well as the fearful heat, that I had to make my way. But in a few moments I emerged into the fresh air; and then a tremendous shout of the most enthusiastic applause greeted me as I appeared with my still inanimate burthen, —whose blue eyes were closed, and the rich masses of whose dark brown hair floated in wild disorder over my shoulder and arm, as well as over her own bosom.

I remember that I saw nothing clearly as I emerged from the mansion—only a confused mass of people thronging in front of me.

"Admirable young man!—this way! this way!" said some masculine voice: and a hand, placed on my arm, guided me with my burthen to a house five or six doors off.

I recollect that the crowd kept sending forth tumultuous shouts of applause: but a front door speedily closing behind me, shut out the din. I was hurried into a parlour; and as I deposited Lady Eccleston upon a sofa, such a dizziness came over me that I felt as if I were about to faint. I suppose that I must have staggered; for I was caught in the arms of the gentleman who had conducted me thither. He placed me on a chair: a glass of wine was offered me; and when I had swallowed the contents, I became suddenly refreshed.

"Water! water!" I cried, pointing to the inanimate form of Lady Eccleston.

The gentleman rushed from the room; and at that very instant her ladyship began to revive. This revival was unusually rapid—indeed almost startlingly so: for as if wakened up from some horrible dream, Lady Eccleston raised herself on the sofa—flung her terrified looks around—and seemed as if her brain were once more abruptly filled with all the horrors from the midst of which she had been rescued. Her looks settled upon me: she recognised me with a sudden start and a wild scream: she sprang towards me—her arms were thrown round my neck—and straining me to her bosom, she cried in a frantic voice, "Good God! is it possible? You—*you* my deliverer!"

Then, as if overpowered by the terrible excitement which had seized upon her brain, she fell back upon the sofa, and swooned again. At that moment the door opened; and the gentleman, accompanied by his wife and a couple of female servants, made his appearance. Lady Eccleston was immediately borne by those females away from the parlour; and I remained alone with the master of the mansion,—who, as I subsequently learnt, was a Mr. Edwards, a wealthy City merchant. He was a middle-aged man, of benevolent manners and kind nature; and he loaded me with praises for what he was pleased to term "the incomparable chivalry of my conduct." He took me up to his own dressing-room that I might perform ablutions which were necessary indeed after having passed through the smoke and dust of the burning mansion. He was also most solicitous to ascertain that I had escaped without injury—which I had fortunately done, save and except a little singeing of my hair. He pressed me to pass the remainder of the night at his house: but this I declined—for fear it should be thought that I was anxious to throw myself in the way of the Ecclestons in the morning, for the

purpose of being thanked or rewarded for what I had done. Mr. Edwards asked me where I was staying?—but the same motive which led me to decline his proffered hospitality, also made me hasten down stairs without responding to his last query; and shaking him by the hand, I was issuing forth from the house, when I encountered Lord Eccleston, who was just ascending the steps in a considerable state of excitement.

"What? Joseph!" he ejaculated, instantaneously recognising me. "Is it possible that——"

"Yes, my lord," Mr. Edwards hastened to observe; "in this admirable young gentleman you behold the gallant deliverer of your wife—who, thank heaven! has sustained no injury."

"You, Joseph?" said Lord Eccleston: and he gazed upon me in so singular a manner that I was confused and bewildered: then abruptly grasping me by the hand, he added in a deep voice, "You know not——But you are not going?——No, no! you must remain."

"He will neither accept thanks nor hospitality—nor anything else," said Mr. Edwards. "He evidently thinks he has performed the most ordinary action."

"I have only done my duty to a fellow-creature," I said: and rushing away, I darted across the Square to avoid any farther assurances of gratitude or any additional compliments for the deed I had accomplished.

At the farther extremity of the Square I paused, and looked in the direction of the burning edifice. The engines were now playing fast and furiously upon the devouring element, which was evidently succumbing to the volumes of water thus thrown upon it. It did not appear that the adjacent houses were much injured. The crowds were still agitating, and crying, and yelling in front: those who worked the engines were singing; and above all was a lurid halo, crowned with a dense smoke.

I continued my way to the nearest cab-stand; and entering a vehicle, was borne to my hotel.

On the following day I read the account of the conflagration in the evening newspapers. It appeared that painters and varnishers had been for some days engaged in several of the principal rooms of Eccleston House—and that large quantities of the inflammable materials which they used in their avocations, were left upon the premises. Thus, when the fire broke out, through an escape of gas, the whole mansion was thrown as it were into a sudden blaze; and hence the rapidity with which the fire spread from point to point, and the fury with which it so immediately raged. My exploit was duly recorded in a manner so fulsomely complimentary to myself that it made me blush as I read it: my name too had become known, and was paraded in the journals which thus recorded the event.

But as if the writers of these accounts were anxious to practise their fulsome vein in more ways than one, they chronicled the following circumstances:—"We observed amongst the crowd Mr. Charles Diggins and Mr. George Spindleshank, who happened to be returning from an evening party at the time the fire broke out. Mr. Charles Diggins, with that admirable readiness to seize upon every passing circumstance which characterizes the eminent and popular author of the *Licksnick Papers*, instantaneously took out his note-book and began making copious memoranda; so that we have no doubt the public will enjoy the fruits of his observations through the medium of a piquant paper in his weekly serial, *Household Stuff*. While this great man was thus usefully engaged in front of the burning mansion, at the time that the gallant Joseph Wilmot was perilling his life in the rescue of a fellow-creature, Mr. George Spindleshank, the eminent artist, was eliciting roars of laughter from a group collected around him, and to whom he was relating with his characteristic facetiousness, an anecdote of how he once extinguished a fire in a kitchen-chimney by the very novel and truly ingenious expedient of giving a loud and abrupt cough at the opening, which by the suddenness of the shock brought down all the soot—covering himself therewith, but effecting his truly philanthropic purpose."

It was in this manner that the narrative of the conflagration was wound up in the newspapers; and I have no doubt that the erudite Mr. Charles Diggins and the facetious Mr. George Spindleshank were hugely delighted at the manner in which their names were introduced, and that they considered they had every reason to congratulate themselves on being the heroes of the night's adventure.

CHAPTER LXVIII.

THE CHATEAU.

I REMAINED two days longer in London, and was glad that no inquiries were made after me at the place of my temporary abode, by those from whose complimentary and grateful language I had so abruptly escaped after my exploit. At length I took my departure by the coach for Dover, and thence proceeded by the steam-packet to Calais. As this is a narrative of my own personal adventures rather than a description of the various scenes and places which in the course of my eventful career I was led to visit, I am not going to inflict upon my readers any delineation of my experiences, opinions, or impressions in respect to French persons, manners, or localities. I will therefore at once succinctly state that having tarried two or three days in Calais, I took my place in the *malle-poste*, or mail-coach, for Paris. This vehicle is only fashioned to carry four persons: namely, the *courier* (or guard) and three passengers. It however happened that I was the only passenger who on this occasion started with the coach, which left Meurice's Hotel in Calais at nine o'clock in the evening. At about eleven o'clock we reached Boulogne; and thence continued our way on the road towards Amiens.

We had not however gone very far—it was scarcely midnight—and I had just fallen into a doze in the rear compartment of the vehicle, where I was seated alone—the *courier* being in the *coupé*, or front compartment—when I was startled up by a sudden swerving of the coach. The *courier* vociferated something—the postilion shouted out another *something* in reply—and the next moment the *malle-poste* was upset in a ditch. For a few moments I was rendered nearly insensible by the shock. The *courier* opened the door

which was uppermost—for it appeared that he had escaped unhurt; and dragging me out, held up his lanthorn, with much concern expressed on his really honest countenance, to see whether by my looks he dared hope that I was equally uninjured. My knowledge of French,—as originally obtained at school, and subsequently improved by study at various times during leisure hours,—was just sufficient to enable me to give him to understand that I had received no hurt beyond a few bruises and the sensation of a shock. One of the axle-trees of the mail was broken; and the *courier* made me comprehend that the nearest town was two leagues distant—that is to say, five English miles. I was too much bruised and experienced too great a stiffness in my limbs, to relish the idea of walking that distance. The *courier* motioned for me to mount one of the horses, the traces of which had been in the meantime cut away by the postilion: but if I were too stiff to walk, I was equally unable to retain myself on the back of a rough uncouth animal such as that which the guard wanted me to bestride.

The air was intensely cold; and though I was well wrapped up, my teeth were chattering. There was a hard frost: but the night was otherwise fine, and the stars were twinkling in the firmament. I looked around in the hope of descrying some habitation where I might possibly obtain a bed; and I saw a light shining in the distance. I directed the attention of the *courier* thereto: but he could not immediately trouble himself any more with me or my affairs, as he was busy in giving directions to the postilion what to do. This individual, aided by the guard, attached the mail-bags over the back of one of the horses; and mounting another he galloped away, leading the animal that was laden as aforesaid. The *courier*, having thus sent forward the bags—doubtless to be transferred to some fresh conveyance to be obtained at the nearest town—once more bestowed his attention upon me. There were two horses left: he besought me to mount one, as he would ride the other, and thus we might make our way onward. But I felt the utter impossibility of riding a rough animal over a hard road, without saddle or stirrups, for five miles, and I gave him to understand that I would sooner ensconce myself inside the overturned mail, and wait there until he could send some conveyance to fetch me. But now our eyes were again turned towards the light in the distance; and as there was a lane leading thither, the guard proposed that I should endeavour to ride at least as far as the habitation to which the light belonged. To this proposal I gladly assented: for I longed for the luxury of a bed in order to recover from the shock which the upsetting of the vehicle had caused me to experience.

I mounted one of the horses; and the *courier*, kindly shouldering my trunk, walked by my side, leading the other horse. In this manner we proceeded for about half a mile, when we reached a spacious but gloomy-looking habitation, which had the appearance of a large barrack,—the more so as it had a sort of belfrey upon the roof in the centre. It was low, having only one storey above the ground-floor—but was extensive, as I have just said—and straggling too, with numerous outhouses. It had a little park or paddock in front, and a shrubbery of evergreens bordering the garden in the rear. All the ground-floor shutters were closed; and from one window only of the upper floor was a light glimmering. This window was higher than the rest—was arched like that of a church—and stood in the centre of the building, immediately under the belfrey. The *courier* spoke of the house as a *chateau;* and when I asked to whom it belonged, he mentioned some Count's name, which I have forgotten now,—giving me to understand that the family who owned it had not lived there for many years, and that it had recently been let to some strangers—but who they were he knew not.

The guard rang at the entrance; and after an interval of some minutes, a man put his head out of one of the upper windows—but not that where the light was burning. He was a Frenchman; and demanded what we wanted. The guard gave a few hasty words of explanation: the man said something which I could not catch—drew in his head—and closed the window. I feared the solicited hospitality was refused: but the *courier* speedily assured me that it was the very reverse. And so it proved to be: for the front door was opened, and the man who had spoken from the window, made his appearance, half-dressed. Such garments as he had huddled on, belonged to a suit of livery; and I therefore judged him to be a footman of the household. He bade me enter: I thanked the guard for his civility and attention, —offering him money, which he however politely refused,—stating that he was an old soldier, and was paid by the King for the duties which he performed as a mail-courier. Then, ere he departed, he gave me to understand that as my fare had been paid in advance, I might take a place in the mail which would pass along the road at the same hour on the following night; or I might have my money returned. I preferred the former course; and the *courier*, mounting one of the horses and leading the other, hastened away.

The footman now shouldered my box; and with a candle in his hand, conducted me into a parlour, where he requested me to wait for a few minutes. He quickly returned, bringing wine and biscuits—and then hurried off again, saying something which I could not rightly comprehend, but which methought was to the effect that he was going to arouse a female-servant to prepare me a bed. The room in which he thus left me, was spacious, but of the most sombre aspect. The furniture was old and heavy: the tables, chairs, and sofas were of that dark walnut wood which was so much in vogue in the time of Louis XIV; and the cushions were all of a dingy red material, known as Utrecht velvet. There were large portraits of old-fashioned ladies and gentlemen, suspended to the walls,—the frames much the worse for dust and neglect—the paintings themselves covered with cracks, and in some parts having the canvass torn. The one candle which the domestic had left in the apartment, shed but a feeble light, and therefore rendered the gloom visible rather than dispelled it. I felt dispirited by the accident and by the bitter coldness of the night-air; so that the sombre aspect of this spacious apartment, with its corners enveloped in an obscurity into which the feeble rays of the candle could not penetrate, was but little calculated to lift me up from despondency. I took a glass of wine; but it was too cold, and

also too poor in quality, to do me any good; and I wished that the footman had exercised sufficient forethought to set a faggot blazing in the grate of the wide-mouthed chimney.

A quarter of an hour elapsed, which however seemed a full hour; and the man re-appeared. He requested me to follow him—which I did,—he again shouldering my box and carrying his own candle, while I bore the one he had left me. We traversed the spacious hall, and ascended a wide staircase, the balustrades of which were the most massive I had ever seen; and on reaching the summit, I perceived that from the landing a long corridor branched off to the right and another to the left, a feeble glimmering at each extremity showing me that there was a window at either end, and therefore that this passage ran the whole length of the building. There was an array of doors on either side; but on the landing, and facing the staircase, there were folding-doors set in a deep and groined archway of some very dark wood, and thus having the appearance of the entrance to an oratorio, or chapel. An intense chill and a gloomy silence reigned throughout the chateau,—the latter broken only by the sounds of our footsteps as we ascended the stairs and entered upon the landing, all of which were of polished wood of a very dark hue, most probably walnut, but certainly not oak. There was no carpet in the parlour to which I was first shown, nor on the stairs or landing: but the absence of this must not be regarded by my English readers as any indication of poverty with respect to the mansion —inasmuch as floor carpets are never seen in the old chateaux of France, and very seldom in modern dwellings, nor even in the hotels, unless it be in the bedrooms.

The footman struck into the corridor diverging on the right hand from the landing; and conducted me into a spacious bed-chamber, the door of which stood open. My spirits instantaneously rose at the comfortable aspect of the apartment: for a cheerful fire was blazing in the chimney,—a faggot with three huge logs laid upon it: two wax-lights burnt on a table in the centre—and in an alcove at the farther extremity, a bed with clean sheets, evidently just put on, met my eye. The footman deposited the box upon the floor, which was of the same dark wood as I have before alluded to; and having given me to understand that breakfast would be served up to me at any hour that I chose to take it in the morning, he wished me good night and issued from the room, closing the door behind him.

The "good night" however was rather a fashion of speech than actually correct; for it was now one o'clock in the morning. Drawing one of the heavy high-backed chairs close up to the fire, I purposed to sit there for a few minutes to enjoy the welcome warmth ere retiring to rest; for my blood was frozen in my veins, and my limbs were numbed with the intense chill of the night-air and of the parlour down stairs. By degrees however a drowsiness came over me—a drowsiness which I could not shake off; and I gradually sank into a sort of dreamy repose. It was not however the depth of slumber into which I was plunged: it was a kind of sleep which, if not actually broken and unquiet, is nevertheless of that nature in which realities and illusions are blended and jumbled together. The crude images which now floated through my brain, took their colouring as it were from recent events as well as from surrounding objects. At one moment I thought I was still rolling along in the mail-coach: at another I fancied that some ghastly countenance was looking out at me from between the dark heavy draperies which hung in front of the alcove containing the bed. Then methought that I was gazing in the mirror over the mantel-piece, but that instead of my own face which was reflected, I beheld another which was pale as that of the dead; and yet I could not define to myself what semblance the features wore. Doubtless the shock I had sustained by the upsetting of the mail had produced a slight concussion of the brain; and hence the unconquerable drowsiness which had stolen over me—hence too these fantastic and horrible dreams which blended with my recollection of realities. But those dreams, be it understood, while operating upon the senses, did not dissipate my sleep, nor startle me up from the repose in which I was lulled in that arm-chair.

My visions were as varied as they were fantastic; and as I believe that no one ever dreamt of horrible things without seeing shapes of spectral form and nature, I was not destined to be an exception to the general rule. Thus methought that a figure clothed in white, slowly emerged from behind the draperies of the alcove, and advanced towards me, filling me with a mortal terror. But it vanished, yielding to some other dreamy effort of the fancy; and this was succeeded by the appearance of another shape quite different from the former one, inasmuch as it was enveloped in sable garments. Then that too flitted away, or melted into thin air; and images connected with the realities of my past experiences, trooped before me. I beheld Sir Matthew Heseltine, his eyes glaring on me with a reptile keenness and malignity of expression ten thousand times more intense than ever I had seen it on the part of the living man himself when first I knew him at Reading; and his lips were drawn in with that peculiar manner which I have so often noticed in former chapters of my narrative. Then I beheld Mrs. Lanover, with her soft melancholy looks bent sweetly and encouragingly upon me; and the next moment her place in the apparition-throng was taken by her miscreant husband, looking a thousand times more horrible, more hideous, and more threatening than he even in reality was in the worst moments of his diabolic nature. Then other images succeeded, presently followed by the lovely shape of Annabel, who, arrayed in robes of azure and of white, floated past me with her form of seraphic beauty, bending upon me looks bashfully expressive of tenderness and hope.

And now again appeared the form clad in the sable garments: but methought that this time, instead of suddenly springing up before me, as if self-created out of the nothingness of empty air, it entered by the door, which slowly opened to give it admission. This shape gradually assumed a more decided and positive form than any which my fancy had previously conjured up. I now too felt the consciousness of slumbering in that arm-chair; and therefore, in plain terms, I presume that this slumber was growing lighter, and that I was approaching nearer a state of wakefulness. I re-

member my sensations as well as if I were at this moment in the same situation over again. Gradually the conviction stole upon me that I saw this figure clad in black with my outward vision, and not through the medium of fancy only. I recollect too that I attempted to rise—that I endeavoured to throw off all the lingering influence of sleep—but that terror, vague and undefined, paralyzed all my powers of motion and of speech. I continued to survey that form which was thus before me: it was the shape of a female, who seemed to be dressed in mourning garments; but I could not obtain a glimpse of her countenance. Nor was the shape sufficiently defined to my vision to enable me to discern whether her countenance was averted—whether it was covered with a thick black veil—or whether indeed she had any face at all. The shape stopped short midway between the door and myself,—thus being at a distance of about four yards from me; for the chamber was spacious. Then I heard a low moan: the figure retreated; and as if a spell were lifted off me, I suddenly started up wide awake.

I must have suffered the acutest terror throughout the endurance of that series of visions. I was trembling all over: my heart was palpitating with such violence that I could hear it plainly: to use a vulgar expression, it was literally thumping against my side. My forehead was bathed in a cold perspiration: and as I glanced towards the mirror over the mantel, I actually recoiled from the reflection of my own countenance, so ghastly pale was it—the eyes so full of unspeakable horror—the lips so ashy white. I glanced towards the door, and saw that it stood half-way open.

This circumstance changed the nature of my terror all in a moment,—relieving me from the superstitious influence which was hitherto upon me, and filling me with alarms of a more real and earthly nature. Could any treachery have been intended? and had my sudden waking up terrified the person who was about to perpetrate it? I was in a strange mansion, in a lonely part of a strange country. All the dreadful tales I had ever heard or read of travellers being ensnared and murdered in cold blood, swept through my brain. Was it possible that the *courier* himself was in league with a gang of assassins? I plunged my hand into the breast of my coat: my pocket-book containing my money was safe: my purse too was in my breeches-pocket: my watch was in my waistcoat; and mechanically drawing it forth, I saw that it was half-past two in the morning. I had therefore slept nearly an hour and a half: the tapers were burning, and the fire was still alight.

I knew not what to think nor what to do. I advanced to the bed—looked behind the draperies—but saw nothing to confirm my apprehensions. I looked under the bed—I carried my inspection to the cupboards in the apartment—I entered an adjacent dressing-room: no brigand form crouching in ambush, did I see. The only circumstance which seemed to confirm my idea that some person had really entered the chamber, was the fact of the door standing open: for I perfectly well recollected that the footman had shut it when he bade me good night. But then I thought to myself, how foolish it was on my part to attach any importance to an incident which might be so easily explained. The lock was probably a bad one; and this was likely enough in an old mansion such as the chateau was. The wind blowing along the corridor, might have forced open the door. All this seemed feasible enough; and yet I could not satisfy myself that it was in reality as I sought to explain it and wished to think it. No—there was something more than a doubt hovering in my mind: there was a suspicion bordering close upon a conviction that I had either been visited by a shape from another world, or else by a living being of this one. I had long ceased to be superstitious; and yet back to my mind flashed the coincidence that Violet, Annabel's twin-sister, had breathed her last under those peculiar circumstances which have been narrated to the reader in an earlier chapter of my eventful history. Nevertheless, I rather inclined to the belief that it was a being of flesh and blood which I had ere now seen in my chamber; and the thought of intended treachery—perhaps of danger still impending—occurred forcefully to my mind. If I were really in a den of robbers and assassins, it might have been that a woman in the first instance had come to deal me my death-blow—but that as she had been scared away, her accomplices would presently make their appearance to consummate that which she had recoiled from effecting.

Again however I strove to reason myself out of these apprehensions: but I felt it impossible to seek the couch prepared for my reception, unless the room door was carefully secured. But there were no means of fastening it—no key nor bolt. I opened it to examine it more carefully; and just as I was about to close it again, my ear caught a low moan, expressive of ineffable anguish, coming from the direction of the landing. The slanting beams of the moon were penetrating through a skylight; and as I turned my eyes in that quarter, I beheld a dark figure pass through the argentine glimmering. It instantaneously disappeared. I listened with suspended breath: methought I was enabled to catch a light footfall and the rustling of a dress—but I was not sure. At all events the figure was not approaching my chamber; and as I re-entered it, I thought that it was possibly the same female form that had startled up me from my slumber.

It was evident that some one was about; and what could this be for? what meant that deep moan of anguish? Had I been disturbed by some person of uneasy mind—perhaps a somnambulist? and were all my apprehensions relative to treachery, impending danger, assassination, and so forth, utterly baseless and unfounded? I began to think so—and likewise to be ashamed of my fears. I therefore thought of retiring to my couch without troubling myself any farther in respect to the means of securing the door,—when, as I was standing near the table in the act of winding up my watch, I distinctly heard some one pass by the chamber—the garments rustling against the door, and continuing to sweep the wall until the footsteps were no longer audible. There was something mysterious in these unquiet wanderings of the individual, whoever it might be; and I confess that I was seized with a vague and solemn awe, partly superstitious—partly inspired by terror, as if I were in a mansion where some conscience-stricken criminal walked about at night. While I was under the influence of that sensation, the

footsteps again became audible as they were evidently retracing their way; and again too did the rustling garments brush against the wall and door. That same sense of superstitious awe which was yet upon me, thrilled as it were into an irresistible impulse; and gently opening the door, I looked out. I caught sight of the figure just as it entered into the sphere of the moonbeams under the skylight. There it stood for nearly a minute—a black shape of female semblance. Yes: the conviction was strong within me that it was the same which had entered my chamber, and that it was no delusion of the fancy on my part at the time I was half-slumbering in the arm-chair.

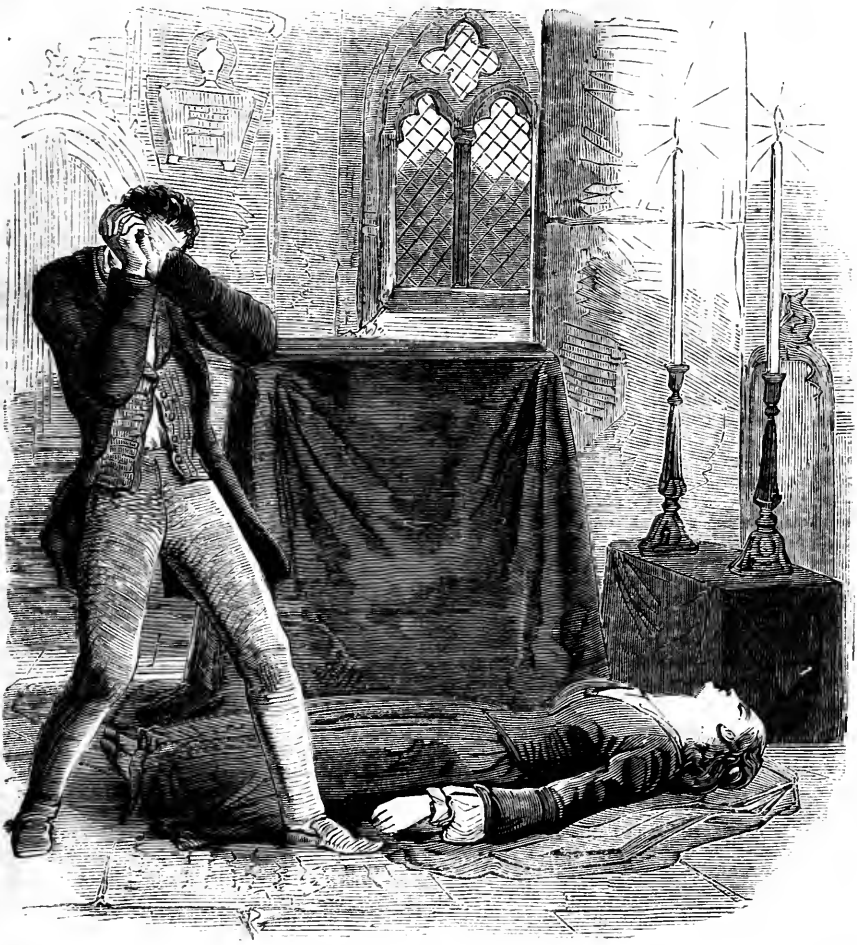
I remained upon the threshold of my room,—my eyes riveted upon the figure in the midst of the moonbeams, and which thus stood at a distance of about twenty yards from me. Again a low deep moan of indescribable anguish came floating gloomily along the chill atmosphere of the corridor; and then I saw the figure move slowly towards the tall portals which were upon that landing, beneath the groined archway, and which I had supposed to belong to an oratorio or chapel. One leaf of the folding-doors was pushed open; and then a light streamed forth—but a light different from that of the moonbeams with which it blended. The figure passed in—the door closed again—the light disappeared—and only the cold rays of the moon fell through the skylight upon the spot where the instant before that figure had stood.

Again I asked myself what could all this mean?—and I must candidly confess that I was seized with an irresistible curiosity. It seemed as if something were passing around me of no ordinary character; and with a sort of superstitious feeling I began to reflect that possibly my own circumstances, or things relating to myself, were mixed up with what was thus passing. Such a state of mind may be readily conceived and comprehended, when it is remembered that I was there, in that old chateau—a strange lonely place—of gloomy aspect—while darkness was yet upon the earth—that my dreams had been so varied and so hideous—and that I was startled up from them by a shape so well calculated to fill my soul with awe. I remained riveted to the spot near my chamber-door, my eyes bent in the direction of the landing. I longed to hasten thither, and to follow that shape into whatsoever place the tall portals might lead: but my inclination and my power were opposed to each other—I could not obey the dictates of the former, because my limbs were paralysed and I was rooted to the spot. Thus a few minutes passed. One leaf of the portals opened again: the light streamed forth for an instant—the dark shape again passed through the cold moonbeams—it proceeded along the corridor in the contrary direction from that where I was standing: I heard a door open and shut—and then all was still.

Now it appeared as if the spell which had rendered me statue-like, was lifted from off me; and I was enabled to obey the impulse of my inclinations. Noiselessly on tip-toe did I advance along the corridor,—taking no candle with me, for I knew that there was a light inside the place with which the tall portals communicated. There was a solemn sensation of absorbing awe upon me as I thus pursued my way; and in a few moments I reached the landing. I pushed open the folding-doors, which swung noiselessly upon their hinges; and a glance showed me that my original idea in repect to this place was correct: for it was fitted up as an oratorio or chapel. But that solemn sensation of awe grew all the more profound, and the blood stagnated glacially in my veins, as I found myself in the presence of funereal preparations. In the centre of the oratorio a coffin, covered with a pall, rested upon tressels; and two tall wax-candles stood at the head—two also at the feet. These tapers had given forth the light which I had ere now seen mingling with the moonbeams when the portals were opened; and a glance at the farther extremity showed me the arched window through which the same light had shone when descried by me in the road immediately after the upsetting of the *malle-poste*.

I had stopped short just at the entrance of the little chapel; and when my looks, sweeping around, had taken in the objects which I have described, I was painfully smitten with the idea that I was an intruder upon a scene of death's solemnity. Then, too, the thought flashed to me that the shape in the dark garments was some unhappy mourner deploring the loss of the loved one that lay coffined there—and that rendered restless and unquiet by bitter affliction, this mourner wandered thus late through the chateau. Ashamed of myself for having yielded to the curiosity which brought me thither, I again glanced quickly around to see if any other person were in the oratorio: but no—I was alone with the coffined dead. I observed that it was a very small coffin—evidently that of a young child; and perhaps it was the bereaved mother whose wanderings had alike disturbed and terrified me. Conscious of having grossly violated the hospitality which was afforded me within the walls of the chateau, I abruptly quitted the oratorio—and hastily but noiselessly retraced my way to my own chamber. I was bitterly vexed with myself for having left it at all; and my only source of congratulation was that I had not been observed by any inmate of the dwelling. Still I was at a loss to comprehend how it was that the bereaved mourner had found her way to my apartment, and wherefore she had come in to startle me.

Completely relieved, however, from all fears of treachery, I laid aside my apparel; and extinguishing the candles, entered the couch. I could not immediately compose myself to sleep: all the incidents of the night kept occupying my brain. But at length slumber stole upon me; and I slept for a while without dreaming—or at least without afterwards recollecting what were the visions which visited me. But presently it seemed to me as if I were gradually becoming aware of the presence of some one again in the room; and I felt just as I had previously done when reposing in the arm-chair—that is to say, whatsoever was passing operated on my senses, came within the sphere of my consciousness, and yet did not dissipate my slumber. It appeared that the fire was burning up, and that its light played flickeringly through the room—that by the aid of this light I beheld the female shape clad in the mourning garments, advancing towards my bed—but that her countenance was either so turned, or else so thrown into the shade, that I could not catch it. I had the



sensation of a cold tremor creeping over me, as the figure approaching close up to the couch, seemed to stand in an attitude of fixed and earnest contemplation. Then a voice spoke,—low, soft, and of silvery sweetness—but Oh! so mournful, so deeply, deeply plaintive, that the very effect produced by this ineffable melancholy of tone prevented me from immediately thinking that the voice itself was familiar to me.

"You have come at last," said the voice; "and I have been for a long time expecting you. But do you come from the grave to which I am shortly going down to rest by the side of that being who, when you were absent, was my only comfort and consolation? Oh, I do not blame you for having kept away from me! I know that you did not desert me wilfully: it was the cruelty of others that separated us. They bore me away to this old house: they told me that I should never see you again, and that I must even banish you from my thoughts. But the tyranny which they exercised over my personal freedom, extended not to my mind; and I have never ceased to think of you. I know that you would have come to me long ere this if you could; and therefore I reproach you not. Strange things have been agitating in my mind—wild fancies—celestial visions. I have seen angel-shapes floating around me, and beckoning me to go away with them to another sphere. And on the night when my beloved one died, those angel-shapes whispered in my ear that I should soon follow. And I know that it will be so: my time is near at hand; but I rejoice that I have seen you once more. Just now, when you slept in the chair, I was coming to imprint one kiss upon your cheek: but I thought that you too were dead as you lay there—and I was fearful of wakening you up again to the sad realities of life. It seemed to me a sin to bring you back to a world which is so cold—Oh! so cold, that the grave will be warm in comparison

with it. You started—and I fled. I know not now what thoughts were in my brain, or wherefore I should thus have rushed away from your presence: but, Oh! I am not the mistress of my own actions—invisible shapes guide me, and do with me according to their own will. Now let me kiss you once:—it may be for the last time until we meet in another world, to join him who has gone before us!"

Then the speaker bent over me. I distinctly felt the soft pressure of her lip upon my cheek. If I was not completely awake before, but only in a sort of dreamy repose, that touch aroused me; and starting up, I caught the sound of a light step—of a rustling dress—instantaneously followed by the closing of the door.

I was now broad awake, and sitting up in the bed. But, good heavens!—what thoughts—what ideas—what terrible suspicions were agitating in my tortured and bewildered brain! That voice—Oh! was it not familiar to me, though modulated to so soft a plaintiveness and to such a profound mournfulness of tone? Had accident——no, not accident——had the hand of Providence brought me beneath the same roof with her whose love on recent occasions I had been denouncing as so fatal?—and, great God! was it possible that it was my own child whose remains were coffined beneath that pall on which, by the aid of the wax-lights, my eyes had ere now been fixed within the walls of the oratorio? There was confusion in my brain: I pressed my hand to my throbbing brows, endeavouring to persuade myself that it was all a vision—the result of the concussion sustained by the accident in the road, and akin to those fevered fancies which had haunted and scared me while dreamily reposing in the arm-chair. But no—I could not thus convince myself. The soft music of Calanthe's voice still floated around me, with its ineffable mournfulness: those plaintive words which she had uttered, and which appeared to bespeak an intellect unhinged and the powers of reason wrecked, still murmured in my ears. A cold perspiration was all over me: I was bathed as it were in my own horror, anguish, and agony. And I felt too the touch of her lips still upon my cheek, as if the soft kiss she had deposited there had left its impress and had marked me.

"No, no," I wildly exclaimed aloud: "it is all a dream!" And I exerted every possible faculty of the mind—every power of the intellect, to persuade myself that it was so. I lay down again—a sensation of faintness came over me—I strove to shake it off—but could not; and consciousness utterly abandoned me.

When I came to myself, the gray dawn of the wintry morning was stealing in at the windows; and with an equal dimness and sluggishness did my recollections begin to revive within me. At first the incidents or the fancies,—for I scarcely knew how to account them,—of the past night presented themselves in a confused and conflicting mass to my contemplation: but by degrees the light of intelligence shed itself upon this chaotic state of the mind—my thoughts settled themselves in the proper cells of my brain—and I was enabled to review deliberately and collectively all that I have been narrating. I knew not to what conclusion to come. It appeared to me a wild and wondrous dream—and yet, on the other hand, a solemn and awful reality. My soul was full of consternation and bewilderment—uncertainty and dismay: so much so, that I had not immediately the power nor the courage to rise and hasten to clear up the stupendous mystery.

"My God, if it be true!" I suddenly exclaimed, as the thought that my child possibly lay dead beneath the same roof, thrilled again, but with a wilder anguish than before, through my imagination.

I sprang from my couch—hastily huddled on my clothes—and issued from the chamber. No one was in the corridor: I sped along it—I reached the landing—I paused at the portals of the oratorio.

"Oh, now for the solution!" my soul's voice said in mingled anguish and consternation within me; and I trembled convulsively from head to foot as I stood against those portals which I dared not for the moment push open. At length, in a fit of desperation, I extended my hand: the doors fell back—and the first glance flung into the chapel showed me that it was no dream, but an awful reality. The doors closed behind me, swinging to of their own accord upon their noiseless hinges; and I stood within the threshold, a prey to indescribable emotions as I gazed on the black pall which covered the little coffin. The dim misty light of morning pervaded the place: the tapers were still burning—but now with a feeble and sickly glimmering. Suddenly I advanced towards the coffin. My hand was stretched forth to raise the pall, to read whatsoever name might be upon the lid—when I was all in a moment startled by beholding a female figure stretched upon the cold pavement-floor on the other side of the funeral scene, the sweeping sable drapery of which had hitherto hidden the form from my view. I advanced a step and then stopped short——yes, stopped short smitten by feelings which language cannot describe: for no part of the previous night's mysteries now remained unsolved. The form which lay there, was that of Calanthe Dundas!

She appeared to be buried in a profound slumber. She was apparelled in deep black; and a sable veil flowing from above her raven hair, rested upon the pavement. Her countenance was however left completely exposed; and as the dull misty light of morning and the sickly glimmering of the tapers played upon that countenance, it seemed of marble paleness. The hands too, motionless by her sides, had the exact resemblance of alabaster: her eyes were closed; but her lips appeared to be moving slightly, as if with the regular breathings of profound slumber. This however was only an illusion produced by the sickly flickering of the tapers; and when in a few moments the conviction burst upon me that those lips really moved not at all, the horrible idea struck me that she was sleeping that sleep from which there is no awakening!

In an instant my arms were thrown around her to raise her up: my cheek touched her's—my hand caught one of her own. A wild cry burst from my lips: for her cheek was as cold as the stone from which I had raised her—her hand too sent quivering through me the ice-chill of the dead. Oh, who can describe what I felt—the horror, the anguish which rent my soul! Again

I cried wildly forth: the portals of the chapel were burst open—a man entered—an ejaculation of astonishment burst from his lips;—and as my dismayed, haggard look was thrown upon him, I instantaneously recognised the hideous humpback form of Mr. Lanover.

CHAPTER LXIX.

THE COMPACT.

He hurried towards me: the doors again opened—and in rushed the footman whom I had seen on the previous night, followed by two female domestics. One of the latter was an Englishwoman; and amid the ejaculations which were now sent forth from the lips of the new-comers, her own frightfully confirmed the horrible idea which possessed me in respect to Calanthe.

"She is dead!" was the cry which thus thrilled from the tongue of the female dependant.

"This villain has killed her!" said Lanover, in the worst tones of his naturally harsh jarring voice.

"Killed her? fiend that you are for saying it!" I passionately exclaimed. "No, no!—I would lay down my own life to restore her's. I came hither but a few minutes back—I found her stretched upon the cold pavement——"

"Yes, yes," said the Englishwoman, now taking Calanthe's other hand—for I still retained one clasped in my own; "the poor dear lady must have been dead some hours!"

"And you did not watch her, Margaret? How came she here?" demanded Mr. Lanover, turning furiously round upon the English maid.

"Sir," I said, "remember that you are in the presence of the dead! Give not vent to this infuriate mood of your's."

"Begone, vile boy!" cried Lanover, darting upon me a look of diabolic malignity: but all in a moment his manner changed, as if prudential considerations suddenly got the better of the first feelings of rage to which he had yielded:—and he said in a low subdued tone, and with an apparently humbled look, "Yes, you are right, Joseph: we are in the presence of the dead—and my conduct was most reprehensible. Surrender up your lifeless burthen to the domestics—and come with me."

I imprinted one kiss upon the marble forehead of the perished Calanthe, while the tears, flowing down my cheeks, dropped upon her own. I resigned her to the servants; and then, without taking any farther notice of Lanover—without indeed for the moment recollecting that he was present—I advanced towards the coffin. Lifting the pall—in a state of mind where the bitterness of affliction suddenly became subdued and attempered by a feeling of solemn awe and reverence—I contemplated the small black-covered box which contained my dead boy. Through the dimness of my tears I read the name of "Joseph Dundas" upon the lid: I sank down upon my knees and wept in silence. I prayed too: for I could not put aside—nor indeed did I attempt to discard—the saddening conviction that I had been the author of much evil, and that by abandoning myself to the temptations involved in Calanthe's love, I had originated, so to speak, the tragedy which had now arrived at its closing scene. I was deeply, deeply contrite: I implored the forgiveness of heaven; and I besought its mercy on the soul of the departed Calanthe. There was no need to invoke the same divine blessing upon the spirit of my perished boy: he had died in his innocence, and ere he had reached an age when one thought of a sinful nature could have harboured in his mind. There I knelt for many minutes,—totally oblivious of the presence of the hated Lanover,—my soul walled in to the thoughts and meditations, the prayers and the devotions which I have just described.

Slowly I arose from my knees; and still without perceiving Lanover—still without recollecting him—I issued forth from the chapel. On the landing I met the footman, who requested me to follow him; and I did so mechanically. We descended the stairs; and he conducted me into that same parlour to which I was introduced on my arrival in the middle of the night. A breakfast-table was laid for three persons: a fire was burning in the grate: I felt cold and ill; and drawing a chair near the blazing logs, stooped over them. For some minutes I remained lost in my reflections, until I was suddenly startled by hearing the door open; and looking round, I beheld Mr. Lanover. I at once saw that he was tutoring his countenance into a conciliatory air, and that his object was to be upon a friendly footing with me: so that this very appearance on his part at once put me upon my guard;—for whenever that man wore such a semblance, I knew that it was the time to mistrust him most. Or at all events, such was the prudential course to be adopted with regard to him.

"Did you come hither purposely, Joseph," he inquired, as he advanced towards me: "or was it really through the accident of the mail-coach breaking down?"

"It was the accident," I answered coldly; "though I have no doubt that, judging other persons' minds by your own, you invariably put a sinister interpretation upon everything."

"Always harsh words from your lips, Joseph!" said Mr. Lanover.

"And always vile abuse from your's," I retorted; "or else cajoling dissimulation. Just now you levelled the coarsest epithets and the blackest accusations against me: and it seems as if you think I am tamely to endure all your moods in the same way that I have hitherto put up with all your persecutions. But, Ah! we are in the house of death; and I am wrong thus to give way to the feelings which your presence excites."

"Yes—you are wrong to do so, Joseph," answered Mr. Lanover. "I believe—since you have given me the assurance—that accident alone brought you hither. When the footman told me at an early hour this morning that he had granted an asylum during the night to a young English gentleman, I entertained not the remotest suspicion that it was you."

"The hand of Providence, Mr. Lanover," I said, "is visible in the circumstances which brought me hither: but this perhaps is language to which you are so unaccustomed that you will sneer at it. Oh! as for myself, I feel that I have been very wicked!—all this is to be traced to my folly and mad-

ness——Alas, alas,—poor Calanthe!"—and the tears again trickled down my cheeks.

"Methought you all along loved Annabel, Joseph," said Mr. Lanover: and I fancied there was a covert malignity in his accents, though he tutored his look to assume an expression of reproach. "Yes—you gave me to understand as much on that day when we met in Aldersgate Street: but it would appear that your heart belonged to Lady Calanthe Dundas."

"No, Mr. Lanover!" I said, mournfully yet firmly; "I loved not Lady Calanthe as she loved me—and perhaps as such love deserved to be reciprocated. But, Ah! speaking of Annabel——"

"Why mention you my daughter's name thus abruptly?" inquired the humpback.

"Your daughter, sir? She is not your daughter!" I emphatically responded,—"except so far as your marriage with her mother——"

"Who told you this?" he demanded, his hideous countenance suddenly darkening with rage.

"Then you know not what has occurred?" I said. "But no!—of course you know it not. You quit your home without indicating whither you are going; and thus if anything grave and serious occurs, those you leave behind have no means of communicating with you. But on your return to London you will find letters of importance awaiting you in Great Russell Street——"

"Letters of importance?" repeated Mr. Lanover, studying my countenance earnestly: "from whom? You evidently know something——tell me what it is, Joseph!"

I reflected for a few moments; and so far from seeing any harm in making certain communications to Mr. Lanover, I thought it better to do so, as I well knew that Sir Matthew Heseltine was anxious to correspond with him in order to settle some terms according to which he would consent to be separated from his wife, and leave her and Annabel entirely unmolested in the new home which they had found.

"Yes, Mr. Lanover," I said, "very important things have recently occurred. Your wife is reconciled to her father."

"Reconciled to her father?" exclaimed the humpback, his countenance expanding with mingled delight and incredulity. "Is this really the case?"

"I am not accustomed, sir," I answered coldly, "either to jest on solemn matters, or to give utterance to falsehoods."

"No, no—I am aware of it, Joseph: but this intelligence comes so suddenly upon me——it is so extraordinary——Pray tell me how all this was brought about!"

"I may take credit to myself," I rejoined, "for having been to a certain extent instrumental therein. I have lived with Sir Matthew Heseltine: and incidents occurred which led him to give me his confidence. One circumstance engendered another: his heart was softened—and he became reconciled to his long discarded daughter."

"And he is enormously rich, Joseph!" said Mr. Lanover, thus unintentionally giving verbal utterance to what at the moment was passing through his mind. "But my wife and Annabel——"

"They are at Heseltine Hall; and it was I who had the supreme happiness of conducting them thither."

"And to think that I should have been abroad at the time!" muttered Lanover, but in a tone sufficiently audible to reach my ears. "And you say that there are letters waiting for me at my house in London?"

"There are. Sir Matthew Heseltine and your wife wrote to you a day or two after the meeting and the reconciliation. What the contents of these letters may be I know not precisely——"

"But can you form a conjecture?" said Lanover eagerly.

"I would rather, sir, leave you to gather from their contents Sir Matthew Heseltine's views and intentions. And now that I have given you all this information, perhaps you will condescend to tell me how it is that I find you beneath the same roof where the lamented perished ones have been dwelling?"

"The explanation is simple enough," replied Lanover. "The Earl of Mandeville made inquiries for a trustworthy person who would place his daughter in a safe custody, but where she would be well treated and where a constant supervision would be kept over her. It happened that I was recommended to his lordship's notice; and I accepted the engagement. I came over to France about three months back to look for a suitable dwelling for Lady Calanthe; and as this chateau was to be let for next to nothing, I took it. Her ladyship and the child were at once removed hither: I remained a short time to carry out all suitable arrangements for their comfort and well being—and then returned to London. Two or three weeks ago the Earl of Mandeville, on receiving information that his daughter's intellects were impaired, resolved to despatch a distant female relative of the family to take charge of her. I came to escort Mrs. Borthwick hither; and business matters have detained me longer than I had anticipated. Then there was the child's death——"

"And how did my poor boy die?" I inquired, in a low and mournful tone.

"He was seized with a fever," answered Mr. Lanover, "which carried him off at the expiration of three days' illness. You see that every suitable arrangement was made for the funeral, which was to take place to-day: but now it will be deferred."

"Yes," I said, with a convulsive sob,—"because there are *two* to be consigned to the grave!"—and again my soul was smitten with remorse as I reflected that Calanthe's early doom was attributable to my weakness in yielding to the temptation of her love.

"You may conceive my astonishment, Joseph," said Mr. Lanover, "when the Earl of Mandeville at our first interview revealed his daughter's unfortunate history, and when her name was mentioned in connexion with your own. For he was obliged to tell me everything, so that I might take measures to guard against any communication between you,—as he informed me that you had carried her off from some place in Berkshire where she had been living in the strictest retirement. And now, Joseph, I offer to enter into a compact with you. You have recently seen my wife and daughter; and you can judge from their manner towards you whether I have betrayed a single syllable of your history in respect to Lady

Calanthe. I will continue silent on that score, if you yourself will solemnly and faithfully promise never to betray whatsoever you have suffered—or fancy that you have suffered at my hands. You will presently see Mrs. Borthwick, the lady to whom I ere now alluded. Will you pledge yourself to say nothing to this lady to my disparagement?—for I may frankly tell you that the Earl of Mandeville has entrusted me with divers pieces of business, for the transaction of which I am liberally remunerated."

"And you would not like to lose his confidence?" I observed. "Well then, Mr. Lanover, I willingly assent to the compact:"—and amidst the depth of my sorrow, it was some little consolation to reflect that my unfortunate connexion with Calanthe would be withheld from the knowledge of Annabel and her mother, as well as that of Sir Matthew Heseltine. I knew likewise that Mr. Lanover must have strong personal motives for proposing such a bargain; and it was therefore reasonable to calculate that it would suit his own interests to observe his portion of it with fidelity. "Do you think," I inquired, "that this Mrs. Borthwick of whom you have spoken, will suffer me to remain here until after the funeral?—for I feel it to be a duty," I added, "to follow to the grave the remains of my poor boy, even if I be not permitted to pay a similar tribute of reverential respect to the memory of the unfortunate Calanthe."

"Mrs. Borthwick will give you permission if you desire it," answered Mr. Lanover. "I will intercede with her on your behalf. And now tell me, Joseph—how is it that I find you travelling on the Continent under circumstances of evident ease and competency?"

"For this," was my answer, "I am indebted to the generosity of Sir Matthew Heseltine:"—but I by no means thought it requisite to enter into farther explanations, nor state how I was to pass a probationary interval of two years ere I returned to claim the hand of Annabel.

"Do you purpose to remain long abroad?" inquired Mr. Lanover.

"For at least a couple of years," was my response.

"Now, listen to an assurance which I am about to give you," he immediately said; "and it is this—that you need apprehend no farther interference on my part with your affairs. You have thought it molestation—even perhaps worse——"

"I am glad, Mr. Lanover," I interrupted him, "to receive such an assurance; because, if sincere, it proves that you are in a somewhat better frame of mind towards me than I have hitherto found you. But how do I know it to be sincere? Nevertheless, it really matters not, so far as I myself am concerned. I am no longer the timid trembling boy who tamely suffered himself to be coerced by you: neither do the same motives now exist which formerly induced me to spare you the vengeance of the law when you outraged me. It was for the sake of your wife and Annabel that I so spared you——"

"And in speaking of me to Sir Matthew Heseltine," said Lanover quickly, "you——"

"I will answer you with frankness," was my rejoinder.

"Enough!—you told him all that I have done to you!"—and for an instant a diabolic expression lowered upon the humpback's countenance: but it passed away as he resumed his conciliatory manner; and he said, "What is done cannot be recalled. We have this day made a compact which places us upon a different footing: the past is to be forgotten."

"Cheerfully so on my side," I exclaimed, "if you will as faithfully adhere to your own share of the bargain. As for your assurance of non-molestation in future, I repeat that I should be glad to have convincing proof that it is genuine. I shall judge you by your actions. But understand me well when I declare that I no longer fear you as I used to do; and if you henceforth attempt any violence, recollect that I can defend myself, while I shall not scruple to invoke the power of the law to shield me from your treacheries and to punish you for them. I am sorry to be compelled thus to speak: but the discourse has taken a turn which necessitates so much frankness on my part."

"Hush, Joseph!" said Mr. Lanover: and immediately afterwards the door opened.

The person who entered, was an elderly lady with a very benevolent countenance, which now expressed mournfulness mingled with agitation. There was none of the natural pride of the Mandeville family about her:—perhaps she was too remotely connected with it to have caught the infection of that aristocratic hauteur which (as I had learnt) characterized all its members, with the exception of the poor deceased Calanthe.

Mrs. Borthwick advanced towards me, and said, "I know not exactly how to address you, or how to receive you. You have done much mischief: and yet on the present occasion it is scarcely becoming to deal harshly with you, or to give utterance to reproaches. I have learnt who you are——"

"Madam," I said, "you address me in terms which are far more kind than otherwise; and I thank you. For whatever wrong I have inflicted—or rather, I should say, of which I have so unhappily been the cause—I humbly and earnestly entreat your forgiveness."

"It is accorded, young man," replied Mrs. Borthwick, the tears trickling down her cheeks. "You ask it with a visible contrition—and I have not the heart to refuse it."

Thus speaking, she gave me her hand; and Mr. Lanover hastened to say to her in a voice, which though subdued, nevertheless caught my ears, "The servants laid a place for him at our table—a change has occurred in his position—he is no longer a menial——"

"I have no pride, Mr. Lanover," answered Mrs. Borthwick.

"I know, my dear madam," he immediately rejoined, "that you are all condescension and affability. This young man, as I have before informed you, is my nephew; and I have a boon to entreat on his behalf. It is that he be permitted to remain here until after the double funeral."

Mrs. Borthwick reflected gravely for a few minutes; and then observed in a whisper to Lanover, but which I could not help overhearing, "What would the Earl say?"

"The mischief which is already done," answered the humpback, "cannot be rendered worse by this young man's presence."

"True!" said Mrs. Borthwick, mournfully; "my poor relative has gone to a world whither the cares and influences of this one do not extend. Yes, Mr. Wilmot," she went on to observe, now addressing herself to me, "you shall remain here. The wish to do so speaks well for your heart; and under circumstances it is a boon which ought not to be refused."

But little more conversation took place during the repast,—which, so far as I was concerned, was nothing more than a mere formality; and immediately it was over, Mrs. Borthwick requested Mr. Lanover to proceed to the nearest town and give directions for poor Calanthe's funeral. As he quitted the room he threw upon me a rapid look, evidently to remind me of the compact entered into between us; and with an equally significant regard I gave him to understand that it should be faithfully observed.

"Poor Calanthe loved you very much, Mr. Wilmot," said Mrs. Borthwick, when we were alone together. "She was constantly speaking of you——But tell me, what circumstances led you just now to enter the chapel?"

I explained to Mrs. Borthwick those incidents of the night with which the reader is already acquainted—how I had been visited in my room by Calanthe, and how she had addressed me in the plaintive language which I have recorded.

"That woman Margaret, who was specially taken to keep watch over her," said Mrs. Borthwick, "evidently suffered the poor creature to wander about at night while she herself slept. On several occasions since I have been here, has Calanthe risen in the middle of the night, apparelled herself, and roamed from room to room as if she were in search of some one whom she hoped to find. It was evidently in such a mood as this that she wandered during the past night. Her intellects, poor creature! had been failing for weeks past; and that was the reason I came hither to watch her. I sat up for two whole nights nursing your poor boy: I sat up two more nights to take care of Calanthe; and then I felt so indisposed I was forced to consign her to the care of Margaret. Oh! Calanthe had strange visions; and from the moment of her poor child's death until her own—an interval of four days—she appeared to live in a world of dreams, deeply sad, profoundly touching! When she saw that her child was no more, she burst not forth into a violent ebullition of grief: nor was it mere resignation into which she was lulled. Resignation, in its proper sense, arises from the reflections of a well-balanced mind; and her's at last had lost its equilibrium. It was therefore a visionary and dreamy state of feeling in the midst of which she existed from the moment of little Joseph'a death. She thought that he was happier in being taken from a world which she declared to be so cold——But I can tell you no more: my emotions overpower me!"

Mrs. Borthwick sobbed and wept; and I sobbed and wept likewise. I retired to my own chamber; and there I gave way to my affliction. Presently, when I grew calmer, I reflected on the particulars of my conversation with Mr. Lanover. I saw, as I have already stated, that he had strong motives of his own for wishing to seal my lips in respect to past occurrences; and I thought that it was not only because he feared being exposed through Mrs. Borthwick (if I should say anything to her against him) to the Earl of Mandeville, but also that he dreaded lest when I again met him in England I might hand him over to the grasp of justice, in which case transportation would inevitably prove his doom for his atrocious conduct in immuring me in the dungeon—in robbing me, or suffering me to be robbed, of my watch and purse when there—and in forcibly shipping me on board the emigrant-vessel. He might even fear it had come to my knowledge that he had meditated my assassination on the memorable night when I escaped from his house in Great Russell Street; and that all these circumstances taken together, would inspire me with the wish to punish him. However, the compact was made between us, as already described; and I was only too glad to give my adhesion to it.

Feeling profoundly dispirited — indeed truly miserable—I descended from my chamber, issued from the chateau, and rambled out into the adjacent country. Several hours were thus passed; and on my return to the mansion, I learnt that Mr. Lanover was inquiring for me, as he was about to take his departure. The footman conducted me up to the humpback's chamber,—where I found him hastening his preparations for his intended journey.

"You wish to see me?" I said; "and I also was desirous to say a few more words to you previous to your departure."

"First tell me, Joseph," replied Mr. Lanover, "what you have to say to me."

"You have requested me to bury the past in oblivion—and I have promised faithfully to keep silent in respect to your conduct towards me. But if you be really wishful that I should think better of you than I have hitherto been able to do, you must give me some positive information on subjects wherein I am naturally interested. In the first place, are you veritably and truly my uncle? If so, speak to me of my parents—tell me wherefore I was brought up in such complete ignorance of the family to which I belong. In the second place, explain to me wherefore you persecuted me——"

"You must not question me on these subjects, Joseph," interrupted Mr. Lanover. "Your uncle I assuredly am: but most solemnly and sacredly do I declare that you need henceforth dread no farther molestation at my hands."

"You refuse, therefore, the explanations which I seek from your lips?"

"I have really none to give, Joseph," responded Mr. Lanover: "or rather," he added, "it were better that you should not persist in demanding them."

The suspicion which often before had struck me—a suspicion to the effect that there was a stigma upon my birth—recurred vividly to my mind; and fearful of hearing a tale of a mother's sin and sorrow, I persevered not in the endeavour to elicit explanations from the humpback's lips.

"You wish to speak to me?" I said, after a few minutes' reflection.

"I wish to bid you good bye, Joseph," answered Mr. Lanover;—"and also I thought that perhaps you might have left some few things un-

said, as our conversation in the morning was interrupted by the entrance of Mrs. Borthwick."

"No—I had nothing more to communicate," was my response: and there was no doubt in my mind that Mr. Lanover hoped to lead me back again to discourse on the subject of Sir Matthew Heseltine's reconciliation to his daughter, and the views that he might have entertained in respect to the humpback himself. Perhaps, too, Lanover was desirous to ascertain on what ground I stood in respect to Annabel: but I had answered him in such a cold and at the same time resolute manner—my looks corresponding also with my mode of speech—that he was evidently discouraged to question me farther. On my part I was desirous to avoid all further interrogatory; and accordingly bidding him an abrupt farewell, and without proffering my hand, I issued from the room. Half-an-hour afterwards a post-chaise arrived to convey him away; and I had no doubt that the communications I had made him in the morning, were the cause of this somewhat abrupt departure, and that he was most anxious to learn the contents of the letters awaiting him at his own house in London.

I had retired to my chamber after separating from Lanover in the manner just described; and I did not leave it until from the window I had seen him enter the post-chaise which came to bear him off. I then left my room for the purpose of seeking Mrs. Borthwick, and making inquiries of her in respect to the funeral. While proceeding along the passage towards the landing, I observed that the door of the chamber which Lanover had occupied, stood open; and fragments of paper resembling letters were scattered upon the floor. At that instant an idea struck me. I recollected how the search amongst the papers which the swindler Dorchester had torn up or turned out of his desk at Oldham, had led to the discovery of the leaf from the register of Enfield parish church; and I said to myself, "Who knows but that Lanover, in his haste to depart, may have left undestroyed behind him some document of importance?"

I entered the room, and began to examine the papers which had caught my eye. Portions had evidently been consumed in the fire: others lay scattered in fragments near the hearth. I carefully scrutinized their contents—but found nothing of importance, until I took up the very last fragment,—when, on glancing at the writing, my eye encountered my own Christian name. It was a piece of a letter, written in a masculine hand, but as if the hand itself had trembled as it guided the pen. All that the scrap contained were these few lines:—

"very fortunate that you let me know whither you were going previous to your leaving London. I therefore lose not a moment in writing to enjoin that nothing more is to be done in respect to Joseph. Should accident throw him in your way, I charge you to leave him unmolested. When next I see you, I will give such explanations as will satisfy you that this resolution"

This was all: but little as it was, it was sufficient to engender the liveliest interest and keenest curiosity on my part. That the injunction thus emphatically given, alluded to me, I had not the slightest doubt; and it was no wonder therefore that Mr. Lanover should have been so ready to give me the assurance that he would in future cease from troubling and persecuting me: and the reader has seen that while proffering such assurance, he was cunning enough to make a bargain of a favourable character for himself. But who could have been the writer of the letter to which this scrap belonged? Again did I search amongst the other fragments of papers: but there was not one which in any way corresponded with it, or had the slightest reference thereto. The remainder of the letter had evidently been destroyed. This scrap however I resolved to preserve, in case accident should ever place me in the position of identifying the hand and thus discovering the writer.

A new channel was opened by this incident, for my reflections in respect to Lanover. It was now evident enough that he had not persecuted me for mere hatred's sake, nor from motives entirely personal on his own account. Indeed, judging from the contents of that scrap, he appeared only to have acted as the agent of another in all he had done towards me. But who was that other? who could he possibly be? What man lived there in the world who at one time had an object in seeking my death—at another time a motive in shipping me off to the nethermost parts of the earth? Now, too, I suddenly recollected that in the conversation of the morning, Mr. Lanover had asked me how long I intended to remain upon the Continent; and I had told him a couple of years. Methought at the moment that his hideous countenance had transiently expressed satisfaction at this response: but I had too many afflicting topics agitating in my brain at the time, to note that circumstance particularly. Now however, as I have just said, it flashed back to my recollection; and I said to myself, "It is evident that although the author of past persecutions has ordered his agent to desist from them in future, it is nevertheless a source of satisfaction to this agent to think that I shall be absent from England for some considerable period. And if a source of satisfaction to the agent,—then doubtless more so to his employer. But who is this employer?"

Again was I plunged into a maze of bewilderment and perplexity. I bethought myself of all the circumstances of my past life: I mentally reviewed the whole array of persons with whom I had ever come in contact. But it was impossible for my imagination to settle itself in conjecture upon any particular individual who could have an interest in seeking my life or desiring my exile from my native country. That there were strange mysteries connected with myself, was but too evident; and that they originated perhaps with my very birth, was a surmise which under all circumstances seemed only too reasonable. Would these mysteries be ever cleared up? Heaven alone could tell! And yet wherefore should I seek to penetrate them?—could the knowledge of them possibly prove pleasurable, or enhance my happiness? Alas! I feared not: for again recurred to me the suspicion that the lifting of the veil might only prove the revelation of a mother's shame and frailty.

Anxious to escape from these saddening thoughts—and having already enough upon my mind without seeking for additional reflections to trouble me—I hastened to the parlour to rejoin Mrs. Borthwick. It was now five o'clock in the

evening; and dinner was on the point of being served up. We sat down to table: my hostess was mournful and taciturn; and it was not until after the meal that I got her to speak in respect to the funeral. I then learnt that it was to take place at a neighbouring village—that Mr. Lanover had made all the arrangements with the undertaker previous to his departure—and that the service would be performed by an English Protestant minister residing at Boulogne, and who would come thence for the purpose, according to such notification of the day as the undertaker would give him.

"There are many strange coincidences," observed Mrs. Borthwick, "in all the occurrences which have recently taken place. To think that the Earl of Mandeville should have accidentally engaged your own uncle in an affair wherein you yourself had been so deeply concerned! And then too, that another accident should have led you hither——But tell me, Mr. Wilmot, something about this uncle of your's. He is a respectable man—is he not? although his appearance is so much against him. Of course I know that he was once connected with an eminent bank, and that at the time of its failure his conduct did not appear in a very good light. But that was very long ago; and since then, I believe, he has struggled on to obtain an honourable livelihood?"

"He is no doubt a very active man in everything he undertakes," was my response: and indeed I had good reason to speak thus of him—though my words might certainly have admitted a double interpretation.

"He is active, no doubt," said Mrs. Borthwick, putting the more favourable construction on the answer I had given her: then, after a few instants' reflection, she observed, "I will tell you why I questioned you: but of course I am speaking in confidence. The Earl of Mandeville has a very large family; and his expenses have of late years exceeded his income. In plain terms, he has contracted some rather serious liabilities,—the difficulty of which is enhanced by the conduct of his eldest son, who has likewise become involved in debt. Mr. Lanover is to be employed in negotiating with the creditors for a settlement. That activity which you have eulogized, added to his business-habits and his acquaintance with monetary matters, rendered him in Lord Mandeville's estimation the most fitting person to conduct the business of which I have spoken. Of course, Mr. Lanover is to be handsomely remunerated."

"Then rest satisfied, ma'am," I exclaimed, "he will do his best to earn so liberal a reward."

"I am glad that you have given me this assurance," said Mrs. Borthwick. "But the next time you see your uncle, you need not mention to him that I questioned you on the subject."

"It is by no means likely," I rejoined, "that I shall see him for a long, long time to come,—inasmuch as it is my purpose to remain upon the Continent for a couple of years."

I am now about to bring this chapter to a hasty conclusion. I remained for four days at the chateau, the funeral taking place on the fourth: for according to the laws of France, interments are precipitated, and are not left to the option of surviving relatives in respect to the interval they may be delayed, as they are in England. I followed the remains of the hapless Calanthe and of my poor boy to the grave hollowed for their reception in the picturesque little village cemetery a few miles distant from the chateau. I will pass over the anguish of heart which I experienced when beholding the two coffins lowered into that grave, and when hearing the dull heavy sound of the earth thrown in upon them. In the night following the ceremony I took leave of Mrs. Borthwick—walked as far as the high-road, followed by the footman, who carried my luggage—and obtaining a place in the mail-coach as it passed along, pursued my journey to Paris.

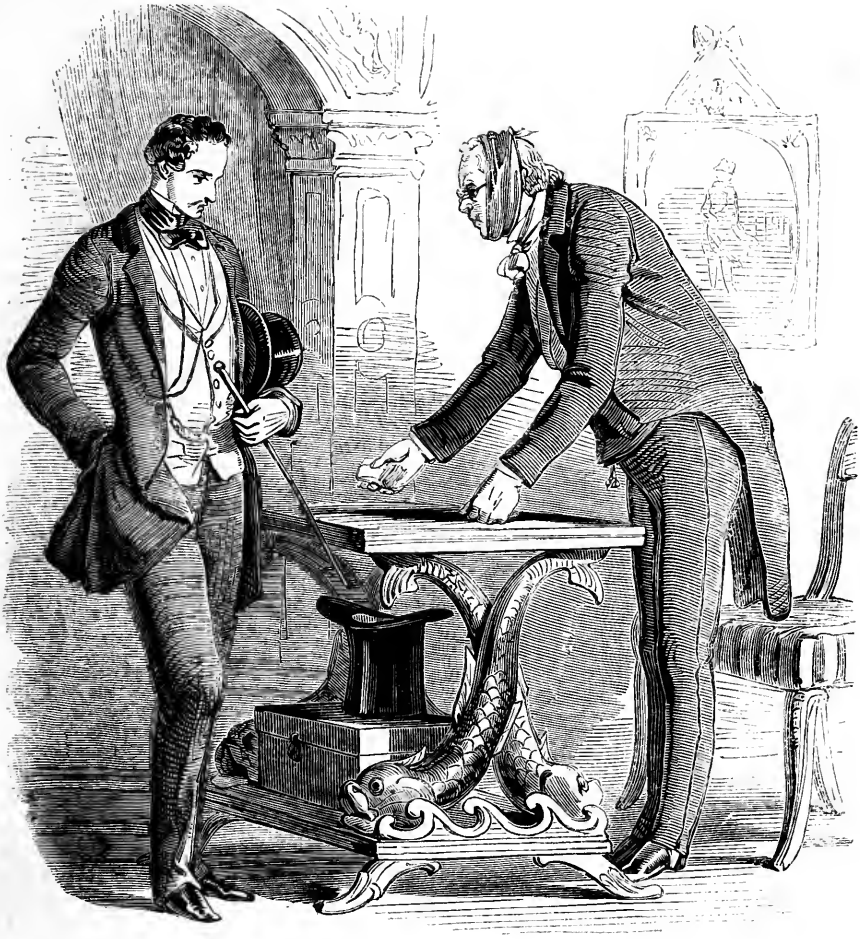
CHAPTER LXX.

PARIS.

On arriving in the French metropolis, I took up my quarters at Meurice's Hotel,—which, though a very fashionable and expensive one, I nevertheless selected for the reason that it was chiefly frequented by English visitors. The first week was spent in the inspection of all the public buildings; and I thus occupied myself from morning till night, in order to escape from those distressing thoughts which on account of recent occurrences were but too apt to arise in my mind. It is not however my intention to spin out my narrative by chronicling all the various impressions made upon me by the sights I beheld and the places I visited: suffice it to say that the favourable opinion I had previously formed of the French metropolis, by the descriptions gathered from books, was fully realized; and I did not wonder at the pride with which Frenchmen were wont to talk of their sovereign city.

It was my custom to dine every day at the *table d'hôte* of Meurice's Hotel; and I soon found that my society was courted by three or four dashing, gaily dressed English gentlemen, who drank a great deal of champagne, and talked very much of their town-mansions and country-seats in England—their studs of hunters and racers—their hounds—their aristocratic connexions—and so forth. It however occurred to me that they were not precisely what they wished to be taken for; and without being absolutely rude, I gave them no encouragement towards an intimacy. I refused to join their wine-parties in the evening: I also declined the invitations which they gave me to accompany them to the theatres, the cafés, and the places of amusement.

I noticed that this conduct on my part was one day observed by an English gentleman whom on this occasion I saw for the first time at the *table d'hôte*, and who, as I subsequently learnt, had only arrived at the hotel in the morning. He was a singular-looking person enough. He wore a brown wig, and large green spectacles, with glasses at the sides as well as in front; so that I concluded his eyes must be very weak. Every particle of hair in the shape of beard and whiskers was scrupulously shaven from his face: his complexion was very florid, and of so peculiar a tint that if it had been on the cheeks of a woman, I should unhesitatingly have pronounced it to be rouge. He dressed very smartly, and by his appearance



seemed to be in comfortable circumstances. He wore a blue coat with brass buttons—a figured silk waistcoat—and a coloured neckcloth, tied with scrupulous neatness. Black pantaloons and patent leather boots completed his apparel, which altogether gave him the air of an old beau, were it not for the odious green spectacles. He had several handsome rings upon his fingers, and a superb watch-chain festooning over his waistcoat. He would have been tall were it not for an extraordinary stoop, which made his head incline very much forward and compelled him to look downward. It was not easy to guess his age: it might not have exceeded fifty—it might have been many years more: for if his teeth were his own, they were remarkably good; and if they were false, they had the appearance of being perfectly natural. He ate his dinner with the air of one who was accustomed to good things, and who loved them likewise: he spoke but little; and when he did give utterance to an occasional remark, it was in a strange affected tone—lisping and hesitating—which enhanced my suspicion that he was an old beau, very vain and conceited, endeavouring to pass himself off as much younger than he really was, and fancying that he was a regular slayer of ladies' hearts.

I have said that this gentleman noticed the somewhat distant courtesy with which I refused the several invitations addressed to me by the group of elegantly dressed and fine-talking gentlemen who were seated at the same extremity of the table as myself. The green-spectacled individual was precisely opposite to me; and three or four times I saw him pause in the midst of his eating and drinking to listen to the answers I gave, until at length he bestowed a slight and only just perceptible nod of approval at the course I was adopting. When the dinner was over and the dessert had been disposed of, the company for the most

part rose from table. The gaily dressed gentlemen likewise took their departure, to visit some theatre; and as the door closed behind them, my green-spectacled friend beckoned me to come round and sit next to him.

"You acted very prudently," he said, when I had complied with his signalled invitation. "Those fellows are not what they seem. The proprietor of the hotel is perfectly aware of their real character, and has his eye on them: but of course until they lay themselves open to any direct imputation, he is compelled to tolerate them."

"And what are they?" I inquired.

"Swindlers and sharpers," responded the gentleman in the green spectacles; and now that he had ceased eating and drinking, he had a way of holding a delicate cambric handkerchief, strongly perfumed, up to his mouth, as if he had the toothache. "I generally visit Paris once a year," he continued, "and always put up at this hotel. The proprietor therefore knows me well; and in the course of conversation on my arrival this forenoon, he mentioned to me the presence in his establishment of those fellows of whom we have been talking. I saw plainly enough that they wanted to get you into their society; and if I had not observed that your own suspicions were aroused, I should have deemed it my duty to give you a hint or two upon the subject."

"I am exceedingly obliged to you," I answered: "but, as you surmise, I did think they were not exactly what they sought to represent themselves."

"You are very young to be here all by yourself," said my new acquaintance: "for that such is your position, I just now gleaned from some remarks which I heard those fellows whispering amongst themselves when you were looking another way. I suppose you are visiting Paris for your amusement?"

I explained that such was the case—adding that it was my purpose to sojourn on the Continent for a couple of years. Perceiving that I was dressed in black, and that I had mourning-studs in my shirt, the gentleman inquired, with much display of sympathy, whether I had recently lost some very near relative. Profound was the sigh which rose up to my lips as I thought of my poor deceased boy and the unfortunate Calanthe; and I said in a low voice, "Yes—I am in mourning for one who was dear to me."

My new acquaintance presently went on to inform me—but in a conversational and by no means an ostentatious manner—that he was a gentleman of independent property—a widower—without any near relations—and that he enjoyed himself by travelling from place to place, of which recreation he was exceedingly fond. He said that for some years past he had suffered very much from weakness of sight, and that one of his reasons for paying his present visit to Paris, was to consult an eminent oculist whose prescriptions invariably benefited him for a time. He added that from this affection of the eyes, as well as from inclination, he was very temperate in respect to the bottle, and that he followed the French custom of taking coffee soon after dinner and drinking no more wine for the rest of the evening. I happened to observe that I also was temperate, and that since I had been in Paris I took coffee after the same French custom. Mr. Dowton—for such my new acquaintance informed me was his name—now looked at his watch, which was an exceedingly handsome one; and finding that it was seven o'clock, he invited me up to his own room to partake of coffee with him. There was so much kindness in his manner that I somehow took a fancy to him, and accepted his invitation. He led me to his apartments, which consisted of a sitting-room and bed-chamber: coffee was ordered—and we sat down together by the side of a cheerful wood fire.

"I cannot help thinking, Mr. Wilmot," said my new friend, as we discussed our coffee, "upon the fortunate escape you have experienced in respect to those adventurers and swindlers who had evidently marked you as their victim. You cannot be too much upon your guard in Paris; and you should likewise remember that Parisian thieves and pickpockets are the most dexterous in the world. Never go out into the streets with much money about your person. I have paid dearly for my own experience. I recollect that the first time I ever came to Paris—which was about twelve years ago—I brought with me some fourteen or fifteen hundred pounds in English bank-notes, and went one morning to a money-changer's in the Palais Royal to obtain French notes and gold. The exchange was effected: I buttoned up my notes in the breast pocket of my coat, where I likewise placed my purse containing the gold. As I was returning to the hotel, I stopped to look in the window of a picture-shop, where I loitered for some few minutes. There were three or four other gazers in at the window; and one elegantly dressed Frenchman made some observation to me in respect to a very fine print representing King Louis Philippe and the whole of the Royal family. Speaking the French language well, I was enabled to answer the gentleman; and we conversed together for some four or five minutes. Then we parted,—he making me the politest bow; and I continued my way to the hotel. On reaching my room, I opened my trunk to deposit my money therein: when, on thrusting my hand into my coat-pocket, it slipped through the cloth, the fingers coming out against the buttons. My pocket-book and purse were gone: and there was a long slit, evidently made by a very sharp penknife or razor, down the cloth just over the pocket."

"Good heavens!" I exclaimed; "how could that have been done without your knowledge?"

"Ah, how indeed?" said Mr. Dowton, shaking his head gravely, as he held his cambric handkerchief up to his mouth. "It proves to you, my young friend, the wonderful expertness of the French swell mob, of which the exceedingly polite and well-dressed gentleman at the print-shop window was no doubt a member."

"I am very much obliged to you," I said, "for the information you have given me. The coincidence is singular: but I also have brought a sum of money to the amount of about fifteen hundred pounds in English bank-notes; and I asked one of the waiters this morning how I should get them changed into French money. He recommended me to a money-changer—I think he said in the Rue de la Paix, just the other side of the Place Vendome; and it was my intention to call there

to-morrow or next day, previous to my leaving Paris."

"It is indeed fortunate, then," said Mr. Dowton, "that I have put you upon your guard. Depend upon it you would have been robbed: for there are always a number of the Parisian swell mob lurking about in the neighbourhood of the banks and money-exchanges. Besides, my experience of Paris enables me to give you another piece of advice. All those money-exchangers are a set of cheating rascals; and if they get hold of an English novice, they are sure to tell him that the rate of exchange is at the moment considerably against English money;—so that for instance you might actually lose ten or fifteen pounds—perhaps twenty or twenty-five—on effecting the exchange for your fifteen hundred. I will tell you what I do. Indeed, I will see what I mean to do to-morrow in the same respect."

Thus speaking, Mr. Dowton drew forth his pocket-book; and examining the contents, he turned over a great number of notes, counting them in an audibly musing strain as he went on.

"I have got, you perceive, some eighteen hundred pounds in Bank of England notes in this pocket-book," he proceeded to say; "and so far from losing by them in making the exchange for French notes and gold, I mean to be a gainer to-morrow to the tune of at least twenty pounds. And why not? Who will thank me for letting the money-exchangers rob me? The difference will pay my hotel bill here; and however well off a man may be, there is no harm in a prudential economy. Adhere to that maxim, my young friend."

"Indeed, Mr. Dowton," I cried, "I shall be very much obliged to you if you will show me how to negotiate my own business, so that I may be a gainer on my fifteen hundred pounds to a proportionate extent that you will be on your eighteen hundred."

"With the utmost pleasure," responded my new acquaintance. "It is merely by changing the money at the Bank of France. Perhaps you will come to my apartments after breakfast to-morrow morning; and we will go together. By the bye, have you seen the Bank yet?"

"No," was my answer.

"Then it will afford you an excellent opportunity to view that establishment; and a small fee will obtain us admission to the bullion cellars, where they always have millions and millions in reserve."

I promised to keep the appointment; and bidding Mr. Dowton good evening I retired to my own chamber,—where I sat reading till bed-time.

On the following morning, at about ten o'clock, I took my pocket-book, containing the fifteen hundred pounds which I had received from Sir Matthew Heseltine—and repaired to Mr. Dowton's apartments. I found him ready to receive me: but on observing that he had his face tied round with a black silk kerchief, I at once conjectured that he was suffering severely from the toothache, and would not therefore go out. He however assured me that he had made up his mind to accompany me,—observing that he was a martyr to the toothache, and that he had been suffering all night with the most violent attack. I begged him to observe that the air was keen: but he was resolute—or as I thought, foolishly obstinate; and therefore my friendly remonstrances were uttered all in vain.

"I have been thinking, Mr. Wilmot," he said, "that inasmuch as the larger the sum the higher the rate of exchange given, if we were to join our respective amounts we should make all the better bargain. Here! you shall be treasurer. This bundle of notes consists exactly of eighteen hundred pounds: put them amongst your own—— How much do you say that you have got?"

"Precisely fifteen hundred," I answered.

"Well, the total is three thousand three hundred pounds: and we shall be gainers to an extent that is to be by no means despised."

I took out my pocket-book—opened it—and placed therein the roll of notes which Mr. Dowton had just given me. I naturally felt flattered by the confidence he reposed in me, at the same time that I was to a certain degree ashamed of myself, as the conviction smote me that if *he* had proposed to become the treasurer of our respective amounts, I should have hesitated to entrust mine to the keeping of a mere stranger. So I thought to myself that here was another lesson which I had just received from my new friend, though he might be in reality unconscious that he was affording it: namely, that while it behoved me to be upon my guard against the machinations of swindlers, I ought not to act upon a principle of universal distrust and show myself suspicious of every one whom accident threw in my way.

Having secured the pocket-book about my person, I accompanied Mr. Dowton from the hotel: we entered a hackney-coach—and he ordered the driver to take us to the Bank of France. While proceeding thither, we conversed on various and indifferent topics; and in about a quarter of an hour our destination was reached,—the coach stopping at the gateway of a large and lofty pile of buildings. We alighted; and Mr. Dowton led the way across a court-yard into an office, where there were only a couple of clerks to attend to half-a-dozen persons who were waiting to transact financial business. Mr. Dowton and I sat down; and he said to me, "When your turn comes, you will have to tell one of those clerks what your business is, and desire him——"

"But, my dear sir," I interrupted my new friend, "I am not sufficiently acquainted with the French language to transact this business."

"Dear me!" ejaculated Mr. Dowton in astonishment; "I thought you were proficient in the French tongue! But as you are not, I must manage the matter myself. Give me the bank-notes."

This I at once did, handing over to Mr. Dowton his own roll, which was tied round with a piece of thread, together with my own fifteen hundred pounds. He took them—advanced up to the counter—and having told them over, said something to one of the clerks. The clerk gave him a reply which appeared to convey some information not altogether anticipated by Mr. Dowton: for instead of proceeding with the business, he gathered up the bank-notes again—bowed an acknowledgment of the clerk's civility—and approaching me, said, "I find a little alteration has taken place in the mode of conducting the business since the last

time I was here: it is done in the inner room now. Wait a few minutes, and I will rejoin you."

With these words, Mr. Dowton turned away—and pushed open a pair of folding-doors at the extremity of the room. During the few moments that they thus remained open, I obtained a glimpse of a much larger office, in which a great number of clerks were attending at the counters; and there was a tremendous rattling of specie. The doors closed again; and Mr. Dowton disappeared from my view.

Five minutes elapsed—and he did not re-appear. Five minutes more: still no Mr. Dowton! A sensation of uneasiness was stealing upon me: I endeavoured to put it off—I reproached myself for my ungenerous misgivings in respect to a gentleman of substance and respectability who was doing me a kind action. But when a quarter of an hour had elapsed, I could no longer struggle against the uneasiness that was strengthening in my soul: still I did so far restrain myself as to tarry where I was instead of going in search of him. Perhaps he might be delayed by unforeseen circumstances? perhaps the throng of persons was so great that he had to stay patiently for his own turn?—and if so, what would he think of me when by proceeding in quest of him, I showed that I mistrusted him? Thus altogether nearly half-an-hour elapsed; and my misgivings grew perfectly torturing. All that I had ever read or heard of ingenious swindles came vividly back to my recollection: and amongst them one exploit which was within my own experience—namely, my dealings with Mr. Dorchester. It was strange how the sudden reminiscence of that man's roguery thrilled through me: it seemed like an inspiration; it all in a moment gave a quickening impulse to the various vague and undefined suspicions which had been floating in my mind. They took form and substance: they expanded into a shape: recollections of Mr. Dorchester seemed to identify themselves with associations in respect to Mr. Dowton. Ah! fool, dolt, idiot that I was!—a veil fell from my eyes; and I now saw clearly enough that if the brown wig and the spectacles were stripped off—if the stooping gait were abandoned, and the man drew himself up to his proper height, Mr. Dowton might very well be none other than my former swindling acquaintance Mr. Dorchester!

Half wild at the idea of being plundered of all I possessed, I unceremoniously burst through the folding-doors into the adjacent office: but every one was too much occupied there to notice my excitement. There was a great crowd all along the counter; and numerous clerks were weighing and ladling out immense quantities of five-franc pieces. I looked searchingly and with feverish anxiety all along that crowd,—clinging with a sort of desperation to the hope that I might yet be agreeably deceived, and that my eyes would presently single out Mr. Dowton from amidst the throng. But no—he was not there; and as I reached the further extremity of the room, I saw that there was another door. I burst it open, and found myself in the court-yard again. My looks plunging through the gateway, encountered not the hackney-coach: I rushed forth—it was nowhere to be seen. An immense tall porter, dressed in a sort of uniform, was standing at the gate; and perceiving how wild I looked, he accosted me. I just knew sufficient French to make him understand that I had been robbed: whereupon he at once bade me follow him, and conducted me up a very handsome staircase into a large well-furnished room, where a venerable old gentleman, with a red ribbon in his button-hole, was seated at a desk,—two clerks or secretaries being engaged in writing at an adjacent table. I soon discovered that this venerable gentleman was the Governor of the Bank; and he spoke English perfectly well. I communicated to him the particulars of my loss, and how the roguery had been achieved. He said that he would at once send off to Meurice's Hotel to inquire for the swindler, though it was by no means to be expected that he would be found there. One of the clerks was forthwith despatched; and the governor, bidding me be seated, left the room.

While he was absent, a short, thin, middle-aged gentleman—also with a riband in his button-hole, and with a very aristocratic look—entered the room. The remaining clerk rose and made a profound salutation; so that my impression was confirmed that this new-comer must be a man of consideration and importance. He sat himself down; and the clerk began telling him my story—as I could judge by a few French words which my comprehension caught, and also by the compassionating looks which the distinguished individual slowly bent upon me.

"I have just been listening to the narrative of your misfortune," said this personage, addressing me in very excellent English when the clerk had finished his recital. "There is some chance that you may get back your money, from the fact that so short a time has elapsed since the robbery, and that in a few hours the whole police of Paris will be put upon the alert."

"Oh, sir!" I exclaimed, "you know not how thankful I am for this assurance: for what on earth I should do if I failed to recover my money, I cannot tell!"

"Is it your all, my poor young man?" inquired the aristocratic stranger.

"It is my all, sir!" I responded: for the thought at once flashed to my mind that if the worst arrived, I should not dare write to Sir Matthew Heseltine and tell him a tale which when deliberately viewed from a distance, would appear of too extraordinary a character to gain speedy belief.

At this moment the Governor of the Bank returned to the apartment, accompanied by a gentleman who wore a tricoloured scarf round his waist. He, it appeared, was the commissary, or magistrate, of the district; and he had special cognizance of all offences committed in respect to the Bank. He sat down; and the governor kindly translated to him my deposition as I gave it. He then took his departure; and the governor gave me to understand that all possible measures would be forthwith adopted to lead to the apprehension of the plunderer. He farther informed me that the rogue, when addressing the clerk in the first office which we had entered, and where he left me to wait for him, had merely inquired where he was to pay in a sum of money to the private account of some individual who banked at the establish-

ment,—and he was instructed to enter the adjoining office. There could be no doubt that he was previously well aware such would be the response, and that he had purposely sought it to give a colour to his proceedings; so that the clerk himself might not think it odd he should leave me waiting while he passed into the adjacent office. All this was done evidently to gain time to enable him to effect his escape with the money of which he had plundered me.

"This young man informs me," said the aristocratic-looking individual to the governor—with whom, I should observe, he had cordially shaken hands; so that they were evidently on a most friendly footing together,—"that it is his all which he has lost. Really I am disposed to do something for him, if the worst should happen and his money is not recovered."

"It would only be consistent with your wonted generosity, my dear Duke," responded the governor; and they were both speaking in English, with the characteristic politeness of Frenchmen in the presence of one who imperfectly understood their own language.

"If you prove unfortunate enough to lose your money altogether," said the Duke—for such appeared to be his high rank—and he addressed me in a kind and affable manner,—"you will perhaps call upon me?"

Thus speaking, he gave me his card; and as I took it, I expressed my heartfelt thanks for the compassionate sympathy which my case had excited both with himself and the governor. I then bowed and left the room. As I issued forth, in a wretched state of mind, from the gateway, I observed a splendid equipage standing there. It was a yellow barouche, with armorial bearings emblazoned on the panels: a coachman in a splendid livery held the reins of the two handsome and elegantly caparisoned horses; and a *chasseur*—or lacquey wearing a sort of military uniform, with a cocked hat and feathers—stood near the door, ready to open it when the personage for whom the carriage was evidently waiting, should come forth from the Bank. That this was the Duke's equipage I had not the slightest doubt; and as I slowly and despondingly passed it by, I caught a glimpse of a lady of a grand beauty who was seated inside.

I retraced my way to Meurice's Hotel, where the circumstance of the robbery was already known,—not merely from the inquiries first made by the clerk whom the governor had despatched thither, but also from a visit which the commissary had himself paid immediately after he received my depositions. I need hardly add that the swindler had not returned to the hotel: but from the examination of his trunk it was discovered through the medium of letters found in it, that his name was not really Dowton, but Dorchester.

My suspicion was therefore realized; and a second time had I become the victim of that consummate impostor. But it was really no wonder that I was deceived by the appearance he had assumed. The stoop in the gait altered the general air of his figure most materially: but even if he had held himself upright, I should still have failed to penetrate his disguise, so fully artistic was it. That brown wig and those green spectacles were almost alone sufficient to conceal his identity: but when to these were added the circumstances of his whiskers shaven off, and of the florid complexion so well laid on that it seemed all but natural, I could scarcely blame myself any longer at the thought of how I was duped. There can be no doubt that on recognising me at the *table d'hôte* he had adopted the additional precaution of keeping his cambric handkerchief as much as possible up to his mouth, so that not even the lower part of his countenance should be too carefully studied by my gaze: and furthermore, for a similar reason, the scoundrel tied the black kerchief under his chin the more completely to disguise himself when bent upon swindling me. As for the notes which he had counted over and which he affected to trust to my charge, they were doubtless flash ones, which he had in readiness to be used as a means of cheating the first dupe whom he could contrive to ensnare. In a conversation with the proprietor of Meurice's Hotel, I learnt that he was totally unknown there previous to this visit,—though he might certainly have honoured the establishment with his presence on a former occasion when perhaps passing undisguised in the world.

My case excited so much sympathy in the hotel that the proprietor generously assured me I need not at all trouble myself about my bill, and that if I did not succeed in recovering my money—of which he seemed but little sanguine—I might remain free of all expense until I could otherwise provide for myself. This was a generosity which I did not however mean to abuse; and I assured the landlord that he might rely on eventual payment. A few days passed, and nothing was heard of Mr. Dorchester: so that I was at length compelled to renounce all hope of recovering my little fortune. I had in my purse a sum equivalent to about four pounds of English money—but much too small to liquidate the bill I had incurred. I therefore resolved to trespass no longer on the kindness of the proprietor, but to take some decisive step towards extricating myself from my present embarrassment.

I seriously deliberated whether I should write to Sir Matthew Heseltine, explain the whole truth, and refer him to the French authorities for the corroboration of my tale. But then I reflected that he had given me a certain sum of money to last me for two years, during which two years I was strictly enjoined to forbear from all communication with him. I understood the meaning of his conduct towards me full well. He had thrown me upon the world for a couple of years that at the end of the period he might judge by the condition in which I returned to him, of the use I had made of the opportunities placed within my reach. If on the very threshold of this probationary term I were to write and confess that, like an inexperienced idiot, I had suffered myself to be defrauded and cheated in so simple a manner, he would form but a mean opinion of my intelligence and capacity to fight the great battle of life. He might even disbelieve my tale altogether: he might fancy that I had gambled away my money, or else been robbed of it in improper society and amongst females of loose character — and that I was artfully concocting a history which should serve the various purposes of concealing my bad conduct, exciting sympathy, and eliciting fresh pecuniary supplies. Indeed, Sir Matthew was so singular

a man, that it was quite impossible to foresee how he would regard such a tale as mine; and, all things considered, I seriously asked myself whether it would be prudent to address him on the subject? No: I came to the conclusion that I must shift for myself—I must do the best I could to earn my own bread; and this at least I should be enabled to do with honour and credit during the two years of my exile from Heseltine Hall. *Then*—at the expiration of that period—however humble my condition, I should at all events be enabled to return with head erect, and with the consciousness that if I had been unfortunate, I had at least conducted myself in an upright and becoming manner.

The result of my deliberations was therefore the decision that I would *not* write to Sir Matthew Heseltine—but that I would avail myself of the sort of promise so generously held out by the great nobleman whom I had met at the Bank of France. The card bore the name of the Duke de Paulin; and his mansion was situated in one of the fashionable fauxbourgs, or suburbs of Paris. It was about noon when I bent my way thither, at the expiration of a week from the date of the robbery. An immense gateway opened into a spacious court-yard, around which the grand and lofty edifice was built in the form of a square. A porter—or *suisse*, as this functionary is denominated in the mansions of the great in France—was lounging in his lodge, reading a newspaper: he was attired in a splendid livery, which was however of such bright flaming colours that methought it was somewhat too gaudy to be consistent with the usual delicacy of French taste. I however subsequently discovered that the porters in palatial mansions in France, are generally dressed in this gorgeous style, and that their apparel is not made to correspond with the liveries of the other male-servants of the household. As I looked through the gateway, I beheld the tall handsome *chasseur* whom I had seen in attendance upon the ducal carriage at the Bank of France;—the red and white heron's plumes floating above his cocked hat, gave him the appearance of an English staff-officer. His uniform was blue, of a military style—the coat richly laced—gold stripes down the trousers—epaulettes upon the shoulders—and a sash, formed of stripes of red and gold alternately, round his waist, the ends having a massive fringe. This individual was conversing with three or four footmen, whose liveries consisted of light blue coats, with gold lace on the cuffs, collars, and skirts—superb aiguillettes—scarlet waistcoats, laced round the pockets—black plush breeches—and white stockings. All the windows looking upon the court-yard—and there could not have been less than fifty—had draperies, more or less rich, discernible through the windows; but those on the ground floor and the first storeys were far the more costly. In a word, the first glance which I flung at this palatial residence conveyed the impression of the immense wealth of its ducal proprietor, and of the sumptuous style in which he lived.

I showed to the porter the card which the Duke de Paulin had given me at the Bank of France; and he bade me write my name upon the back of it. This being done, he rang a hand-bell, which immediately summoned one of the footmen lounging in the court-yard. The lacquey took the card—desired me to follow him—and led the way across the yard, to a door at the opposite extremity: and here I may observe that each range of buildings had its own separate door and staircase,—all the doors standing open throughout the day-time.

I was conducted through a spacious hall, in which there were some exquisite specimens of statuary, and where two or three more footmen in the same livery that I have already described, were lounging. We ascended a wide and handsome marble staircase, the balustrades of which were of bronze with much gilding on the ornamental work. On reaching the landing of the first floor, I perceived that wide and lofty passages branched off. The floors were of polished oak, shining like glass; and along the walls, statues holding lamps were ranged. Entering one of these passages, the footman conducted me to an ante-chamber, where a table was spread with writing materials: and I subsequently learnt that applicants having favours to request of the Duke, were shown in here that they might reduce their demands to writing. The footman indicated a seat, and passed on into an adjoining room, closing the door behind him. In less than a minute he returned, bidding me follow: and I was now led through another apartment into a third, where I found the Duke lounging upon a sofa, with newspapers, letters, and books scattered around him. The apartment was not large, but was exquisitely furnished. All that the art of the upholsterer and the decorator could achieve—all the sumptuous appointments which lavished gold could procure—all that a refined taste could group together in such a space, in the form of pictures, alabaster statuettes, magnificent vases, ornaments, and curiosities of all kinds—were displayed to the eye in this room. It was luxuriously carpeted: a cheerful fire of logs blazed in the chimney; and so heavy were the draperies, that not a breath of the cold wintry air could penetrate through the casements. The Duke was enveloped in a superb morning gown, and had a purple velvet cap with a gold tassel upon his head. I have already stated that he was a short thin man: I may now add that his features were sharp—his eyes were small and dark—his hair was only just turning gray—he had a good set of teeth—and his age might be about fifty. Though small in stature, yet his air was dignified; and his manners had that blending of loftiness and affability which pre-eminently characterizes the French nobleman of the old school.

Such was the room, and such was the presence in which I found myself. The servant had retired; and I was alone with the Duke de Paulin. He pointed to a chair—and said, "I had not forgotten you. I expected that you would call: for I yesterday visited my friend the Governor of the Bank—and he informed me that the rogue who robbed you of your money has not been discovered."

"Such, my lord," I answered, "is indeed but too truly the case:"—and here I must observe that I knew not exactly whether to address the Duke as if I were speaking to an English nobleman; for I had read that since the Revolution of 1830 the title of "my lord" had been abolished; but I thought it better to be on the right side, and therefore I used the expression.

"I certainly felt interested in you," proceeded the Duke; "and I am so still. Have you no

friends nor relations in England to whom you wish to go?—for if such be your desire, my purse shall cheerfully be placed at your disposal."

"I have no friends nor relatives, my lord, to whom I can go. I am for the present entirely dependent on my own resources. Frankly speaking, the sum of fifteen hundred pounds was given to me that I might travel for two years; and during this interval I am unable to address myself to the same source for farther supplies."

"Excuse me for asking," said the Duke, "what is your position in life?"

"My story, my lord, is a somewhat romantic one—but far too long to permit me to think of wearying you with it."

"At least give me a few outlines," said the Duke de Paulin: "for I can assure you that I am not asking through mere idle curiosity."

"My parents I never knew," was my response. "I was educated at a good school; and when fifteen years of age, was cast upon the world friendless and unprovided for, to commence the struggle of life. Until very recently I gained my bread in a menial capacity: and I have about me testimonials which I have fortunately preserved, but which I little thought ten days back that I should ever require again."

"And this fifteen hundred pounds of which you became possessed and which you have lost?" said the Duke inquiringly.

"Circumstances, my lord, enabled me to render particular services to a gentleman of considerable wealth in England: and as a reward for those services, he sought to elevate me above my former position. He sent me abroad to travel and gain experience of the world during a period of two years—at the expiration of which time I am to return to him: but during this interval I must obtain my bread once more by mine own industry."

"The tale is a singular one," said the Duke, eying me, I fancied and feared, with some little mistrust: but if my conjecture were right, that expression speedily vanished from the Duke de Paulin's countenance: and he said, "I believe you: there is frankness in your speech—candour in your looks. I am disposed to do something for you—but I really know not what. To offer you a menial situation after you have evidently been recently raised above it——"

"My lord," I enthusiastically exclaimed, "if you will only take me into your household, the meanest and humblest situation will be cheerfully accepted by me. I only ask to eat the bread of industry; and I will serve your lordship with fidelity and gratitude. Here are the testimonials of which I spoke. Your lordship will perceive that I was in the household of an English nobleman, Lord Ravenshill——"

"Ah! Lord Ravenshill!" ejaculated the Duke: "I knew him well. Frequently when he visited Paris some years back, has he been a guest at my house. Did not some misfortunes befall him?"

"He was ruined, my lord—and left his native land to die in a foreign country."

"To be sure! I have heard that such was the case," said the Duke: and taking my testimonials, he read them attentively. Then he reflected for a few minutes; and at length spoke as follows:—"I will take you into my household, Joseph Wilmot: but if I cannot bring myself to assign you a very menial position, I cannot on the other hand provide you with a very lofty one. It happens at the moment that I am in want of a page for my own private apartments—to wear no livery, and to attend exclusively upon myself in a sort of confidential capacity. The salary shall be liberal; and you will take your meals with the upper-servants. If this situation suits your views, it is at your disposal."

"My lord, I accept it with the utmost gratitude," I exclaimed; "and I shall ever regard you as a generous benefactor who compassionated me in the hour of need."

"Then you can come when you like," said the Duke; "and I will give instructions that you be enrolled in the number of my household. But there is now something," continued the Duke, with a half-smile which nevertheless had a certain bitterness and irony in it, "which I must tell you. You have addressed me in the style which I was accustomed to hear previous to 1830, and to which my ancestors for centuries back were likewise accustomed. But you must know that all this is changed in France—whether for good or for evil I will not pass an opinion. We have no '*my lord*' or '*your lordship*' in the country now—unless it be for Princes of the blood or the Prelates of the Church—and I happen to be neither one nor the other. But still the French phrase of '*Monsieur le Duc*'* is a remnant, small though it be, of aristocratic distinction; and my order has so little of such distinction left that I am inclined to cling to whatsoever shred yet remains. When speaking to me therefore in English, you must not use the plain and simple word '*sir*:' but you must interpolate the French phrase which I have named. Perhaps you may think the matter one that scarcely merited so many words as I have lavished upon it: but still it was better that you should be made acquainted with the etiquette of my household."

I bowed—and was on the point of taking my leave, when the Duke suddenly recollecting something, exclaimed, "Ah! by the way, you may perhaps require funds to liquidate your hotel bill?"

I thanked the Duke—but explained to him how generously the proprietor of Meurice's had behaved towards me, and that I purposed to devote the first proceeds of my salary to the liquidation of my account.

"Better owe me the money than the proprietor of an hotel," said the Duke: and taking out his purse, he placed a handful of gold in my hand. I commenced suitable acknowledgments, which were indeed fraught with a heartfelt gratitude: but he cut them short, and bade me go and make my arrangements to take up my abode at his mansion.

I departed, infinitely rejoiced at having found such a friend and procured such a situation to relieve me from the embarrassment into which I was thrown by Dorchester's villany. Indeed, such was the relief my mind experienced, that I was even happy notwithstanding the destruction of all the hopes and prospects wherein I was so

* Literally translated, the phrase would be, "Mr. the Duke."

lately enabled to indulge in respect to the mode in which my two years' probation were to be passed. I again found myself reduced from independence to dependence: I had again descended from the grade of a gentleman to that of a menial. But, as I have had occasion to observe in former parts of my eventful narrative, youth is not the time when human beings are very much prone to abandon themselves up to despondency, much less to despair. I felt assured that I should be comfortable in the Duke de Paulin's establishment: I flattered myself that the two years would soon pass away—and that at the expiration of the term I should go back to Heseltine Hall with the certainty of being well received, and with no fear of disappointment in respect to my most fondly cherished hopes and aspirations.

CHAPTER LXXI.

THE DUKE AND DUCHESS DE PAULIN.

Having settled my bill at the hotel, I packed up my things and proceeded in a hackney-coach to the mansion of the Duke de Paulin, where I was at once received amongst the upper domestics with every testimonial of a kind welcome. Two or three of them, having lived in English families resident on the Continent, were more or less acquainted with my own native tongue: one—the lady's-maid of the Duchess—spoke it fluently—and thus I was not altogether at a loss for conversation in my new place. I determined however to study the French language as much as I could, and not only to practise it in discourse, but likewise to glean, through the medium of books during my leisure hours, a better insight into it than I already possessed.

It is scarcely possible to convey an idea of the sumptuous style in which the Duke de Paulin lived: but, as I soon learnt, he was one of the few exceedingly wealthy noblemen now remaining in France. The household of Lord Ravenshill, though splendid enough, was insignificant in comparison with that of my ducal master. The mansion itself was twice as large as Charlton Hall in Devonshire; and three times the number of domestics were maintained. Indeed the Duke and Duchess had, so to speak, two distinct establishments beneath the same roof. They had their own separate carriages and horses,—separate sets of domestics being allotted to each. They lived together beneath the same roof, but were much asunder. The Duke had his own private apartments: the Duchess had her's. Sometimes the Duke would have a dinner-party of noblemen and gentlemen in his rooms—the Duchess a ball, *soirée*, or concert in her own; and then in the evening the guests of the former would join those of the latter. I soon learnt that the Duke and Duchess were not upon very happy terms with each other: but the reasons did not immediately transpire to my knowledge. They had several children,—the eldest, who bore the title of Marquis, being about seventeen years of age, and the youngest four.

The Duchess was that splendidly handsome lady whom I had seen in the carriage at the Bank of France: for occasionally—though not often—she and her husband went out together. She was six-and-thirty years of age—above the medium height—and of that *embonpoint* which is perfectly consistent with symmetry. She was indeed superbly handsome. Her hair was of a dark brown; and she usually wore it clustering in ringlets—for it was of extraordinary luxuriance, and that style of *coiffure* displayed its richness to the best advantage. Her eyes were blue—large and clear—with an habitually pensive expression that sometimes made them seem languishing: her complexion was dazzlingly fair, with the slightest tinge of the rose upon the cheeks. Her forehead—white as alabaster, but yet with the animation which the marble cannot have—was high and open: her nose perfectly straight—the mouth small—the lips classically chiselled. She had a magnificent set of teeth, and a softly rounded chin. Nothing could exceed the elegant arching of the swan-like neck, nor the statuesque slope of the shoulders. The bust was gorgeously developed—the arms magnificently though robustly modelled, and of milky whiteness. Generally she had a certain air of languor about her, but not inconsistent with dignity, though very far from being sensuous or voluptuous. To gaze upon her countenance, it was impossible to suspect her capable of an impure thought—much less of a wrong action. She could be haughty when she chose; and nothing could exceed the queen-like dignity with which at times she drew herself up,—all the appearance of languor vanishing in a moment, and her aspect becoming that of Juno. Towards her servants, as I soon learnt and perceived, she was only coldly courteous,—seldom smiling, nor descending to the least familiarity even with her own handmaidens: yet she was not unkind—much less tyrannical: indeed she could scarcely be said to be severe. But she was evidently proud of her rank and position,—entertaining a high sense of all that was due to the wife of the Duke de Paulin. She herself, too, was descended from one of the most ancient families of the French aristocracy, and had brought an ample dowry when she accompanied the Duke to the altar. From what I heard, moreover, it was a love-match at the time, and very far from being one of those conventional marriages which often take place in high life.

Before I proceed with my narrative, it is necessary I should give some particulars in respect to the sleeping apartments of the Duke and Duchess de Paulin. I have already stated that the mansion was built in the form of a square, with a court-yard in the centre. What might be termed the back of the edifice—or the outer frontage of the inner line of building—looked upon a large garden joining the Champs Elysées, the Hyde Park of Paris. The great hall was in this line of building,—the immense marble staircase ascending not from the centre of the hall, but on one side of it. On entering the hall from the court-yard, large folding-doors met the eye at the farther extremity. These folding-doors communicated with a passage; and this passage connected two suites of apartments of a corresponding description. Each suite had an ante-chamber, a dressing-room, and a sleeping apartment, opening one into another. One suite was occupied by the Duke: the other by the Duchess.

Those apartments, be it recollected, were on the ground-floor, and looked upon the garden to which I have just alluded. The windows had Venetian shutters, which were always closed at night-time. The dining and breakfast rooms, the parlours, the library, the billiard and smoking rooms, were all on the ground-floor likewise: those drawing-rooms which were habitually used, and the state-saloons for grand festal occasions, as well as other parlours and retiring-rooms, were on the first floor; and the higher storeys of this range of building of which I am speaking, contained the bed-chambers of the upper domestics, including those who were specially attached to the persons of the Duke and Duchess. The reader must be careful to bear the above particulars in mind, as they will be necessary for the proper understanding of events to be hereafter related.

I soon found that my duties and avocations were trivial enough; and I should have concluded that the Duke de Paulin had taken me into his service entirely through charitable motives,—were it not that I found there were numerous dependants of the household whose situations seemed to be almost as much sinecures as my own; and it was therefore evident that for the sake of show and ostentation a train of dependants was kept numerically exceeding the actual requirements of the ducal household. I had plenty of time at my own disposal: I could absent myself for hours if I thought fit to do so; and though I rendered these opportunities available to make myself well acquainted with Paris, I nevertheless devoted far more of my leisure to the study of the French language,—so that in a few weeks' time my progress exceeded my most sanguine expectations.

The Duchess appeared to be very fond of company: there was scarcely an evening that she did not either go out to parties, or receive guests at home. The Duke accompanied her but seldom to entertainments elsewhere: but he usually made it a point of appearing at her own receptions. On

the evenings when he was not thus occupied, and had no company of his own to receive, he was invariably out,—sometimes, as I understood, till a late hour in the night.

I had been in my new place about two months—and it was now verging towards the end of February—when the Duke one morning said to me, as I was opening his letters and arranging his newspapers on the breakfast-table (for he and the Duchess took this meal separately, in their own private apartments),—"You must by this time begin to know Paris tolerably well?"

I answered in the affirmative; and the Duke, taking a sealed billet from his writing-desk, inquired whether I thought I could find my way to a certain street which he named, and which, as I afterwards found, was about two miles from the mansion. I was not previously acquainted with this particular street: but when I was informed of the neighbourhood in which it was, I assured the Duke that I should be enabled to find my way thither. He bade me take the note and wait for an answer: but as I was about to quit the apartment, he called me back, to bid me conceal the billet in my pocket, and not mention to any of my fellow-servants the fact of my being charged with this particular mission. I set off accordingly; and experienced little difficulty in inquiring my way: but it was not until I entered the street which was my destination, that I drew forth the note to refresh my memory as to the precise number of the house to which I was directed. I now observed that the letter was addressed to *Mademoiselle Ligny*. Now, as *Mademoiselle* represents "Miss" in English, I of course comprehended that it was to a single lady I was proceeding as a messenger; and the injunction of secrecy which I had received from the Duke, led me to draw an inference which the reader will agree with me was natural enough—namely, that it was some little intrigue in which my ducal master was engaged. I did not much like being employed in the affair: but there was no help for it: I was bound to deliver the note and await the answer.

Almost every house in Paris has its gate-porter; and on reaching the particular dwelling indicated by the address of the note, I inquired for Mademoiselle Ligny. The porter directed me to ascend to the second storey; and on reaching the door of the suite of apartments to which I thus mounted, my summons at the bell was responded to by an elderly and respectable-looking female servant. I gave her the note: she took it to an inner room; and almost immediately returned, desiring me to walk in. I was conducted into a plainly but decently furnished parlour,—where I found myself in the presence of a lady about thirty years of age, and who had evidently once been exceedingly beautiful: but the ravages of care and illness seemed to have changed her much. She was very pale—and her cheeks were sunken: her eyes, large and dark, were hollow and encircled by bluish rings. Her hair was also dark; and being gathered up negligently in a knot at the back of the head, left her entire face all the more exposed; so that its thinness and unnatural pallor were unrelieved by the curtaining veil which those luxuriant masses might have been made partially to form if allowed to depend in tresses or ringlets. Her figure had evidently been fine: but it had lost its willowy elasticity, its suppleness, and its rounded firmness of contours. She was somewhat negligently dressed at the moment I was introduced to her presence; and thus not even the artificial aids of the toilet concealed or compensated for the decay of charms which had once no doubt been considerable. Though not more than thirty, as I have already said—for I learnt her age afterward—she looked ten years older; although a beautiful set of teeth, faultlessly preserved, gave a younger air to a countenance otherwise waning and fading. I must add that notwithstanding I thus found Mademoiselle Ligny in *deshabillée*, there was a certain elegance about her which bespoke the well-bred woman; and I could readily fancy that before her beauty had succumbed beneath the wasting, blighting, withering influences of care and sickness—and when apparelled with all the graces of the toilet—her appearance must have been distinguished and attractive to no ordinary degree.

In an affable but mournful manner—and addressing me in English, which she spoke fluently—she desired me to be seated, while she wrote an answer to the note which I had brought: but scarcely had she begun to pen the response, when there was a violent ring at the outer door of the suite of apartments: so that she started nervously and looked as if seized with sudden affright.

"Is Mademoiselle Ligny at home?" inquired a female voice, thus addressing the elderly domestic who had answered that summons: and this voice was that of the Duchess de Paulin herself.

Mademoiselle Ligny recognised it also as well as I did; and springing up from her chair in the strongest excitement, she said, "There! there!"—at the same time opening the door of an inner room, clutching me by the arm, and pushing me into it. Scarcely had she closed this door upon me, when I heard the other door of the room which I had just left, thrown open.

I was in Mademoiselle Ligny's bed-chamber; and I felt that my position was by no means a pleasant one. The thought that there was indeed some improper intimacy between the Duke and Mademoiselle Ligny, recurred to me with additional force,—coupled with the idea that the Duchess had discovered the intrigue and that some terrific scene was about to take place. I feared that in her jealous rage the Duchess might possibly take it into her head to penetrate into the chamber where I now found myself—a proceeding which I thought she was likely enough to adopt if her husband should have happened to have gone out immediately after I left him, in which case she might search to see if he were there. I looked for another outlet, with the intention of beating a retreat, if possible: but there was none: the only door belonging to the chamber, was that by which I had just entered. An animated conversation had in the meantime at once commenced between the Duchess and Mademoiselle Ligny: but I was not sufficiently proficient in the French language to follow it with ease: nor indeed did I study to become an attentive listener; for I felt that it was a matter of extreme delicacy, into which a sense of honour forbade me deliberately to pry. I could not however help overhearing somewhat that was said; and I will endeavour to put it into its most connected form.

"You have been the destruction of my happiness!" said the Duchess violently.

"I call heaven to witness that your suspicions, Madame la Duchesse, go into an extreme which wrongs and insults me," answered Mademoiselle Ligny.

"I have a right to suspect everything!" exclaimed the Duchess. "The Duke was here last evening——"

Mademoiselle Ligny said something, which I did not catch.

"Espy his actions!" cried the Duchess, as if bitterly echoing the last words which had fallen from the other's lips. "But have I not a right——"

But here her own words became unintelligible to me; and for some minutes the discourse between them was carried on in a lower strain.

"Oh, Mademoiselle!" I now heard the Duchess say, "I pray and beseech you to take the only measure which will atone for the past. You never should have returned!"—and then the Duchess continued speaking in accents of earnest entreaty, sometimes appearing to descend to coaxing and cajolery, which produced the strangest effect when considered in contrast with the impassioned animation and almost violence she had at first displayed: but what the words were which she was now uttering, I did not catch.

"I will consider of it," said Mademoiselle Ligny: "I will do anything to prevent a recurrence of these dreadful scenes. Oh, Madame la Duchesse, why do you not believe me? Did I not faithfully discharge my duty towards your children?"

"My children!" ejaculated the Duchess vehemently: and I was startled—for the impression was that she shuddered as she spoke; so that I could almost picture to myself how she looked at the instant, though there was a wall between us. "What a frightfully immoral example!—their own father and their own governess!"

"Madame la Duchesse, this must end!" said Mademoiselle Ligny. "Have mercy upon me! If you do not believe me, at least pity me! See how I have suffered—how changed I am! I am but the spectre of my former self! I dare not look in the mirror: I recoil in horror from the reflex of my own image. Care and illness——"

"Ah! you speak of *your* sufferings," said the Duchess: "think of mine. None better than you know how I loved that man——"

"And you love him still, Madame la Duchesse," answered Mademoiselle Ligny, in a voice of deep mournfulness; "or you would not be thus jealous of him. I beseech you to leave me! Yes—leave me, madame—and all that you have required, shall be done! I will depart from my present residence this very day!"

"May I rely upon it?" inquired the Duchess, with eagerness in her tone: "Oh, may I rely upon you? Tell me that I may—and I will forgive you all the past—I will thank you—I will bless you!"

"Madame la Duchesse, it shall be done!" was Mademoiselle Ligny's firmly given answer.

There was a little more conversation, which I did not catch; and then the outer door of the adjoining room opened and shut. The next minute Mademoiselle Ligny—paler if possible than she had at first struck me to be—more ghastly than even her previous ghastliness was—appeared before me. She looked like one risen from the dead—an animated corpse,—only that instead of a dull glare of the eyes, they seemed to burn with a strange unnatural fire. That she had suffered much during her interview with the Duchess de Pauliu—was still suffering fearfully too—was painfully evident. I could not help pitying her, though it was scarcely possible to entertain an opinion otherwise than detrimental to her character.

She beckoned me into the adjacent room; and without speaking a word, she resumed her seat at her desk. Twice she laid down the pen and pressed her thin wan hand to her pallid brow: the tremendous effort which it cost her to complete the billet, was visible enough. She folded and sealed it—but wrote no address upon the envelope.

"You will have the kindness," she said, again addressing me in English, "to place this in the hand of the Duke de Paulin. He tells me in his own note that you are trustworthy and discreet; and that as he has some little claim upon your gratitude, you will prove worthy of his confidence. It would therefore be unnecessary—almost insulting for me to add another word upon the subject. But I have a favour to ask you—a boon which I beseech you to grant unto the most wretched creature upon the face of this earth! It is that you will preserve an inviolable silence with regard to whatsoever you may have overheard between the Duchess and myself. Forget, if you can, that such a scene ever took place. Above all things, breathe not a syllable thereof to the Duke himself: drop not the slightest allusion to the circumstance that his wife came hither. He will not suspect it—he will not question you on the point: it is for you, by the calmness of your looks, to avoid giving him any reason to suppose that aught unusual or extraordinary occurred. Will you promise me all this?"

"I can readily do so," was my response, "inasmuch as the whole affair concerns me not—and I should be the last to make mischief between husband and wife."

"Ah, you possess the most generous feelings!" cried Mademoiselle Ligny, with a sort of enthusiasm which seemed almost unnatural:—not that it was forced or affected, but it struck me as being the evidence of an intellect warped or impaired by acute sufferings. "Oh, let me appeal to those generous feelings of your's, that you will not judge me harshly! If you overheard—as indeed you must have done—all, or the greater portion, of what took place between the Duchess and myself——"

"Indeed, mademoiselle," I interrupted her, "I heard very little: and the little which my ears *did* thus catch, was unsought by me."

"But you heard perchance," she continued, in that same strain of unnatural exaltation of voice, looks, and feelings, "how I rebutted the dreadful extreme to which her suspicions went? Judge me not therefore harshly!—believe me not guilty of the very worst——Oh no, believe me not completely lost and depraved! I am not, as heaven is my witness!"

This scene was a very painful one for me: I felt that Mademoiselle Ligny was constituting me, as it were, a tribunal of appeal against the accusations of the Duchess—and those accusations levelled on the Duke's account. The Frenchwoman was

quick and intelligent: she saw that I liked not to be thus addressed—she appeared in an instant to comprehend that I was being placed in a false position; and as all her feelings suddenly subsided into a cold deep calm—but a calm as unnatural as their previous excitement was—she said, "I am wrong to detain you. Go, sir—and accept my thanks for the silence and secrecy which I am confident you will preserve in respect to everything that has happened."

I bowed and issued from the presence of Mademoiselle Ligny. As I retraced my way towards the ducal mansion, I thought to myself that it was scarcely generous and just of the Duke to avail himself of the debt of gratitude I owed him, for the purpose of employing me as a messenger to one whom I could scarcely consider in any other light than his mistress. Certainly he had a right to send me on an errand; and equally certain was it that he could not possibly have foreseen, and would perhaps be very far from suspecting, that so much should have come to my knowledge and in such a way. I sincerely hoped that Mademoiselle Ligny would fulfil the promise she had given to the Duchess, and betake herself elsewhere out of the Duke's reach and knowledge—so that I might be spared the unpleasant task of again acting as their go-between.

On reaching the mansion, I found that the Duke had not stirred out while I was away; and that he was awaiting my return with an anxiety which he could scarcely conceal.

"I am much obliged to you, Joseph," he said, as he took the note which I handed him; "and I beseech you not to breathe a syllable of this mission of your's to any one within these walls."

In the course of that same day I was strolling in the garden, when Amelie—the Duchess's principal lady's-maid—likewise came out to walk; for the weather was exceedingly fine, with the genial warmth of an early spring. She was a young woman of about two-and-twenty—by no means good-looking in the face, but with a very elegant figure, and a neat foot and ankle—of which however she was not vain, inasmuch as perfection in these points is not the exception, but the rule amongst all grades and orders of Frenchwomen. She dressed with exquisite taste—was naturally of a vivacious and lively disposition—very good-natured—simple-minded and ingenuous—and of unimpeachable reputation. In the presence of the Duchess she was sedate, quiet, and taciturn: but in the upper servants' hall, her merry laugh was almost incessantly ringing, and her artless gaiety seemed to diffuse a general spirit of cheerfulness. She was fond of a gossip, but by no means given to ill-natured scandal; she might go to the length of talking on family topics which were known to others—but she would not mischievously betray secrets, much less wickedly exaggerate matters that had come within the scope of her cognizance. She was one of the few domestics of the household who spoke English: and it was her delight to have a chat with me in my own native tongue.

"So you are enjoying this beautiful day?" she said, as we met in the garden. "In a short time we shall have flowers; and then you shall help me to gather a nosegay for the boudoir of the Duchess. By the bye, how get you on with your French? I was thinking of you this morning, when I found amongst my books a little Guide to the English language which Mademoiselle Ligny—that was the former governess, you know—presented to me a short time before she left; and it struck me that if you would give me a few lessons in your own tongue, I would help you to a better understanding of our's."

"I flatter myself that I am making considerable progress with my French——"

"Oh, yes!" Amelie laughingly exclaimed. "I heard you talking away yesterday to Justin"—thus alluding to the Duke's principal valet: "and I really must compliment you on your quickness in surmounting the difficulty of our idioms."

"Thanks for your kind opinion," I said: and then in an apparently indifferent, or rather simply conversational manner, I asked, "Was it this Mademoiselle Ligny that you have just mentioned, who taught you to speak English as well as you do?"

"Oh, no! I learnt it in an English family that was residing in Paris: but Mademoiselle Ligny was very fond of talking to me in your native tongue. She spoke it fluently. If you knew her, and heard her speak English, I am sure you would scarcely perceive any foreign accent at all. Ah! she was a very nice, amiable, good creature; and all the servants liked her——much better, between you and me, than we do Madame Colbert, the present governess."

"And how was it that Mademoiselle Ligny came to leave?" I inquired, still in that same half-careless manner, as if I had no ulterior object in putting the question.

"If it were any secret I should not betray it, Joseph," responded the simple-minded and artless Amelie: "but as it is tolerably well known to all the servants, of course there is no reason why I should keep silent in respect to you. Well, the truth is"—and here she glanced around to assure herself that no one was nigh to overhear our conversation,—"the truth is, Joseph, Madame la Duchesse was jealous of Mademoiselle Ligny."

"Was Miss Ligny so very beautiful as to inspire jealousy?"

"Oh! at one time she was a beautiful creature," responded Amelie,—"beautiful indeed! She was altogether some six or seven years in the family: I have been here four years—and as she only left seven or eight months ago, you see that I must have known her pretty well. Latterly she fell off very much in her good looks: she became pale and careworn; and I have heard, too, that since she left, she has undergone a long and painful illness which has altered her dreadfully. The under lady's-maid, Florine—who, by the bye, is a greater favourite with the Duchess than I am, and the only one to whom she ever unbends at all——"

"Well, what were you going to tell me of Florine?" I inquired.

"Only that she happened to meet Mademoiselle Ligny the other day; and she told me that she was never so much astonished and shocked in her life at the change which illness and sorrow have worked in her. Florine, you know, frequently goes out: she does all that sort of shopping for the toilet of the Duchess which the Duchess does not choose to do for herself——"

"And you seem to be the least thing jealous of Florine," I observed, laughingly.

"Jealous indeed?—not I!" ejaculated Amelie. "What does it matter to me that she should be more in the confidence of Madame la Duchesse than I am, so long as I give satisfaction in my own way? You do not think, Joseph, that I am jealous of Florine," added Amelie, with a merry laugh thrilling from her own lips, "because she is going to be married to Adolphe, the Duchess's principal valet? I wish Florine joy of her Adolphe!—a saturnine, gloomy-looking fellow, who always has his eyes bent downward and is continually going about no one knows why or for what. No, no! let Florine keep her Adolphe: for my part, I do not envy her the prospect of such a husband. But we were talking just now of studying French and English. In the course of the evening I will set you a lesson," continued Amelie in her gay merry style; "and it shall be a tolerably long one too."

"Very good," I answered, entering into the strain of her happy humour: "rest assured I will execute it, although I have no doubt you will be mischievous enough to find me the hardest you possibly can."

"Stop here for a few moments!" cried the laughing Amelie; "and I will go and see if I can lay my hand upon it now."

With these words she tripped lightly away, re-entering the mansion. While I was awaiting her return, I reflected on certain things she had told me. In the discourse between the Duchess and Mademoiselle Ligny, unmistakable mention had been made of spies employed by the Duchess to watch the Duke's actions; and I now more than half suspected that these spies were the very Adolphe and Florine of whom Amelie had been speaking. The ingenuous and frank-hearted Amelie herself, however, suspected nothing of the sort; and it was not therefore for me to put such an idea into her head.

In a few minutes she returned,—bringing with her a roll of manuscripts consisting of several sheets of writing-paper, apparently containing a tale, from the hasty glance which I immediately threw over the first page. It was of course written in French, and in a neat female hand—much too good, methought, to be Amelie's own penmanship.

"Now, put it into your pocket at once," she said, with an arch look and a merry laugh; "or else if any one observes us from the windows, it will be thought I am giving you a love-letter—which I am sure I am not. That is your task, Mr. Joseph; and I expect that some time to-morrow you will show me the translation, accomplished in the most accurate manner. Then I shall be able to compare the French original with your English version, and thus receive a lesson myself in the latter tongue. But you must be sure to give me back this manuscript to-morrow, whether you have finished your translation or not."

"Indeed!" I exclaimed, smiling; "you are dreadfully afraid to trust me with the manuscript. Pray is it your own?—perhaps a love-tale which you have composed, and which, with the modesty of incipient genius, you are fearful I shall display to the eyes of others?"

"Now do not ask me any questions about it," responded Amelie, in her wonted joyous tone: "but acquit yourself of your task—keep the manuscript quite clean—be sure you do not lose it—and give it me back to-morrow. Of course you will not show it to any one, because it is only a little piece of fun between you and me. Ah! I hear the sounds of the carriage entering the court-yard! It is Madame la Duchesse who has returned from Court—for the Queen held a reception to-day; and I must be off!"

With these words the gay and good-tempered Amelie again tripped lightly away; and I ascended to my own chamber, somewhat curious to peruse the manuscript which she had entrusted to me. I found, as I had surmised, that it contained a tale: I read it—and it struck me as being a strange, wild, and improbable one, though amusing enough,—the chief interest turning upon a swindle of so extraordinary a character as to eclipse a thousand-fold the ingenious devices by which Mr. Dorchester had on two occasions plundered me. It was not a very long one; and in a couple of hours I finished the translation. In the evening, before retiring to rest, I found an opportunity to consign both the original manuscript and my translation into the hands of Amelie: but no farther discourse took place between us on the occasion.

On the following morning the Duchess de Paulin,—accompanied by Madame Colbert the governess, and the young children—attended, too, by the saturnine valet Adolphe, as well as by Amelie and Florine,—took her departure on a fortnight's visit to her father, who was a Marshal in the French army and had a country-seat at a short distance from Paris.

CHAPTER LXXII.

THE TALE.

About ten days elapsed without any occurrence at all worthy of record; and one morning, as I was arranging the Duke's letters and papers on his breakfast-table, according to my wont, he said to me in a good-humoured manner, "Well, you see, Joseph, nothing has ever transpired relative to that Mr. Dorchester who robbed you so ingeniously."

"Nothing, Monsieur le Duc," I answered, with a sigh, as I thought of my fifteen hundred pounds and of the menial condition to which the loss had reduced me.

"Setting aside the annoyance of the thing," observed the Duke, "it was really one of the cleverest species of roguery I ever heard of in all my life. It transcends anything in the shape of tale or romance."

"Not exactly so, with due deference, Monsieur le Duc," I said; "for I have fallen in with the narrative of an exploit which wonderfully excels it."

"Indeed!" said the Duke, carelessly. "Was it in a newspaper?—for, after all, some of our Parisian swindlers are clever and cunning enough, as the police journals almost daily demonstrate."

"No, Monsieur le Duc—it was not in a newspaper, nor yet in any of those French prints which are specially devoted to reports of law and police cases. It was a mere tale or fiction—for of course

it cannot be an actual reality; and the manuscript containing it was placed in my hands."

"It appears to have made some impression upon you," said the Duke de Paulin; "and you are piquing my curiosity."

"I translated it into English," was my response, "and therefore it dwells almost word for word in my memory."

"And is it so exceedingly strange and interesting?" inquired the nobleman.

"Interesting as a mere romance, Monsieur le Duc," I responded; "and therefore to be regarded as a fanciful and clever creation of the brain—with this additional merit, that it invests the wildness of fiction with a certain air of probability. True, the thing itself might possibly have happened—in which case it would certainly be the most consummate piece of refined villany on record."

"You excite my curiosity more and more," said the Duke: then looking at his watch, he added, "I have a spare half-hour, and you shall tell me this tale."

"With pleasure, Monsieur le Duc," I answered: and as I stood at a little distance, with my hand on the back of a chair, I commenced the narrative in the following manner:—

"The tale sets out by describing that about eighteen or nineteen years ago, a French nobleman, who was designated only as the Marquis de ———, was engaged to be married to a wealthy and beautiful heiress, whose name is not given at all. The Marquis belonged to one of the oldest, proudest, and richest families in France——"

"Ah, a veritable romance!" said the Duke, interrupting me with a laugh. "Sit down on that chair, Joseph: you will be more at your ease. And now proceed with your tale."

"Well, Monsieur le Duc, as I was saying," I continued, "the narrative sets forth that this Marquis de ———, though the heir to great wealth, had nevertheless been so wild and profligate, and had gambled to such an extent, that he had contracted immense debts, the existence of which he dared not mention to his father, who had already settled his liabilities on a former occasion. He trembled lest his difficulties should transpire—in which case the contemplated match would be broken off by the relatives of the wealthy heiress whom he was engaged to espouse. It must be observed that his father had a short time previously given him a separate establishment where he was to dwell with his bride, and had presented him with the sum of ten thousand pounds* in ready money, that he might have a good account at his banker's. For it appears that the Marquis had faithfully promised his father he would turn over a new leaf and become as steady as he was previously extravagant: his father, therefore—to give him a renewed proof of confidence, and to encourage him by such confidence to maintain the path of reformation—dealt thus liberally with the Marquis. Ah! I forgot to observe——"

"Oh! but you must forget nothing," said the Duke de Paulin. "The tale is evidently so interesting, that I must have all its details. What was it you had forgotten to observe?"

"Simply this, Monsieur le Duc—that the irregularities of the Marquis had been so well concealed, they had not transpired to the knowledge of the heiress whom he courted, nor to that of any of her relatives; and therefore his father had been all the more ready to liquidate his debts in the first instance and hush up the matter, in the hope that marriage would ensure his son's promised steadiness. But the Marquis had proved faithless to the solemn pledges given to his father. Again had he gambled—again had he contracted debts,—borrowing money of usurers on post-obit bonds; and what was worse still, the whole of the ten thousand pounds paid in to his account at the banker's had melted away in profligacies and extravagances."

"So runs the tale—eh?" again interrupted the Duke. "But where, in heaven's name, did you pick up the manuscript of this romance?"

"I do not think, Monsieur le Duc, that I am exactly at liberty to tell," was my response. "And yet I know not that there is any great harm—— But however, permit me first of all to finish the story," I added, thinking that the other matter might remain as a subject for after-reflection.

"Well, well," said the Duke: "proceed. What happened next?"

"It wanted three months to the day named for the nuptials," I continued; "and the beautiful heiress was to pass that interval with her own relatives at their country-seat ere separating from them to go to another home. The Marquis was bewildered how to act in the midst of his difficulties: he was driven almost to despair. He felt that to apply to his father would be worse than useless; for his father was a man of the strictest integrity; and though he had overlooked his son's first faults, he would not now be guilty of so heartless and dishonourable an action as to allow a beautiful and innocent as well as confiding young lady to be sacrificed to an individual who was proving himself utterly incorrigible and inveterate in his profligacies. Besides, the Marquis had given post-obit bonds—thereby speculating on his father's death; and this was a proceeding which he well knew would fearfully incense his parent against him, if it came to his knowledge. No wonder, therefore, that the Marquis was distracted; and in order to divert his mind, if possible, from his harrowing reflections—as well as to get away from those Parisian temptations which were engulfing him in irretrievable ruin—he resolved to set out upon a tour for a short period. He had never been upon the Rhine; and he thought this would be the most agreeable trip, as it was in the summer season. Accordingly he set off; and when on board a steam-vessel somewhere between Dusseldorf and Cologne——"

"On my soul, this tale of your's is minutely circumstantial!" ejaculated the Duke de Paulin.

"If I am wearying you, Monsieur le Duc——"

"Not at all! I like it much," he exclaimed, with a laugh. "Proceed."

"Well, Monsieur le Duc," I continued, "as the Marquis de —— was on board this steamer between Dusseldorf and Cologne, he beheld a picturesque ruin of a castle on the right bank of the

* Throughout this narrative which I am now detailing, I shall speak of the various sums of money which have to be mentioned, according to the English currency; as it will be more convenient for the generality of my readers.

river. He made inquiries concerning it; and the captain of the vessel, or some one else on board, informed him that the castle was once the seat of some powerful and wealthy family to which the title of Count was annexed. The extravagances of successive owners of the castle and domain had led to eventual ruin: the estate had dwindled down to a few poor acres—the castle had fallen into decay—and the race had become extinct. But still the title of Count attached itself to the ownership of that ruin and of the few acres which were left. The property had fallen to the Crown on the extinction of the family long years back; and being so small, was perhaps neither considered worth the trouble of caring for, nor of bestowal on any person attached to the Court. Thus whole generations passed away, and the land as well as the ruined castle seemed to be forgotten by all save those who dwelt in the neighbourhood. At length, when the Prussian treasury was drained by the long wars which terminated only on the field of Waterloo, all possible expedients were resorted to for the purpose of replenishing it; and an inventory was drawn up of all lands which at any time, and in any district, had demised to the Crown of Prussia. A decree was promulgated to the effect that these lands should all be disposed of—some by public auction, others by private contract, according to circumstances: and in this latter category was the patch, with the ruin, of which I have been speaking. Some years had elapsed since the decree was published; and as yet no one had seemed to care about becoming proprietor of that old ruin and the few acres attached to it. These were the particulars, and this was the substance of the information which the Marquis de —— learnt on board the steamer; and when the vessel reached Cologne, there he stopped. Instituting inquiries, he found that the ruin and the remnant of the estate which had so much interested him, were to be sold by a notary, or man of business, at Dusseldorf. So away sped the Marquis de —— to Dusseldorf; and he introduced himself to the old notary, whom he found to be a simple-minded man in some respects, but very keen and cunning in making money for his own special benefit."

"An extraordinary compound for the character of a lawyer!" interjected the Duke de Paulin, with another laugh: so that I flattered myself he was much amused with the tale—which indeed appeared to me more absurd and far-fetched than ever, now that I was thus reciting it. "Simple-mindedness and avarice!—two rather discordant elements to go together!"—and the Duke laughed again.

"Be kind enough to observe, Monsieur le Duc," I said, "that the tale is not mine own; and therefore I am not responsible for its incongruities or defects."

"Certainly not, Joseph. But proceed. What did your Marquis do with this old notary at Dusseldorf?"

"I am about to explain, Monsieur le Duc. The Marquis de —— said to the notary, 'Such-and-such a ruin, with so many acres of ground, is to be sold, and you have the power of sale?'—The notary answered that it was so, and exhibited a plan of the property; when it appeared that the land had for upwards of a hundred years been left totally uncultivated and was now comparatively worthless.—'The only reason,' said the notary, 'why it is hoped to sell the property at all, if *property* it can be denominated, is because it confers the title of Count, and accident may throw in my way some wealthy plebeian who for the sum of two hundred pounds would willingly purchase a patent of nobility.'—'I am willing to make the purchase,' said the Marquis.—The notary surveyed him with astonishment; and then exclaimed, 'Why, you are already a Marquis! what can you want with the inferior title of Count?'—'Because,' responded the Marquis, who, anticipating certain questions, had all his answers ready conned and prepared, 'it is one thing to be a French nobleman, and it is another thing to be a nobleman of Prussia.'—'True!' said the notary; 'and the distinction is, when I think of it, cheaply bought for two hundred pounds.'—'Ah, but here stands the difficulty!' cried the nobleman: 'I should very much like to be able to sign myself Marquis of France and Count of Prussia; but it would be a beggarly Countship indeed to have nothing more to show for it than the paltry title-deed of an estate purchased for two hundred pounds.'—'That is also true,' said the notary.—The Marquis pretended to reflect; and he suddenly exclaimed, 'I tell you how the difficulty could be got over. You can make out the title-deed as if it represented a property worth twenty thousand pounds; and of course I should present you with a hundred pound note for your kindness, in addition to your regular costs.'—The notary pricked up his ears at this proposition; but as a thought struck him his countenance fell; and he said, 'You forget perhaps that the stamp for a title-deed carrying on the face of it twenty thousand pounds as the purchase-money of the estate, will be enormous in comparison with the stamp for the mere two hundred.'—'Never mind the difference!' said the Marquis, who had not quitted Paris quite empty-handed but had still some few hundreds of pounds at his disposal: 'let us consider it a bargain; do you draw up the deed, and the reward shall be your's. Your own clerks can attest it; and a few pounds will silence their tongues. In a word, the thing can be kept as quiet as possible; and as I do not require the deed for display in Prussia, but merely as a means of parading in Paris my additional style and title, the real truth of the transaction need never transpire in your own town or neighbourhood.'—Thus spoke the Marquis; and the notary gave his assent."

"But do tell me frankly," exclaimed the Duke de Paulin, "how the manuscript of this strange tale fell into your hands. Come, Joseph—why do you hesitate? Answer my question! I should like to read it for myself."

"Is it possible, Monsieur le Duc," I said, "that the absurd fiction does really so much interest you? But up to this point there is little or nothing to rivet attention. I am now coming to the main incident of the story."

"Well, well, then—proceed!" said the Duke: and he sipped his coffee as I continued in the following manner:—

"The deed was drawn up; the Marquis paid the purchase-money, the bill of costs, and the promised rewards to the man of business and his clerks. He then hastened away and lost no time in getting back to Paris, from which he had not

been very long absent. He was rejoiced on finding that the secret of his difficulties had not transpired; and he now saw his way clearly to emancipate himself therefrom. He put the deed in his pocket, and set off to the abode of a wealthy money-lender, with whom he had no previous transactions. To this individual he represented that he was in the immediate want of seventeen or eighteen thousand pounds to meet an emergency which had suddenly arisen; and he affected to blame himself for having parted with upwards of twenty thousand only ten days back, whereas he should have kept that amount to meet the present contingency. The money-lender inquired on what security the Marquis proposed to borrow the loan: whereupon the nobleman produced the title-deed of his newly acquired estate on the banks of the Rhine. The money-lender was satisfied: the rank, position, and connexions of the Marquis rendered it completely unnecessary in his estimation to make any additional inquiries. Besides, there was a title-deed regularly drawn up—having the proper stamp in reference to the amount—attested by witnesses—and setting forth that the sum of twenty thousand pounds had been paid as the purchase-money for that castle and estate situated between Dusseldorf and Cologne, in such-and-such a district, and the domain conferring upon its possessor the style and title of Count of the Prussian monarchy. What could possibly be more regular? Accompanying the deed, too, was the authority of the Prussian Minister of the Interior, countersigned by the King, and addressed to the notary at Dusseldorf, empowering him to sell and dispose of whatsoever lands and tenements existed under such-and-such a name in such-and-such a locality. So the money-lender advanced the Marquis the sum of seventeen thousand pounds for a period of five years,—within which interval the Marquis doubtless calculated that his father would die, or that in case of emergency he might otherwise raise the necessary sum to pay off the amount. He enjoined the money-lender to the strictest secrecy,—representing that he would not like to have it known that he had mortgaged his Prussian estate so soon after he had purchased it; and the argument of course appeared so plausible that the money-lender readily promised to comply with his noble client's wishes. The Marquis having accomplished this egregious piece of roguery——"

But here I had to stop suddenly short in my narrative, and spring forward to pick up the coffee-cup which the Duke de Paulin had just dropped from his hand as he was trifling with it while listening to my story.

"Thank you—thank you, Joseph," he said, appearing to be somewhat confused at the accident. "And now continue your tale."

"The Marquis, I was saying, having consummated this egregious piece of rascality, seemed suddenly resolved to turn into a new course. He replaced the ten thousand pounds which his father had paid to his account at the banker's; and he liquidated all his previously contracted debts,—leaving himself clear in the world, save and except with regard to that sum of seventeen thousand pounds borrowed on the fictitious title-deed. The time passed on; and the day arrived when he was to conduct the heiress to the altar. Everything progressed favourably; and the marriage was solemnized with very great pomp. The fortune of the bride was settled upon herself, as is usual, I believe, Monsieur le Duc, under such circumstances in France?"

"Oh, yes," responded the nobleman; "it is invariably done when the wife brings a dowry."

"I thought so, Monsieur le Duc. Well, as the fortune of the beautiful Marchioness was thus settled upon herself, the Marquis could not of course anticipate the revenues arising from that source, nor raise any money upon it without obtaining the signature of his wife. This he dared not ask for. How could he possibly invent an excuse to account for the need of so considerable a sum as seventeen thousand pounds? As for his own income, which was allowed by his father—although it was very handsome, yet it was not sufficient to enable him to make such an immense payment. Besides, he had borrowed the sum for five years; and there was really no necessity, as he thought, to trouble himself about it for the present. Nevertheless, a feeling of uneasiness would occasionally creep into his mind; and his beautiful wife, who loved him devotedly, sometimes observed that he was mournful or pre-occupied. A year passed away; and at the expiration of this interval the Marquis was one day waited upon by the money-lender, who addressed him as follows:—'I purpose, Monsieur le Marquis, to treat my family with a little trip up the Rhine; and as we intend to make a short stay at Cologne, it struck me that if you had any instructions to send to the domestics in charge of your castle, or to the intendant of the domain, I would cheerfully become the bearer thereof. Indeed, Monsieur le Marquis, if it will be rendering you a service, I will pay a visit to your estate, and satisfy myself by personal observation that your interests are duly cared for in your absence.'—The consternation of the Marquis, on hearing this announcement, may be more easily imagined than described. The money-lender would inevitably discover that he had been grossly duped: he would hasten back from the Rhine to Paris to demand his money: he would perhaps give publicity to the transaction: he might even possibly invoke the immediate aid of justice. Such must have been the dreadful reflections which flashed through the mind of the unhappy Marquis. But he so far restrained his feelings as to prevent the outward betrayal of them; and he said to the money-lender, 'It is a singular coincidence that you should have called upon me to-day, for I was about to pay a visit to you. Indeed, I am going to return you the amount you so kindly advanced, and shall be prepared with it to-morrow.'—'Oh, but all my arrangements are made to set off to-morrow morning at an early hour,' said the money-lender; 'and therefore the settlement can easily stand over until my return. I shall only be six weeks absent.'—'But I must beg of you to let me settle it at once,' said the Marquis. 'My father has been much indisposed for the last few weeks; he is of course aware that I purchased the Rhenish estate; he has asked me three or four times to show him the title-deed; illness makes him irritable; and I am fearful that if I put him off with any additional excuses, he will grow suspicious.'—'In that case, Monsieur le Marquis,' said the money-lender, 'I am bound to listen to your representations, and I will endeavour to postpone my de-

parture until the day after to-morrow.'—With these words he took his leave. But I hope that I am not wearying you, Monsieur le Duc?" I here said: for methought that my noble master was fidgetting in his chair as if he were getting impatient.

"Not at all!" he exclaimed. "Go on. It is indeed very interesting:"—and he laughed, I knew not whether contemptuously or good-naturedly, or with any other feeling. "Yes—go on, go on," he said, observing that I hesitated.

"You may easily conceive, Monsieur le Duc, that the unfortunate Marquis now found himself in a most threatening dilemma. He had promised to accompany his wife on a round of visits: he was compelled to put her off on some pretence, with which however she was by no means satisfied; for she saw that there was a strange trouble in his looks. He sped away to his father's residence, with the intention of throwing himself at the old Duke's feet, confessing everything, and imploring his succour. But he found that his father had just been smitten with paralysis, and had lost his reason and his speech. Yet the physicians who were in attendance, declared that it was quite possible for him to live on some time still. The Marquis, after remaining awhile in the sick-chamber for decency's sake, went away almost distracted. He could command about five thousand pounds: he wanted twelve to make up the amount. He hastened to the houses of two or three friends: one was out of town—another was ill in bed and could not be seen—a third had no available resources at the time. The Marquis flew to his lawyer: but the man of business would not advance money upon a post-obit bond, which was the only security the Marquis could offer. He returned in the evening to his own mansion, in a state bordering on despair. The money must be found for the following day—or ruin would

overtake him! The Marchioness, perceiving how troubled he was in his mind, and seeing that it was not entirely on his father's account, besought him to reveal his sorrows and suffer her to share therein. Vainly did he assure her that there was naught preying upon his spirits beyond his sire's precarious condition: she felt convinced of the contrary, and her own grief was great. It was between nine and ten o'clock when the Marquis was sent for to his father's mansion; for the old Duke had been suddenly seized with the most alarming symptoms. While he was absent, the money-lender called, and appeared so much annoyed at not finding the Marquis at home, that the servant to whom he addressed himself, inquired whether he would like to see the Marchioness. He doubtless thought to himself that the wife was aware of the husband's pecuniary circumstances; or at all events he must have seen no harm in giving the answer which he did. It was to the effect that he would like to see the Marchioness; and he was accordingly conducted to her presence. He said to her, 'Monsieur le Marquis has made an appointment with me for to-morrow to liquidate the mortgage on his Rhenish estate: but I am unable to postpone my previously effected arrangements for departure in the morning. I have accordingly left the deed in the hands of my son, who will remain in Paris, and who is perfectly confidential. It is precisely the same thing as if I myself were there to manage the business, as my son will not think of betraying the secret.'—The astonishment of the Marchioness, on hearing these words, may readily be conceived: for it was the first time she had ever heard of a Rhenish estate possessed by her husband. Indeed, she was tolerably well confident in her own mind that he had no such possession at all. She however was at once smitten with the idea that accident was putting her in the way to the discovery of a clue to the secret of her husband's profound trouble, and which she knew was altogether apart from filial grief on his sire's account. She composed her feelings, so as not to excite the astonishment of the money-lender; and she casually inquired the amount of the debt. When it was named she was indeed stricken with dismay and surprise; and the money-lender, perceiving her emotion, feared that he had done wrong in addressing himself to her. She however assured him to the contrary—received the address of his son's abode—and promised that the amount should be liquidated on the ensuing day. When the Marquis came home, which was not until near midnight, she threw her arms around his neck—lavished the tenderest caresses upon him—and told him that she had at length fathomed the secret sorrow which was preying upon him: for she now supposed he really was in possession of a handsome Rhenish estate, but that he had never mentioned it on account of its being mortgaged to nearly its full value, and its revenues therefore being absorbed in the payment of the interest. But then a sad and terrible scene took place: for the Marquis not comprehending what impression was on his wife's mind relative to the Rhenish property, gave vent to passionate ejaculations, which at once betrayed to her the whole dreadful truth. From her own lips then likewise burst forth the wildest lamentations: she would rather have beheld her husband stricken dead at her feet, than have discovered him to be a villain!"

Here the Duke de Paulin started so abruptly, that I could not help saying to him, "You see, Monsieur le Duc, the interest of the tale is really sufficient to produce an effect upon the mind of one hearing it for the first time. It is scarcely possible to help identifying one-self with the unfortunate Marquis and keenly comprehending the feelings that must have racked and tortured him."

"Yes—that is just what I was thinking," said the nobleman. "Go on."

"My narrative verges towards a conclusion, Monsieur le Duc. You have already heard," I continued, "that there was a terrible scene on the part of the unmasked husband and his distracted wife: for the Marchioness was imbued with the loftiest sense of honour. However, the result was that on the following day the requisite amount was raised on her own resources: it was paid to the money-lender's son—and the deed, on being got back, was at once torn up and committed to the flames. That very same day the old Duke died; and the Marquis inherited his title and his wealth. Whether the money-lender discovered the fraud that had been perpetrated on him—or whether, if so discovering it, he was easily persuaded to hush it up, as the amount had been paid—the narrative does not inform us."

When I had thus brought my tale to a conclusion, the Duke de Paulin rose from his seat; and advancing to the window, leant against it with his back towards me for some minutes. I knew not what this could possibly mean: but that he was labouring under some emotion, or was else seized with a sudden indisposition, was but too evident. When he slowly turned towards me again, it was with a countenance as pale as death——a countenance, Oh! so ghastly, it haunted me in my dreams for some nights afterwards.

"Joseph," he said, in a low deep voice, "whence obtained you the manuscript of that tale?—or is it false that you read it in manuscript at all? Perhaps it was told to you by—by——But, no! impossible! She would not condescend to such utter meanness!"

All in a moment was I seized with a terrible alarm: a wild and frightful apprehension smote me—a hideous suspicion which I dared not envisage as one that involved a possible truth. The Duke saw how I staggered back—saw how I was struck—and guessed what was passing in my mind. The way in which he gazed upon me, was intolerable: it was as if the eyes of a fiend were glaring out of the face of a corpse. Every instant my suspicions grew stronger—my misgivings were strengthened; and I anathematized the folly which had led me to tell the tale,—though on after reflection I could of course perceive no just ground for such self-reproach. What I had done was in perfect innocence of what the result would be.

"Joseph," said the Duke, in a lower and deeper voice than before, "tell me at once—I command you—how came this story to reach your knowledge? how learnt you these details with so frightful an accuracy?"

"O Monsieur le Duc, what have I done?" I exclaimed, terrified and bewildered.

"What have you done?" cried the Duke, now

trembling with rage and boiling with passion, "Can you not understand that every word you have uttered for this last hour, has been a separate dagger which you have been thrusting into my heart?—did you not perceive how difficult it was for me to master my emotions so that I might induce you to go on until the end in order to ascertain how much you did really know, and what complexion was given to the tale? By heaven! if for one whole hour molten lead had been poured into my veins, or drops of boiling oil sprinkled upon my brain laid bare, the agony could not have been greater—the anguish more excruciating!"

"Pardon me, Monsieur le Duc!" I exclaimed, falling upon my knees: "pardon me!" I cried. "I take God to witness that I knew not I was thus afflicting you! No—I would not have done it! I owe you too deep a debt of gratitude——"

"Rise, then—rise!" said the Duke, becoming suddenly calm: but it was a dread, unnatural, false calmness which thus seized upon him: for as he caught my hand to compel me to rise up from my kneeling posture, he pressed it with as much convulsive force as if it were in an iron vice.

I rose and stood trembling before him. I felt that however great the dishonour of his action might have been at the time, it was a shocking thing for me thus to have slowly paraded the entire details in their infamy before him: but, as I had said, heaven knows how innocently I had played this part! I dared not look him in the face: I felt as if it were I who ought to blush and to be ashamed: my sensations were those of a deeply guilty individual.

"Now, Joseph Wilmot," said the Duke, "while at once frankly acquitting you of any premeditation in this matter, I must insist upon receiving the fullest explanations. You can but too well comprehend how necessary it is for me to know in what manner a secret which I had fancied existed only between myself and my wife—for the money-lender never discovered the truth of the transaction——"

"Under such circumstances, Monsieur le Duc," I interrupted him, "no longer can I hesitate to explain how that manuscript fell into my hands. It was Amelie who in a playful mood gave it me as a task for translation."

"And the handwriting?" said the Duke abruptly.

"Was that of a female," I responded.

"Did it resemble *this*?" asked the nobleman, producing a letter from his desk and showing me the address.

"The same, Monsieur le Duc!" I at once ejaculated: "the very same!"

"Does Amelie suspect——But no—she can scarcely do so——"

"I am sure, Monsieur le Duc," I earnestly answered, "that Amelie suspects nothing more than I did until a few minutes back."

"How long did you have that manuscript in your possession?" was the next question abruptly put after a brief pause, during which the Duke appeared to be reflecting profoundly.

"Scarcely twenty-four hours," was my response. "Indeed, Amelie charged me not to show it to any one—not to lose it, nor to soil it."

"Then she herself," muttered the Duke in a tone only just audible, and with a certain feeling of relief evidently expressed upon his countenance, "must have surreptitiously removed it from the desk of the Duchess."

This was an immediate revelation for me: to a certain extent it opened my eyes in a moment: it was the Duchess herself who had committed the astounding narrative to paper.

"Joseph Wilmot," said the Duke de Paulin, still speaking in a low deep voice, and looking at me from under his brows as if ashamed to survey me in a frank and straightforward manner, "I need not ask whether you will keep this secret—I know that you will—I have that high opinion of your generosity and good faith. I will not insult you by recalling to your mind——"

"Oh, Monsieur le Duc!" I exclaimed, still labouring under considerable excitement; "apart from the debt of gratitude which I owe you, there are a thousand considerations to induce me to put the seal of silence upon my lips. Rest assured that never, never——"

"Joseph," interrupted the Duke, with a sudden vehemence, "your own good sense renders you aware how terrible is all this for me! To think that I, the representative of one of the haughtiest and most ancient families of France, should be compelled to blush in the presence of one who is in my service,—Oh! it is enough, Joseph, to drive me to despair, and almost to make me perish in the blood of a distracted suicide! Think not, then, that I am deficient in confidence with respect to yourself, when I ask you to swear—aye, and swear most solemnly—by everything you deem most sacred—that so long as I remain a living denizen of this world, you will keep my tremendous secret?"

"Monsieur le Duc," I answered, solemnly and gravely, "the oath is unnecessary, I can assure you! But nevertheless, as it was through my thoughtlessness that this most painful scene has occurred, I dare not refuse to afford you every possible guarantee of my honour and good faith. Under these circumstances I swear, Monsieur le Duc, that so long as you live, the secret which has this day so singularly transpired as being connected with yourself, shall never pass my lips without your consent."

"I thank you, Joseph—I thank you most sincerely," said the Duke de Paulin, taking my hand and pressing it for a moment with a fervour that was even violent. "And now leave me—leave me: I would be alone!"

I accordingly issued from the presence of my ducal master, whom I saw no more for the remainder of that day. I could not help feeling for him, notwithstanding the baseness of the action which was recorded in the manuscript narrative; and not a little did I marvel at the fact that the Duchess de Paulin should have committed to paper the signal history of her husband's dishonour. As I thus pondered, the thought gradually stole into my mind that it could only have been in a strange morbid condition of feelings the Duchess had so perpetuated the memory of her husband's dishonest conduct: for that she could have done so with a view to giving it publicity to the world, was an idea too preposterous to be for a moment entertained. The longer I reflected on the subject, the more evident did it appear to be that the Duchess was a woman whose mind and feelings were of no ordinary contexture;—and now, as I recollected

the scene with Mademoiselle Ligny, I beheld therein additional proofs of the accuracy of the opinion I was thus forming of Madame la Duchesse. On that occasion she was one moment violent, the next coaxing and cajoling—passing in quick transitions from high excitement to almost a grovelling persuasiveness—and giving way to lamentations where she ought only to have maintained an air of dignified indignation in the presence of one whom she believed to be her husband's mistress. And then, too, to think that a wife could have sat down deliberately to pen the narrative of her husband's dishonour—to enter into the minutest details—to chronicle sentiments and feelings with the nicest precision and the most pains-taking accuracy—in short, to dress up the whole proceeding from first to last with the character of a romance, and even to labour at the investment of the narrative with that peculiar air of interest which novelists are wont to bestow upon those tales which are the offspring of the imagination,—that the Duchess should have done all this, I say, was sufficient to corroborate my opinion that if her intellects were not the least thing touched, they were at all events highly sensitive, and liable to an excitement of the most unnatural and morbid character.

On the following day Madame la Duchesse returned from her visit into the country; and she came back attended, as she went, by Amelie, Florine, and the valet Adolphe. I was now determined to put certain questions to Amelie, but as a matter of course without in any way violating the solemn pledge which I had given the Duke in reference to his secret, and also without suffering the lady's-maid herself to perceive that I had any ulterior purpose in so catechizing her. The opportunity soon served: for in the course of the forenoon of the day following her return with the Duchess, we found ourselves alone together for a little while in the servants' hall.

"Well, Amelie," I said, "have you enjoyed this little excursion?"

"Pretty well," she responded,—"but only pretty well—and not as much as I had at first anticipated."

"And why not?" I asked.

"Oh, I scarcely know," rejoined Amelie, with a slight air of vexation: "but Madame la Duchesse seemed quite out of humour the whole time. Not that she vented her feelings upon me—nothing of the sort!—but still I cannot bear to behold gloomy countenances and to see persons unhappy when I am compelled to come in incessant contact with them. Ah! I can guess what it is all about: for I one day accidentally overheard the name of Mademoiselle Ligny mentioned by Madame la Duchesse and her father the Marshal, when they were walking together in the splendid picture gallery at the Count's country-seat."

"Then the father of the Duchess holds the rank of Count?" I observed inquiringly.

"To be sure! But that is nothing," continued Amelie, "in comparison with his military rank of Field-Marshal. Ah! by the bye," she exclaimed, with a smile, "how get you on with your translation?"

"First of all let me ask," I said, "how you have got on in your study of English by the process of comparing that translation of mine with the original which you placed in my hands?"

"To confess the truth, Joseph," replied Amelie, "I have had no opportunity of making any such comparison at all; for I have not been again able to get possession of the original French tale. It has not been left lying about——"

Here Amelie stopped suddenly short, and looked somewhat confused, as she flung a quick furtive glance at me. She had evidently said more than she intended; and I saw that I was in the right road to obtain the explanations which I sought. But I kept my countenance perfectly—and wore that sort of good-humoured, careless, indifferent demeanour which forbade the suspicion on her part that I was really questioning her for a special purpose.

"How do you mean?" I said: "what would you have me understand by the manuscript not having been left lying about? Was it not your own composition?"

"I am not silly nor vain enough, Joseph," was the ingenuous Amelie's ready response, "to assume a talent which I really do not possess. But since you have questioned me, I do not see wherefore I should not tell you the real truth. You know that Madame la Duchesse is very clever and exceedingly accomplished. Sometimes—in what I may term her happy moods—she writes poetry, and is very fond of translating ballads and madrigals from the Italian, the Spanish, and the German. She often leaves her manuscripts lying about on the writing-table in her boudoir; and one day, when she surprised Florine in the midst of reading some of those papers—Florine of course appearing very much confused and disconcerted at being thus caught,—Madame la Duchesse told her, with an air of considerable kindness, that no harm was done, and that if she took the fancy into her head, she was quite welcome to amuse herself with any of the manuscripts that lay upon the table."

"It was exceedingly good-natured of Madame la Duchesse," I observed, as Amelie paused for a few moments.

"Well—and as I was present on the occasion," resumed the lady's-maid, "I of course understood that the permission extended to myself as well as to Florine; and therefore ever since that day I have not hesitated to while away a leisure hour in the study of the Duchess's literary achievements."

"Ah! now I begin to comprehend the real truth," I observed with a smile, "in respect to the manuscript you lent me the other day—and I who gave you credit for the authorship!"

"Why, you really must have known that it was not my lucubration," cried Amelie, now laughing with her wonted merriment. "To be sure," she added in a lower tone, and with a glance towards the door so as to assure herself that we were not overheard,—"it was a manuscript by Madame la Duchesse. She had left it lying on her desk——"

"And does she often leave her desk open?" I inquired.

"Ah! now that I am reminded on the point," rejoined Amelie thoughtfully, "it was the first occasion on which I ever found the desk left open, or ever knew it to be unlocked."

"Does it not strike you, Amelie," I said, "that there may be certain papers which the Duchess would be loth to have read by her maids?"

"What! a mere tale?" ejaculated Amelie.

"Might it not have been left out inadvertently?"

I asked, throwing into my accents the slightest tinge of remonstrance: "at all events Madame la Duchesse would not be over well pleased if it came to her knowledge that you removed any of her papers from her apartment."

"Dear me, Joseph, how seriously you are taking the matter!"—and Amelie gazed upon me as if she were struck with the apprehension that, after all, she might really have done something wrong. "Well, I do confess," she continued in a grave tone, "that it may have been somewhat indiscreet on my part—and I will not do it again. But inasmuch as the manuscript was not missed during the short while I lent it to you, there is no need to distress myself on account of that one little thoughtless act."

Here our conversation was interrupted by the entrance of some of our fellow-domestics: but it had progressed far enough to clear up all doubt in my mind as to the manner in which Amelie had become possessed of the manuscript which revealed to me so stupendous a secret in respect to the private character of the Duke de Paulin.

CHAPTER LXXIII.

THE CAB.

About an hour after that interview with Amelie—and it being now a little past noon—I was issuing forth from the ducal mansion to take a stroll in the streets of Paris, when I was accosted at a short distance from the gate by an elderly female, whom I at once recognised as the servant of Mademoiselle Ligny. She cast rapid glances all around, as if to assure herself that we were not observed by any persons belonging to the Duke de Paulin's establishment; and then she thrust a note into my hand,—begging me to present it secretly to the Duke. It was all the work of a moment, and though I hesitated, I had not time to give utterance to any objection: for the servant-woman, hurrying away, turned round a corner and was at once lost to my view. Still I stood for a few moments in a state of bewilderment and uncertainty:—then, all in an instant, my mind was made up *not* to continue a go-between in respect to the Duke and Mademoiselle Ligny after everything which had come to my knowledge in respect to the unhappiness of the Duchess on their account. I ran forward in search of the servant-woman, with the intention of restoring her the letter and bidding her find some other medium for its transmission: but I could not overtake her; and from the street into which she had turned, there were several other diverging ways, by any one of which she might have thus escaped me. What was I now to do? I had in a measure accepted the mission, from the mere fact of not immediately refusing it, and of suffering the woman to leave the letter in my hand. There was no alternative but to acquit myself of the trust so reposed in me: but I vowed that it should be for the last time.

As I was retracing my way to the ducal mansion, I was suddenly struck by observing Adolphe emerge from the corner of a neighbouring street, and saunter as if in a lazy, careless manner into the court-yard of the dwelling. An uneasy suspicion at once began to agitate in my mind. I knew that the Duchess employed spies in respect to her husband and Mademoiselle Ligny; and I entertained the idea, amounting almost to a positive conviction, that Adolphe and Florine were those spies. Was a watch now being set upon myself?—had anything transpired to induce the Duchess to fancy that I had already been the bearer of a billet from her husband to the ex-governess?—or was it merely suspected that inasmuch as I served the Duke in a confidential capacity, I might possibly be used as the instrument of his secret correspondence with Mademoiselle Ligny? At all events, I felt myself to be in an embarrassing position, and that day by day I was gradually becoming more and more involved and enmeshed, so to speak, in the mysteries which concerned the Paulin family.

Thus unpleasantly reflecting, I repaired to the Duke's apartment; and handing him the billet, stated how it was entrusted to my charge. The Duke bade me wait; and with a visible nervousness he opened the letter. Its contents were evidently brief, for they were soon scanned; and then, with an air of vexation bordering upon distress, the Duke said, "Poor creature!—ill and suffering as she is, and without funds!"

These words had escaped him in a musing manner, and were not intended to reach my ears. He did not however appear to notice that he had thus unconsciously made me acquainted with the nature of the billet's contents. Seating himself at his desk, he penned a few rapid lines—enclosed some Bank-notes in the letter—sealed it—and beckoning me to draw near, said, "I must trouble you, Joseph, to leave this little packet at the address indicated; and be secret, as you were on the former occasion."

"I should be very sorry, Monsieur le Duc," I answered, "to incur the imputation of ingratitude after the immense service you rendered me in the hour of my need,—but I really would rather not become the bearer of private and secret correspondence."

The Duke gazed upon me with a momentary indignation, which rapidly merged into astonishment; and then he said, coldly and haughtily, "You take advantage, Joseph, of a certain power which your knowledge of my secret gives you over me. And yet there is not the slightest connexion between *that* matter and the present one. Come, young man—it will not exactly do for you to be so fastidious——"

"Monsieur le Duc," I interrupted him, "pardon me for observing that I shall regret having entered my present situation if I, find myself constrained to perform missions which are repugnant to my feelings."

The Duke now looked more perplexed than angry; and after a brief silence, he said, turning his eyes suddenly upon me, "You suspect—and it is natural enough too—you suspect there is an improper intimacy between Mademoiselle Ligny and myself?"

"It is not for me, Monsieur le Duc, to offer comments upon your proceedings: but——"

"Oh! I perfectly well comprehend what is passing in your mind!" exclaimed the Duke, stamping his foot with a petulance bordering upon rage. "Every one doubtless thinks ill of

me! And yet I swear to you, young man, that there is nothing but the sincerest friendship—or if it be love, it is not a guilty one—between Mademoiselle Ligny and myself. Now I beg of you—I entreat it as a favour—that you will convey this packet. I do not ordain it as a command: I request it as a boon. Indeed, on the score of humanity you cannot refuse me. That poor creature is prostrate on a bed of sickness; and with her fine spirit and exceeding delicacy of feeling, she must be destitute indeed that she could have induced herself to apply to me for pecuniary succour. I have now told you what the nature of the errand is; and every moment that elapses ere assistance reaches her, prolongs her suffering and suspense. I have no one else whom I can charge with this commission; and if it be necessary," added the Duke, with a bitter smile, "to humiliate myself still further by these explanations, you must know, Joseph—yes, by heaven, it is a fact!—my movements are watched!"

Again I felt deeply for this nobleman who was compelled so often to undergo humiliation in my presence. Nevertheless, were it on his own account alone, I would still have refused to become the bearer of his communication to Mademoiselle Ligny; but when I reflected that it was a matter in which a fellow-creature was suffering deeply, and that those sufferings were to be relieved,—I could no longer find it in my heart to refuse the mission with which it was sought to entrust me.

"May I most respectfully yet at the same time most earnestly request, Monsieur le Duc, that this shall prove the last occasion on which such a service will be demanded at my hands?"

"You may—you may!" responded the Duke. "Rest assured, Joseph," he added, with a sort of nervous vehemence, "that it is really the last time you shall hear a syllable in respect to such an errand breathed from my lips."

I said no more: but bowed—received the letter—and was about to issue from the room, when the nobleman bade me observe that the address was not the same as that to which I had on the former occasion been directed. Indeed, on glancing at the letter I found that Mademoiselle Ligny had removed to quite a different part of Paris; and thus it was evident that she must have fulfilled the promise which she had made to the Duchess in my hearing a fortnight back. Yes—she had certainly fulfilled that promise so far as mere change of dwelling was concerned: but had she not violated its sense, if not the actual tenour of its words, by again communicating with the Duke de Paulin?

Such indeed was the reflection which I made as I issued forth from my noble master's presence; and it was not until I entered the court-yard that I recalled to mind the little incident in respect to Adolphe, which had ere now troubled me. But when I saw him lounging in the gateway, that occurrence was vividly brought back to my recollection; and I regretted having yielded to the Duke's persuasions to become the bearer of the packet. It was however too late to retreat; and I felt that I must acquit myself of a commission which I more than ever resolved should be the last of its sort.

Exchanging a few passing words with Adolphe, I strolled out of the gateway, with the idle lounging air of one who has no definite purpose in view,—and walked along the street for some minutes, without looking behind. I know not how it was, but by some means or another—presentiment or inspiration, call it what you will—I had the intuitive conviction that Adolphe was following me: but it was not until I reached the Boulevards, where I purposed to take an omnibus, that I glanced over my shoulder. Sure enough, Adolphe was behind me! My keen eyes caught a momentary glimpse of his light blue livery coat ere he disappeared from my view either in some diverging street, or else by plunging into the gateway of some house. However, I saw that I was watched; and the very indignation I experienced at the circumstance, rendered me determined to accomplish my mission and to outwit the spy upon my actions. Hurrying up the Boulevards, I darted into a cab; and it was not until thus ensconced within the vehicle, that I gave the necessary instructions to the driver as to whither he was to proceed. For this purpose I drew forth the letter to refresh my memory as to the precise number of the house where Mademoiselle Ligny now dwelt; and in my hurry and excitement I dropped the packet. I was leaning towards the door; and a gust of wind, sweeping through the vehicle, carried the letter into the muddy road.

"Take care!" I exclaimed in the best French that occurred to me at the moment: "it contains Bank-notes!"

"Very good, sir!" said the man, picking up the letter as it was being swept on by the wind towards a pool of slimy water; and he restored it to my hand.

I thanked him: he touched his hat—leaped upon the box—and drove away. The letter was somewhat soiled by its contact with the mud; and for a few minutes I was occupied in cleansing it as well as I could with my kerchief. Then I again bethought me of Adolphe; and looked stealthily from the window—but beheld him not. I looked also from the little circular pane at the back: still no Adolphe was visible. Yet he might very well be ensconced in one of the numerous cabs that were following in the same direction? I was determined not to be beaten, if possible: I therefore opened one of the front windows: and without stopping the cabman, said to him, "Take a circuitous route; and if you perceive that we are followed by any particular vehicle, have the kindness to lead it a dance till you distance it or it loses the track."

My French was quite good enough to make the cabman comprehend my meaning; and as he looked down over his shoulder from the box, he gave me a significant nod, as much as to imply that my instructions should be attended to. Indeed, by the grin on the fellow's countenance, methought that he regarded it as a very good piece of fun—and that he entered into the spirit of it,—all the more so, too, as the longer I occupied his vehicle, the greater would be his own emolument.

On we went: and I soon felt assured that we must be followed, and that the driver had singled out some particular vehicle which he had reason to believe was upon our track; because I presently found myself being borne along into a maze of

narrow streets and alleys belonging to a quarter which, well as I by this time knew Paris, was altogether strange to me. In less than twenty minutes we passed one of the barriers, or custom-house gates, of the French metropolis; and then we halted for a moment, while the driver spoke to some man whom he recognised at the door of a wine-shop. This individual, whose looks and appearance were none of the most prepossessing, leapt upon the box; and the moment he thus took his seat by his friend the driver's side, the horse was whipped, and on we went again.

In a few minutes more, the houses grew fewer and more straggling, until they ceased altogether; and now the open country was reached. What could this mean? The driver was evidently taking a circuitous route with a vengeance—and far exceeding the sense, if not the syllable of my instructions. I looked through the circular pane at the back, and beheld another vehicle following at some little distance: so I thought to myself this must be the one which the driver had reason to suppose was keeping on our track; and I gave him credit for his determination in distancing or eluding it.

"He is most likely acquainted," I said to myself, "with some bye-lane, up which he will presently take the opportunity to turn rapidly when unseen by those who are following; and thus, though by a far more circuitous route than I had intended or anticipated, he will get back into Paris and take me to my destination."

Scarcely had I reached this point in my reflections, when sure enough, the cab turned into a bye-lane, which meandered with such sinuosities that if the other vehicle were still following, it could no longer be descried from the little pane at the back of my own seat.

"Adolphe will be outwitted after all," I said to myself, chuckling at the thought. "This driver of mine is a clever fellow—a very clever fellow; and——"

Scarcely was the present point in my reflections reached, when the cab suddenly stopped. Down leaped the driver on one side—his ill-looking friend on the other—the two doors were opened simultaneously—and simultaneously too was I seized upon by the vigorous grasp of each ruffian; for their predatory intentions were now but too plainly apparent. At the very moment that these rude hands were thus laid upon me, the blood seemed to boil to fever-heat in my veins; and I felt flaming up within me such a spirit as I had not often experienced before, and which seemed to nerve me with the strength of a thousand. Dealing the cabman a blow with all my might upon the countenance, I sent him sprawling back against a bank on that side of the lane; and then I flung myself with all my energy—which was really tremendous at the moment—upon his villanous companion. He was visibly smitten with dismay at a resistance as effectual as it was unexpected; and he offered not to assail me, as for a moment he had an opportunity of doing—for I stumbled on thus precipitating myself out of the vehicle upon him. That instant's hesitation—a paralysis of the energies, so to speak, on his part—was all that was needed by me to crown the advantage I had already gained. Well aware that I had no chance if closing with the two burly ruffians in a desperate struggle, I sped away fleet as an arrow shot from a bow,—retracing along the lane the direction in which we had come. A very few minutes brought me into the high road: still I continued my rapid flight, until I came within view of the houses. Then I relaxed my pace to recover breath; and looking about, saw nothing of any vehicle which might have been following the one whence I had just escaped. I now therefore began to think that perhaps we had never been followed at all—but that the treacherous driver, taking advantage of my instructions, had made them a pretext—or rather used them as a means for carrying out his dishonest views. The little incident of the letter falling into the mud, had made him acquainted with the fact that it contained Bank-notes; and I therefore saw all the risk I had run of being robbed of the amount—and perhaps ill-treated, or even murdered by the two ruffians.

On approaching the barrier, at which I noticed two or three *gendarmes* lounging about, I was on the point of accosting them, to give information as to the treatment I had experienced and send them in pursuit of the culprits,—when it struck me that if I gave publicity to the affair it would get into the newspapers, and the Duchess de Paulin would wonder wherefore I was riding about in cabs—and still more why I ordered the driver to elude any other vehicle that might be following. I of course did not wish to be questioned on the point, nor to open up any circumstances which might lead to the suspicion that I was performing the secret behest of the Duke. I therefore determined to pass over the adventure in silence; and entering another cab, I ordered the driver to proceed direct to the house where Mademoiselle Ligny dwelt. The reader may be assured that I this time took especial care to watch the route which was being pursued: but I had no cause for re-awakening suspicion; and in half-an-hour reached my destination. On alighting from the cab, I glanced quickly up and down the street—but beheld no sign of Adolphe. Entering the gateway of this house, I confided the letter to the porter, requesting him to apologize on my behalf to Mademoiselle Ligny, through the medium of her servant, for the soiled condition in which the missive appeared. On issuing forth again, I was startled and terribly vexed on catching a glimpse of a light blue livery coat suddenly disappearing round the corner at the extremity of the street. Adolpe had succeeded in his purpose: whereas I had failed in mine—namely, to outwit him!

I re-entered the cab, and proceeded to within a quarter of a mile of the ducal mansion,—performing on foot that short interval which thus remained. The Duke was in his own apartment; and when I sought him there, I found that he was nervous and excited,—thinking that there was something wrong on account of the length of my absence. I at once explained to him that I had reason to believe Adolphe had watched me—I described the precautions I had adopted to elude him—I narrated the dangerous adventure into which those precautions had led me—and concluded by stating that I was outwitted after all, and that Adolphe had proved more keen and cunning than myself.

"Maledictions upon the accursed jealousy of that woman!" muttered the Duke between his teeth, but not in a tone so low as to be inaudible

to my ears. "Yes—maledictions upon that jealousy of her's!" he repeated, thus alluding to his wife. "By heaven——"

But here he stopped short,—with corrugating brows, and an expression of features so darkly sinister that for an instant I was both horrified and alarmed: methought that terrible things must be passing, agitating, and conflicting in that nobleman's stormy mind.

"The Duchess, Joseph," he said, "is almost certain to send for you into her presence, and question you as to whatsoever mission I may have confided to you. What will you say?"

"Indeed, Monsieur le Duc," was my response, somewhat hastily and even impatiently given, "I am too wearied of these proceedings in which by some means or another I have become involved, that——But no, Monsieur le Duc!" I exclaimed, abruptly checking myself; "I must not prove ungrateful towards you. Pardon whatsoever petulance there may for a moment have been in my words; and rest assured that if Madame la Duchesse should question me, I will do as little as I can to complicate or aggravate those embarrassments which are already too numerous."

"You are a good young man," said the nobleman; "and I thank you for that assurance."

I went forth from the Duke's presence; and for the remainder of the afternoon kept my own chamber. But in the evening, on descending into the servants' hall at supper-time, Florine accosted me: and under pretence of making some passing observations, she hurriedly whispered, "I wish to speak to you particularly, by command of Madame la Duchesse. Meet me in the great hall in half-an-hour."

My apprehension was thus about to be fulfilled: the Duchess had evidently learnt from Adolphe that I had been to Mademoiselle Ligny's abode; and she intended to question me. Throughout supper-time I was lost in reflection as to the course I should pursue; and the repast terminated before I was enabled to make up my mind on the subject. One thing was however settled in my resolution; and this was to give utterance to no falsehoods. Indeed, I beheld no alternative but to shut myself up in as much reserve as I might dare possibly to assume.

Supper was over—I repaired to the great hall—and was almost immediately joined by Florine. She requested me to follow her; and she led the way into the boudoir of the Duchess,—where I found this noble lady in company with the Marshal her father.

CHAPTER LXXIV.

THE CONCLAVE.

Florine immediately withdrew; and I was left alone with the Duchess de Paulin and the Marshal. This latter was a man well-stricken in years—with a bearing alike aristocratic and military—and an expression of countenance somewhat stern. His look was now particularly grave and severe, yet with a certain tinge of sadness in it. Indeed it was well known that he loved his daughter dearly; and as I had no doubt she had confided to him the sources and particulars of her wrongs and sorrows, he must have felt deeply on her account.

As for the Duchess herself, I have already said in a previous chapter that she was splendidly handsome. Indeed, though her age was six-and-thirty, and she was the mother of several children—and though, moreover, she had a sense of injury, more or less real and justifiable, preying upon her heart—yet were her charms comparatively unmarred by those influences; and she yet retained about her much of that freshness which had belonged to the more youthful period of her life. Her dark brown hair, of a remarkable luxuriance, fell in heavy clusters upon her fair and softly-rounded shoulders,—one or two stray curls reposing, as if more fortunate than the rest, upon the gorgeous neck. Her large blue eyes, usually so pensive in their expression, had now a strangely blended look of woe and resoluteness—as if affliction's self had driven her at last to some decisive course which though long foreseen as one which must be adopted, had hitherto been put off, but was now at length finally determined upon. She sat upon a sofa by the side of her father the Marshal; and when I entered the boudoir, she looked fixedly at me for a few moments,—as did her parent likewise. For this brief interval not a syllable was spoken; and I must candidly confess that I felt much confused and embarrassed.

"Do you know, young man—or do you suspect," inquired the Marshal, at length breaking silence, "why you have been sent for hither?"—and here I may observe that the old soldier spoke English indifferently enough, but still sufficient to render himself perfectly intelligible.

"I await your explanation, sir," was my guarded though respectfully given response.

"No evasions, if you please!" said the Marshal sternly.

"Perhaps, my dear father," interposed the Duchess, laying her beautiful white and richly jewelled hand upon the veteran's arm, where the taper fingers, as they rested upon the black sleeve, seemed like alabaster with the slightest animation of a roseate tint,—"perhaps, my dear father, you had better permit me to question the young man?"

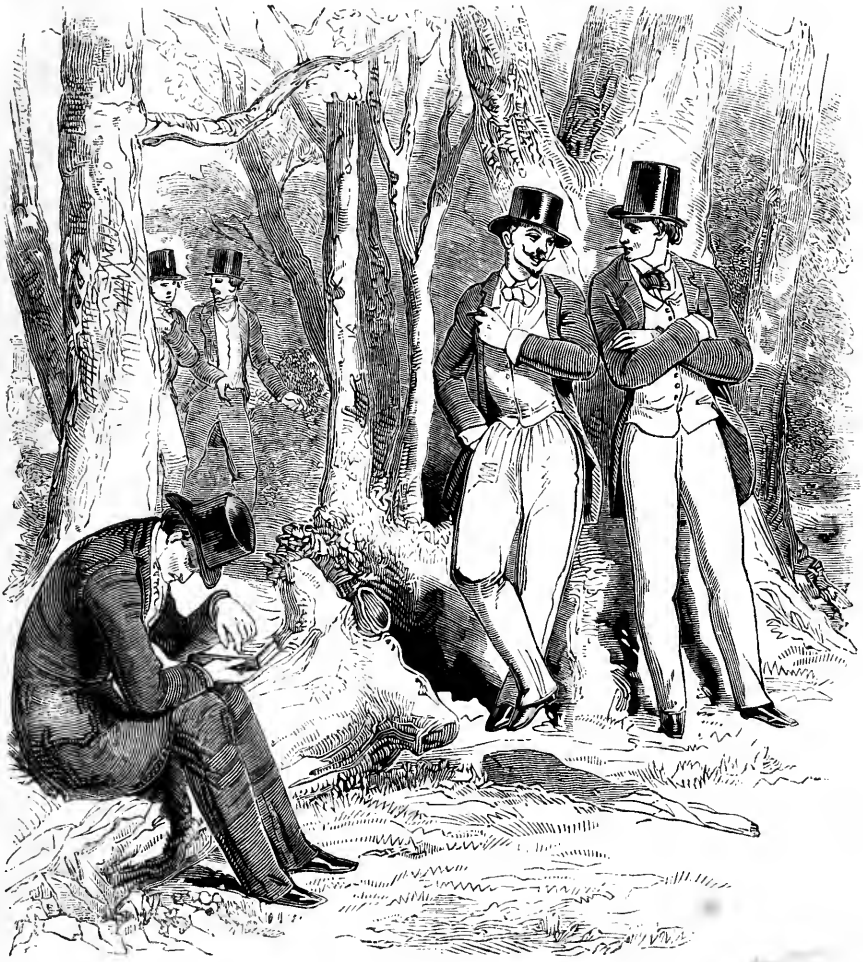
"Well, my dear, do so if you think fit," rejoined the Marshal.

"Joseph," said the Duchess, "I expect that you will tell me the entire truth. You were sent to-day to a certain place by Monsieur-le Duc?"

I bowed—but made no answer.

"It is doubtless very praiseworthy of you to endeavour to preserve any secret that may be entrusted to you," continued the Duchess, speaking in a sort of coaxing and cajoling manner, to which I should have scarcely thought she would have condescended towards a menial, however she might have brought herself to do so in respect to the ex-governess. "But it is useless for you to deny the truth; and you must see the impropriety of shutting yourself up in a reserved silence when your mistress is questioning you. In a word, you went to-day to the dwelling of a certain Mademoiselle Ligny; and now I desire you to inform me what it was you left at her abode?"

"If I had the honour of being in the special service of Madame la Duchesse," I answered with the profoundest respect, "I should certainly con-



sider it my duty to remain silent if questioned by Monsieur le Duc."

"But the Duchess de Paulin," exclaimed the noble lady, her splendid countenance suddenly becoming crimson with indignation, "is incapable of any action concerning which she would not desire that her husband should seek information."

I again bowed, but said nothing: for the thought struck me that the Duchess laboriously and deliberately committed her husband's misdeeds to paper and set spies upon his actions,—which proceedings, however indefensible his own conduct might be, were but little justifiable on the part of a wife.

"Now, sir," resumed the Duchess sharply—for she was a woman of capricious humour, and her mood speedily changed from cajolery to irritation, —"do you intend to answer my question? In a word, was it money of which you were the bearer this day to that woman?"

"In the most respectful terms which I can possibly employ," I said, "it is my duty to convey the assurance that I cannot submit to be thus catechized. I would sooner at once withdraw from the mansion altogether——"

"His very words, my dear father," exclaimed the Duchess, all in a moment bursting into a paroxysm of violent excitement, "confirm our suspicions! He does not dare deny it!—by his evasiveness he admits it! Oh, that the money which ought to go for the honourable maintenance of our own position and of our children, should be thus lavished on worthless wretches such as that woman! But my mind is made up!—I will endure it no longer!—I will separate from him! Take me away, dear father!—let me return with you to that home which I never ought to have quitted for the purpose of accompanying such a man to the altar!"

In this violent explosion of mingled bitterness

and rage, the dignity of the Duchess was altogether forgotten, and she only displayed herself as a weak-minded passionate woman. I say *weak-minded,* because it was her duty to avoid such an exposure in the presence of a menial, as I then was: but not for a single instant do I wish it to be supposed that I seek to palliate whatsoever misconduct the Duke had been guilty of, much less to represent his wife in falsely unfavourable colours.

"My dear, compose yourself!" said the Marshal, tenderly caressing his daughter; "and I will bear you hence. This is indeed no longer a home for you!"

At this moment the door was hastily opened; and Florine entered somewhat unceremoniously,—exclaiming, "Oh, Madame la Duchesse, Monsieur le Marquis has just arrived!"

"My son! my dearest son!" ejaculated the lady: and then, as if the thought of her children produced a revulsion of feeling in favour of that husband whom but a few instants back she was resolving to quit for ever,—she cried, "No, no—I will not leave him! I will remain, dear father—yes, I will remain—for the children's sake!"

"Be it so," said the Marshal, with an air so inscrutable that it was really difficult to say whether he were pleased or otherwise by this decision on his daughter's part; and then abruptly accosting me, he added in a low stern voice, "You may leave the room; and beware how you speak of what has occurred! Beware too"—and here his tone sank lower still—"how you carry any more letters or messages to a woman who has proved the means of destroying my daughter's happiness."

While the veteran was thus addressing me, the Duchess de Paulin had hurried from the boudoir to embrace her son who had just arrived at the mansion. I gave no answer to the Marshal's injunctions—but likewise issued from the apartment, infinitely relieved that the scene should have terminated in such a manner. Most gladly would I have given the Duke notice to leave my situation: but there was a powerful reason which prevented me, and which kept me as it were shackled and enthralled. The reader will remember that the Duke had advanced me a sum of money to pay my hotel bill; and I had not as yet been long enough in his service to earn a sufficiency of wages to cover the amount. Therefore I was bound by a sense of honour to retain my post for a little while longer: but I resolved that so soon as I could with decency leave it, I would disentangle myself from the complications and perplexities in which I had been gradually getting more and more involved.

On issuing from the boudoir of the Duchess, as just described, I was so agitated and excited that I longed for the fresh air and change of scene. There was no restriction upon the goings and comings of the domestics of the household up to midnight: indeed, if any of us chose to remain out later, we had only to give an intimation to this effect to the porter. And here I may observe that it was but little trouble for him to open the gate to any one returning to the mansion after he had gone to rest: for by means of a wire passing into his lodge, and which terminated in a handle at the head of his bed, he could pull back the latch of the little wicket-door in the great gateway on hearing the bell ring. Thus he had not even so much as to leave his couch—but merely stretch forth his hand to pull the wire, and thereby give admission to any belated inmate of the dwelling. This contrivance is common enough in France: but I have explained it for the benefit of the untravelled portion of my readers.

To resume the thread of my narrative, I was about to say that after the scene in the boudoir of the Duchess, I issued forth from the mansion with the intention of visiting Franconi's horsemanship, which was at no great distance, in the Champs Elysées. It was now verging towards ten o'clock: but I knew that the performances were protracted to eleven; and I had often wished to behold them. I was now in that state of mind when some sort of recreation becomes absolutely necessary; and hence my resolve, so suddenly adopted, to visit Franconi's. On passing out of the mansion, I was threading the street towards the nearest turning into the Champs Elysées, when I was suddenly accosted by a young man whose age might be about four-and-twenty, although his beard and moustache gave him a somewhat older appearance. It was close by a street-lamp that he thus approached me; and I therefore at once had a full view of him. He was well dressed, but had a slouching kind of hat—very much resembling that fashion which is now known by a term as vulgar as it is inexpressive: namely, a "wide-awake." He stepped up to me with the air of one who fancied that he knew me, or who had some question to put; and I therefore instinctively stopped short. After surveying me for a few instants, he spoke a single word; and that word was "Ligny."

On thus hearing mentioned the name of a woman who was so intimately connected with those complications and perplexities whence I was anxious to escape, I naturally started and gazed with inquiring surprise upon the stranger. He immediately placed his finger upon his lip to enjoin silence; and turned round with the air of one who intended to be followed. And I did follow, mechanically. What on earth was this new mystery? My curiosity was awakened: indeed I was so bewildered with astonishment that I scarcely knew what I was doing. In a few minutes, however, I regained somewhat of my self-possession, and began to think the adventure so extraordinary that I should do well to inquire into its meaning before I proceeded any farther. I accordingly quickened my pace, so as to bring myself abreast of my stranger-guide, instead of continuing to follow him: but just as I laid my hand upon his arm to draw his attention, he turned abruptly towards me, again putting his finger to his lip—at the same time so accelerating his own speed, that I was again left three or four paces in his rear.

I was more and more bewildered: and I liked the adventure as little as could be. I was however seized with the sudden determination not to be dragged into any fresh dilemmas or embarrassments in respect to the affairs of Mademoiselle Ligny and the Duc de Paulin: so that I was again about to engage my mysterious guide's attention for the purpose of demanding an explanation,—

when he suddenly stopped short at a small narrow doorway, and beckoned me to enter. This I did, in that same mood of mechanical bewilderment into which I had before been plunged: for, foolish as it may appear, I really felt as if I were walking in a dream and had no power over my own volition. The door itself stood half open; and as I passed into a sort of narrow alley or passage—for it was pitch dark—I found by the pressure of the door that there was some one behind it. Then, to my increasing astonishment—or I may say, to my crowning bewilderment—the bearded stranger who had brought me thither, and who was now close at my heels, again pronounced the word "Ligny," in the same low, abrupt, decisive manner that he had originally spoken it to me.

"Good!" said the individual behind the door, and speaking in French.

At the same instant the door itself was closed and bolted. A vague terror seized upon me: the thought that I was inveigled into a den of assassins swept in like a hurricane upon my mind; and I was about to rush towards that door, when a bell suddenly tinkled—and at the same instant a light appeared at the farther extremity of the passage. This was occasioned by another door abruptly opening,—doubtless at the signal of the bell, which most probably one of the two persons in whose company I found myself, had agitated by means of some wire unseen by me. But it was not merely a light which suddenly appeared at the end of the passage a moment before involved in total darkness: for in the midst of that light was a young female of a striking beauty. She was not above the middle height: but her form, with its slender symmetry and its willowy elasticity—combining elegance and grace—made her appear taller. She was well dressed, and evidently of gentle birth. She had a shawl loosely thrown over her shoulders: but it did not sufficiently envelope her form to conceal its sylphid shape. She had no bonnet; and her dark hair, forming bands to enframe her oval countenance, was gathered in a Grecian knot at the back of her well-shaped head. Her age could not have exceeded eighteen; and yet there was in the expression of the clear hazel eyes, and in the classically formed vermilion lips—as well as in the sedate repose of the whole beauteous countenance—a degree of firmness, amounting to fixed and resolute decision of purpose, which appeared strange indeed when viewed on the part of one so young.

All my terrors vanished in a moment: I could not possibly associate murderous designs with the presence of this really beautiful being. But if my apprehensions were thus dissipated, my wonderment was vividly resuscitated. The thought struck me that I had become involved in an adventure founded upon some egregious mistake. I turned in bewilderment from the contemplation of the young lady, towards my two male companions; and I now perceived that he who was behind the door at the instant of my arrival, was a tall stout individual, of herculean build, with a good-natured countenance, but yet with a certain resoluteness depicted upon it. His age was about forty; and he was dressed not merely well, but even with fashion and elegance.

I had turned, I say, from the presence of the young lady towards my two companions: but they motioned me to proceed; and as I mechanically reverted my looks upon the fair creature who stood on the threshold of the inner doorway, I perceived that she herself was turning as if to lead on elsewhere. So I followed, with a curiosity vividly excited, but still mixed with so much bewilderment as to prevent me from being the master of my own actions. The young lady traversed what appeared to be a small ante-chamber, in which there were only a few chairs of an ordinary description: and she stopped at an inner door, until I and my two companions had advanced close up to her. Then she opened that door, and led the way into a spacious but dimly lighted apartment, not particularly well furnished, but having the appearance of a meeting-place or lecture-room.

And a meeting-place of some kind it assuredly struck me to be; for I found myself in the presence of between thirty and forty individuals, of whom some half-dozen were of the female sex. A motley assemblage it was too,—comprising the representatives, so to speak, of all grades of society, tracing them down from the fashionably dressed gentleman to the mechanic in his *blouse*, and including the tradesman of comfortable means as well as the shopkeeper of a humbler description. Then, in respect to the females, there was the lady, represented in the person of the beauteous young creature—and the poorest order typified in the fat, blowzy, but determined-looking fish-woman from the market; with the intermediate social divisions represented by a milliner, the wife of a wine-merchant, the spouse of a publican, and the sister of a foreman in a manufactory. A profound silence was prevailing amongst the conclave at the moment when we entered the apartment; and thus I had leisure to complete my survey of its aspect and its inmates. Three or four candles, interspersed about at considerable intervals, gave so insufficient a light as to leave the scene enwrapt in gloom rather than to bring all its salient features out into bold relief. On a sort of platform at the farther extremity of the apartment, sat an individual whom I of course concluded to be the chairman of the meeting. He was a venerable old man, with a few thin white hairs just fringing his head as with a patriarchal crown of reverence. He was dressed in deep black; and though there was much benevolence in his looks, they nevertheless wore a certain resoluteness, which I observed upon the features of nearly all present. Beneath the chairman, at a table covered with papers, sat a young man in the costume of a mechanic: his brown *blouse* was gathered in at his slender waist by a belt; and his cap lay by his side. This individual I concluded to be the secretary. But I have yet more to relate: for as my eyes grew accustomed to the scene which I had first looked upon through the partial obscurity of the ill-lighted room, I discerned a death's head lying upon a small table a few paces in front of that at which the secretary was seated. The members of the meeting were for the most part sitting on forms—a few however on chairs—ranged on either side of the room; so that a passage was kept clear towards the little table with the death's head. I must not forget to add that amongst those present I observed a priest and a couple of soldiers,—the former in his cassock, the two latter in their gray overcoats, and with their swords by their sides.

Such was the scene to which I was thus introduced by the beautiful young lady and my two male companions. The door was now locked and bolted by the bearded individual who had brought me thither: the young lady took a seat close by; the stout man did the same—and my bearded friend motioned me to follow him towards the farther extremity of the room. We halted near the little table with the skull upon it; and then the president, addressing me in French, said in slow and measured accents, so that I fully comprehended his words, "You are welcome, citizen, amongst us; and you receive the thanks of the patriots here assembled for yielding to the impulses of your own generous nature and joining the sacred cause which we have in hand."

If any doubt had remained upon my mind that the adventure in which I found myself involved, had arisen from some extraordinary mistake, all uncertainty on that score was now dispelled by the chairman's address. I regained my natural calmness and self-possession, and was about to volunteer some explanation,—when my bearded companion laid his hand upon my arm to enjoin silence. The priest advanced towards the table whereon reposed the ghastly skull; and the chairman, again speaking in measured accents, said, "You will now proceed, citizen, to take the oath of secrecy and fidelity which every new member of the Central Republican Association is bound to record."

These words were now a complete revelation for me. I had often read in the French journals of secret political societies, and had learnt that France was covered with them: but my ideas thereof had hitherto been so vague and shadowy that I was almost inclined to treat them as a fable, until the conviction of their stern and unmistakable truth was thus singularly forced upon me on this memorable occasion. I must confess that I grew somewhat terrified on finding myself in the midst of persons who, influenced by the noblest patriotism, were implicated in such desperate proceedings: for I knew not how I might be treated when it should be discovered that I was an interloper. All these reflections swept in a moment through my mind; and my agitation must have been visible. Indeed, I felt that it was so; and I saw the priest and the bearded gentleman contemplating me with looks wherein surprise and suspicion were blended.

"Some mistake has occurred, sir," I said, addressing myself to the chairman: "it was by an error that I was brought hither."

The silence which had until now been observed by the assembly, was all in a moment succeeded by a strong sensation: ejaculatory syllables of astonishment, incredulity, suspicion, and rage, burst from numerous lips—while several exclaimed, "He is a foreigner! he is an Englishman!"—and then, after a moment's pause, a single voice emphatically added, "He is a spy!"

"No!" I exclaimed, my countenance flushing with sudden indignation; and as I drew my tall slender form up to its full height, I flung my looks upon the individual from whose lips that accusation had come.

I was now surrounded by a dozen of the members of the Secret Society; and they all began questioning me at the same moment and with passionate vehemence. I felt as if I had been suddenly transported into the midst of a perfect Babel: for when French was spoken with that excited rapidity, and the words were thrown at me as if they were so many daggers, it was impossible for me to comprehend anything that was said. All in a moment the bearded young gentleman who had brought me thither, and who seemed to be in a more towering passion than the rest, caught me violently with both his hands; and as he thus furiously grasped the lappels of my coat, he shook me,—exclaiming, "Answer! answer! who are you?"

My blood boiled with indignation at this treatment; and with a single blow I knocked down my assailant. The next instant I was seized upon by a dozen powerful hands; while the bearded gentleman sprang up to his feet, giving vent to furious ejaculations,—the only words of which I could understand, being, "satisfaction" and "vengeance." But all in a moment the scene presented a new and most romantic phase: for that same beautiful young lady of whom I have spoken, glided into the midst of the enraged throng by whom I was surrounded; and in a flute-like voice, which in its accents had now all the majesty of command, she said, "Citizens, shame on you! Ye who are for the fullest measures of justice, should deal not unjustly by this young man. Await his explanations ere you pronounce judgment. And you, Citizen Lamotte," she added, turning towards the bearded young gentleman whom I had so summarily chastised,—"you have only to thank your own passionate vehemence for what has occurred."

As oil stills the troubled waters—or as music soothes the irritated soul—so did the influence of this beautiful creature at once produce a lull where a storm had a moment back been raging.

"The Citizeness Eugenie is right," said numerous voices: "let the young man explain himself!"

Then those who had surrounded me, glided back to their places: the lovely Eugenie returned to her own seat; and Citizen Lamotte, moving moodily away, sat down with arms folded across his breast, and with a countenance which in its livid paleness and corrugated brows denoted a deep inward rage. I now stood alone near the table where the skull reposed; and the Chairman again addressing me, said, "You have declared that there is some mistake. Who are you?"

"I am an Englishman—my name is Joseph Wilmot—and I am a page in the service of the Duke de Paulin."

"Citizen Lamotte," continued the Chairman, "how did this error arise?"

The Frenchman thus addressed, rose from his seat; and it was evident enough that it cost him no inconsiderable effort to keep down an explosion of the rage which was agitating within him.

"Take your own time, Citizen Lamotte," said the Chairman: "the brethren and sisters are not impatient."

This delicately conveyed hint that there must be no display of excitement or evil feeling, produced an immediate effect upon the young man to whom it was addressed; and in a calmer voice than I had expected to hear, he spoke as follows:—

"I was informed by Citizen Leroux, who does

not happen to be here this evening, that a young man—a particular friend of his own, and a staunch patriot—was desirous to be admitted into this association. Leroux was to have introduced him in the usual manner this evening: but pressing business which he could not postpone, prevented him. He accordingly confided the task to me,—giving me a description of the young man's personal appearance, and naming the place and hour at which he was to be met. I was punctual at the particular spot; and on encountering this stranger, I at once concluded, by his appearance, that he was the individual whom I was appointed to meet. Leroux had informed me that the present week's watchword had been communicated to his young friend; and therefore when I spoke that watchword, and saw that it produced a certain effect upon this stranger, I entertained not the slightest doubt as to his identity with the person whom I was to meet."

Having thus spoken, Lamotte sat down; and again crossing his arms, kept his eyes riveted upon me in a manner which showed that he still cherished a bitter feeling on account of the personal chastisement which I had inflicted, and which I could not help thinking he so richly deserved.

"You have listened to the explanations which have been given," said the Chairman, again addressing himself to me: "do you wish to explain anything on your own side? Speak deliberately; and if you do not feel yourself competent to express yourself in French, I can doubtless find an interpreter amongst those present."

I was now so perfectly cool and collected that all the French I knew came readily to my aid; and it even seemed as if my mind was suggestive of idiomatic forms and suitable phrases in proportion to the emergency of the case.

"I have only to say, sir," was my answer, firmly but respectfully given, "that when Monsieur Lamotte beckoned me to follow him in the street, I had not the slightest idea of whither he intended to conduct me: and he will remember that I endeavoured to address him—but he placed his finger upon his lip, and would not afford me the wished-for opportunity for explanations."

"That is true," said Lamotte: "it was of course a natural precaution on my part, it being dangerous to converse in the open street, especially at night-time when listeners may lurk in gateways. Entertaining not the slightest doubt as to the identity of this stranger with him whom I sought, I naturally fancied that he merely wished to question me as to the whereabouts of the place whither he was to be conducted—or that he purposed to put any other casual queries which curiosity might naturally suggest. But let him answer how it was that the mention of the pass-word produced such an effect upon him that he appeared thoroughly to understand it?"

"You have heard the question, young man," said the Chairman: "will you be good enough to answer it? Or I will put it again for your better comprehension. How was it," he inquired, speaking with slow deliberation, and accentuating every syllable, "that you appeared at once to understand the password, *Ligny?*"

"I can give no other explanation than this," was my response,—"that the name of Ligny is one which is familiar to me; and therefore when it was so suddenly spoken, it produced upon me a certain effect which, if Monsieur Lamotte will be kind enough to tax his memory, he will recollect to have been that of astonishment rather than of special intelligence."

"It might have been so," observed the bearded young gentleman.

Here the stout, tall, fashionably dressed man who was behind the outer door on my arrival, ascended the platform, and whispered a few words in the ear of the Chairman;—having done which, he resumed his seat.

"Citizens," said the Chairman, glancing slowly around him, "I have just received an intimation which appears to confirm the account given by the young Englishman who is now amongst us. The name of Ligny is no doubt familiar to every member of the Duke de Paulin's household; and the coincidence was most strange which should have led that word to be adopted as our pass for the present week, and caused it to be thus spoken to a stranger on whom it was so well calculated to produce a particular effect. Still I think that Joseph Wilmot should be more explicit, and give us to understand how it was that he suffered himself to be introduced amongst us without proffering a single word of remonstrance to those whom he encountered in the passage."

"Cheerfully and readily will I give the explanations demanded," was my immediate response: and I proceeded to state how I was on my way to Franconi's when I was accosted by Monsieur Lamotte—how completely I was bewildered by the singularity of the occurrence—and how I was hurried on from one incident to another, still with the same feelings of wonder, uncertainty, suspense, and curiosity, until I found myself in my present position.

The chairman looked slowly around him when my explanations were finished; and doubtless perceiving that the impression they produced on the audience generally, was similar to those which he himself entertained, he said, "Your words, young man, are stamped with candour and truthfulness: but what guarantee can you offer us that our secret is safe in your keeping?"

"I can do no more, sir, than pledge my most sacred word of honour to that effect. Indeed," I continued, "I have no interest in betraying you—and assuredly I have no inclination."

Again did the venerable Chairman look slowly around; and perceiving that the audience were satisfied, he said to me, "We must place trust in your word. But remember that it is not merely our personal safety which is in your keeping: our very lives are now held in your hand!"

"God forbid," I exclaimed, enthusiastically, "that I should by any treachery, or even imprudence on my part, become the author of so frightful a catastrophe!"

A sensation of approval greeted these words; and the Chairman then said, "You are at liberty to retire."

I bowed—and retreated towards the door, which one of the members seated nearest hastened to unfasten. I made another bow—this time to the beautiful young lady who was at no great distance; and she returned my salutation with an affable smile, which—while displaying teeth of pearly

whiteness—seemed to express her satisfaction that I should have so well explained the circumstances under which I had been brought into the midst of the Secret Society.

In another minute I was once again in the open street; and as it was now too late to think of visiting Franconi's, I returned to the ducal mansion. Besides, I had no longer any inclination for amusement: I had issued forth from that mansion, an hour back, for the express purpose of diverting my mind from disagreeable and desponding reflections; and heaven knows that I had been led into an adventure which was full well calculated to produce a powerful revulsion of feelings!

When I sought my couch, it was long before sleep visited my eyes. I could not help thinking of that conclave of representatives of all grades and of both sexes, linked together by one common bond of patriotic enthusiasm. All social distinctions were there forgotten: the fashionable gentleman fraternized with the humble working-man—the elegant and well-bred lady treated the fish-fag as a sister; and I thought to myself that if that scene were really an epitome of the great world without, it would be all the better for the principles of true freedom and for the well-being of society. If in my reflections I dwelt upon the presence of the young and lovely Mademoiselle Eugenie at that scene, it was only in wonder and admiration at the enthusiastic fervour and the patriotic strength of mind which could have led a being, whose natural sphere seemed to be a brilliantly-lighted drawing-room, into the midst of stern-resolved and earnest-souled individuals, who, hating tyranny, were adopting the only means in their power to labour for its overthrow. Yes—it was alone in this sense that I thought of Eugenie; and not for a single instant was I traitorous to that devoted affection which I cherished for the charming and well-beloved Annabel.

CHAPTER LXXV.

MONSIEUR LAMOTTE.

The Marquis de Paulin, eldest son and heir of the Duke, was a little past seventeen years of age; and he had been finishing his education at one of the German Universities. He had returned home, as I learnt, a day or two before he was actually expected; and hence the excited suddenness with which Florine had burst into the boudoir to announce his arrival to his mother. He was a youth of exceeding personal beauty—tall and slender—and having a somewhat delicate appearance. His countenance was intelligent; and its expression denoted a high sensibility of feeling—a characteristic which he inherited from the Duchess. He had no pride; but was affable in his manner and amiable in his disposition towards his inferiors as well as to his equals. I learnt from Amelie that he had made marvellous progress in his studies at the University—and indeed, that he had applied himself thereto with an assiduity which had to some little extent impaired his health: but it was hoped that now his education was completed, and he would have ample leisure for recreation and exercise, he would speedily regain his strength. I need hardly add that his mother, who was a woman of such strong feelings, doted upon her first-born: but it may perhaps be as well to specify more emphatically that his father likewise regarded him with true paternal pride and affection. Indeed, while speaking upon the subject, I must in justice to the Duke de Paulin declare that he was much attached to all his children; and if I have not spoken more of the juvenile branches of the family, it is for the simple reason that the incidents of my narrative have travelled in a course which rendered such special mention unneccessary.

Fortunate it appeared to be that the young Marquis de Paulin should have returned home at that particular crisis; inasmuch as it evidently prevented a separation on which the Duchess was previously resolved. The Duke did not ask me whether his wife had questioned me in respect to my visit to the dwelling of Mademoiselle Ligny—either because he fancied that if she had, I should mention to him the fact of my own accord; or else, on the other hand, because he conceived that whatsoever was done in confidence would be regarded in that light by myself.

It was about noon on the day following my adventure with the Secret Society, and I was issuing forth from the mansion to take my accustomed walk, when I was accosted by a fine, tall, handsome-looking man—of middle age and of military appearance—and whom methought I recollected to have seen amongst the conclave the night before. He spoke very good English; and requested to have a few minutes' private conversation with me. We accordingly walked together to a little distance; and on turning into a more secluded street, the Frenchman stopped.

"My business with you," he said, "is of somewhat an unpleasant character: but perhaps you can conjecture what it is?"

"Indeed," I exclaimed, "I am utterly unable to form the remotest surmise."

The gentleman looked at me very hard for a few moments, as if he were at a loss to persuade himself that I was speaking the truth; and then he said, "You last night struck my friend Monsieur Lamotte."

"Ah!" I ejaculated, as a light flashed in unto my mind: and then I burst out into an uncontrollable fit of laughter.

"Sir," said the French gentleman, speaking sternly and drawing himself up in a dignified manner, "it is highly indecorous to make a jest of the business. And, after all, it is really no joking matter."

"Very good, sir," I responded, instantaneously recovering my gravity. "I will treat the affair seriously, since such appears to be your wish: but really I could not for the moment help laughing at the idea that——But perhaps you will be kind enough to explain your object in seeking me?"

"I come on behalf of Monsieur Lamotte," rejoined the Frenchman, "to request that you will name a time and place——"

"Ah!" I interrupted him: "it really is a duel, then, which Monsieur Lamotte intends to provoke?"

"Nothing less, I can assure you, Mr. Wilmot," was the Frenchman's answer. "My friend Monsieur Lamotte seeks satisfaction for the blow which you struck him."

"Might I be permitted," I said, "to inquire what is the social position of Monsieur Lamotte?"

"Were we now at that same place to which you found your way last night," responded the Frenchman, in a low voice and with a significant look, "I should answer that my friend Lamotte is a citizen on an equality with all other Frenchmen: but as we are speaking out of doors, and must for the time being consider everything in reference to existing social usages and distinctions, I reply to your question by informing you that Monsieur Lamotte is an independent gentleman."

"Very good," I said: "Monsieur Lamotte is a gentleman. Now, I think you heard me very frankly confess last evening that I am a valet—or page—or menial—whatever you like to term it—in the service of the Duke de Paulin."

"I know it," answered the French gentleman. "And what then?"

"Simply that there may be no mistake," I rejoined, "as to the difference between Monsieur Lamotte's position and mine own: because in England a gentleman would no more think of challenging a man-servant to a duel——"

"But we are *not* in England!" interrupted the Frenchman. "And even if we were," he continued, "Monsieur Lamotte would pursue precisely the same course in respect to yourself. I know more of you than you are perhaps aware. Indeed, you can scarcely suppose that possessed as you are of the important secret which came to your knowledge last night, some of us whom you saw on the occasion, would fail to make certain inquiries with respect to you. The result of such inquiries is that you came to Paris as a gentleman—that you lived at Meurice's Hotel—that you were robbed by a fellow-countryman to the amount of fifteen hundred pounds—and that you were thereby necessitated to accept a situation in the household of the Duke de Paulin. Consequently, Monsieur Lamotte would be bound to treat you as a gentleman, even if his political and social views did not lead him to regard you as an equal."

"Very good, sir!" I observed. "Then the short and the long of it is, that you wish me to fight with Monsieur Lamotte?"

"Just so," answered the French gentleman: "or else to make the amplest apology in writing, to be duly witnessed by myself."

"The apology, sir, I assuredly shall not concede," was my response; "inasmuch as I consider myself the aggrieved party—and moreover think that your friend Monsieur Lamotte was most righteously chastised."

"In this case," said the French gentleman, "you are prepared to meet Monsieur Lamotte in a duel?"

"If it be any gratification to your friend," I replied, "I cannot of course, under the circumstances, refuse to afford it. I have been a gentleman once—and hope to become so again. But about this duel—I have really no friend to whom I can apply to second me on the occasion."

"That little difficulty can be soon got over," answered the Frenchman, who was evidently prepared to carry out the transaction in a cool, deliberate, and perfectly business-like fashion. "If you will only name the time and place, I will take care that you shall find a gentleman on the spot who will be infinitely delighted to act as your second."

"The gentleman you allude to," I said, "must have somewhat singular tastes as to the particular recreation which constitutes a source of infinite delight. However, be it as you say. As for the place, it is for you to name a convenient one; and as for the time, it must be in the middle part of the day, when I am enabled to dispose of my own leisure."

"How shall you be engaged for the next two or three hours?" inquired the Frenchman.

"I am entirely at your service," was my rejoinder.

"It is now half-past twelve," said the gentleman, consulting his watch: "will you be near the Triumphal Arch at three?"

"Punctually," I replied.

"Good!—it is an arrangement. You will fight with swords, as a matter of course; and I will take care to furnish the weapons—of which, be it understood, you shall have your choice."

Having thus spoken, the French gentleman made me a very polite bow, and walked away. I retraced my steps slowly to the mansion: I was about to fight a duel in which my own life might be lost; but I was determined not to take that of my antagonist. I could not possibly hope to prove superior to him in the use of the sword: for I well knew that all Frenchmen are more or less proficient with that weapon. But if I should find the advantage to be, by any circumstance or accident, on my side, I was firmly resolved not to avail myself of it so far as to inflict a mortal wound. Not for worlds would I have had the death of a fellow-creature resting on my conscience! But I feared that all the advantage would prove to be with my antagonist; and I thought that my life was now probably not worth much.

On arriving at the mansion, I ascended to my chamber, and wrote a long letter to Annabel,—describing all the circumstances which had led to this duel—assuring her that she possessed my devoted love unto the very last—beseeching her to receive as resignedly as possible the tidings of my death—and though recording the hope that she might yet know happiness from other sources in this world, yet expressing the wish that she would now and then bestow a thought upon him who had loved her so tenderly and so well. I could not help shedding tears as I penned this letter: but I wiped them away, resolved to meet the approaching duel with a becoming fortitude. I folded, addressed, and sealed the letter; and locked it up in my box. I then wrote upon a slip of paper, a few words to the effect that such a letter would be found in such a place; and entreating that it might be at once despatched to the post-office. This scrap I put into my pocket, so that if I fell, and in my last moments should be stricken speechless, that final instruction would be found about my person.

My arrangements having been thus completed with the carefulness and deliberation of one who was about to meet death face to face, I again quitted the mansion—and now directed my steps towards the Champs Elysées, at the extremity of which stands the Triumphal Arch. It wanted but a few minutes to three when I reached my destination; and there I found the tall, stout, fashion-

ably dressed gentleman who had stood behind the door to receive the watchword on the preceding evening. At once recognising me, he made a courteous bow; and accosting me, intimated that he had been requested to act as my second in the approaching duel. A cab was waiting at a short distance: we entered it—and the driver urged his horse into a quick pace.

"Beautiful weather," said the gentleman, caressing his chin in as calm and unconcerned a way as if we were bent upon a pleasure excursion. "It is really a lovely day for the season of the year!—quite Spring, although only the middle of March. I suppose you will go and see the grand review in the Champ de Mars to-morrow?"

"To-morrow!" I echoed, with an involuntary sigh: for though I flatter myself I experienced no cowardly feeling on the occasion, yet still I could not help thinking that to-morrow's sun might find me a corpse—stiff, cold, and stark!

"Yes—to-morrow," said my companion, evidently mistaking my meaning, and his ear not catching the sigh. "Have you not heard of it? or did you think it was put off?"

"Yes—I have heard of it," was my response. "But really," I added, "a person in my position ought not to speculate on what he may do to-morrow."

"Ah—true!" said the Frenchman, as if carelessly recollecting what was about to take place. And here in justice to himself, and to the noble nation to which he belonged, I must record my conviction that his conduct on this occasion arose not from sheer heartlessness—but that it was attributable to a natural indifference to serious matters in which life was involved. Indeed, I am certain that if he himself had been the principal instead of the second in the pending duel, he would have treated it with just the same degree of calm and careless indifference,—perhaps ordering his dinner to be got in readiness by a certain hour, and most assuredly pre-arranging in his mind how he should pass the morrow.

There was some little interval of silence, during which he gazed out of the cab window admiring the beauty of the weather; and then turning to me, he said, "I suppose you are a pretty good swordsman, Mr. Wilmot?"

"Indeed," I answered, "I never handled such a weapon in my life."

"Ah! that's a pity," he observed: and then there was another short pause.

"I presume that Monsieur Lamotte is a good swordsman?" I remarked inquiringly.

"Well, not bad," rejoined my companion, as he calmly and comfortably took a pinch of snuff. "Let me see! There was young Bontemps that he pinked very neatly: and then there was an English Milor—one of your nation—that he disabled for six months; and I think, if I recollect right, that when he travelled in Germany about eighteen months ago, there was some Russian baron, with a name as long as your arm, and as unpronounceable as a name can possibly be when it has got a dozen consonants and only a couple of vowels——Ah, to be sure! I do remember!—he laid the Russian on his back in the neatest possible style imaginable. I read the account in the newspapers: it must have been a beautiful sight—a beautiful sight indeed!" and my companion heaved a profound sigh, as if in immitigable regret that he was not there to behold it.

However courageous a man may be, it is certainly no great consolation to hear that the individual with whom he is about to fight a duel, is an expert swordsman, and has already distinguished himself in that respect by killing two antagonists and disabling the third for a period of six months. I could not help thinking that the farther I saw into the affair, the more the chances appeared to be against myself; and I could not repress another sigh as the image of Annabel rose up before me in all the radiance of its preterhuman beauty.

Meanwhile the cab had diverged from the main road—and threading a lane, reached the vicinage of a wood. Here it stopped; and we alighted. My companion leading the way, we penetrated into the wood; and in a few minutes reached an open space,—where I found Monsieur Lamotte coolly leaning against a tree, smoking a cigar. His second—the gentleman who had brought me the challenge—was similarly engaged; and just as we came upon them, they were laughing in an idle, careless manner, no doubt at some jest to which one of them had given utterance. A third gentleman was sitting on the huge trunk of a felled tree, and was deliberately examining a case of instruments which he had open in his hands. I therefore at once concluded that this must be a surgeon, who was present in case his professional services should be needed. On the ground, at Monsieur Lamotte's feet, lay a piece of green baize,—the ominous shape of which indicated plainly enough that it enwrapped the weapons with which the duel was to be fought.

When my companion and myself appeared upon the ground, Lamotte and his second lazily tossed away their cigars; and then the preliminaries commenced. My antagonist threw off his coat, waistcoat, and cravat; and I followed his example—while the two seconds, taking the swords from the green baize wherein they were wrapped sheathless, proceeded to compare their lengths. Their measurement was perfectly the same; and Lamotte's second—holding one in each hand, by the points, so that the flexible blades bent up and down in their metallic elasticity—accosted me and bade me take my choice. I grasped the handle of the one that was nearest: the other was then presented to Lamotte—whose second proceeded to say, "If Mr. Wilmot will yet consent to make an apology, this business need go no farther."

"I certainly can offer no apology," I said: and I was even astonished at the firmness of my own voice. "On the contrary, sir, I repeat the words I uttered to you this forenoon—that I consider myself the aggrieved party."

"In that case," said both the seconds simultaneously, "we must proceed:"—and I saw they for a moment surveyed me with a marked admiration.

My own second took me aside, and inquired whether I had any last instructions to give? I responded that there was a scrap of paper about my person, which, if I fell, would convey my supreme wishes.

"One word, my young friend, before you begin," said my second. "Should circumstances transpire so as to place you in the position of being judicially examined, you will, as a man of honour,

refrain from mentioning *where* the dispute originated?"

"As a matter of course," I rejoined. "Under no circumstances would I betray the secret which I so solemnly pledged myself to retain inviolate!"

My second now shook me by the hand; and I turned to confront my antagonist. Until that instant I had no more idea than a child how to manipulate the weapon with which I was armed: but no sooner did it cross that of my antagonist, than I felt less strange with it—less awkward—less sensible of a complete novelty of position, than I could possibly have hoped or expected. As for my courage, I presume that the reader will not hold me culpable of vanity if I declare that I entertained not the slightest apprehension: indeed, I may almost say that I thought not of actual danger, in the ordinary use of the term—that is, to be inspired by a sense of alarm: I regarded it only as the motive for exerting all my energies to ward it off. I was perfectly cool and collected; and at once perceiving that my antagonist kept his eyes keenly fixed on mine, the thought instinctively struck me that it was to judge therefrom what my proceedings would be;—and this was a hint which I was careful to follow. Now that I can deliberately look back upon that scene, I am astonished at the rapidity with which I learnt my initiatory lesson in the use of arms. I kept my eyes riveted upon the pupils of Lamotte's—caught all their quick glancing—and judged therefrom in a moment in which direction he intended to manipulate his weapon;—at the same time I was incessantly reviewing my own attitude and position, so as to assure myself that I lay not open to a dangerous assault. It is perfectly marvellous how many different things an individual in such a position may think of if he be but calm—and how many varied exigencies and necessities he may bear in his mind. Such was the case with me;

and for the first five minutes I skilfully—yes, I may write the word *skilfully*—warded off every attack.

Hitherto my opponent's movements were slow, cautious, and well-measured: it was evidently his object to ascertain first of all how far my own experience of the sword extended. But soon his proceedings became more rapid; and after a pause of nearly a minute—during which the weapons remained crossed, and he by a slight swaying, leaning, or else inclining back of his body, endeavoured to throw me off my guard by these feints—he all in an instant, quick as the eye can wink, whisked round his weapon and made a desperate thrust at me. I had foreseen this very movement: I knew that he was meditating it; and the swift glistening of his eyes which preceded it, was a sufficiently timeous warning of the moment when it was to be effected. It was the outburst of the thunder following, quick as thought, upon the vivid flash of the lightning, and yet with just sufficient interval between the two as to make one aware of what was coming.

Not more quickly was the thrust made, than it was parried; and as I stepped nimbly aside at the same moment, my weapon, as it whirled round, grazed Lamotte's cheek. The blood spurted forth upon his shirt; and I have no doubt that the sensation of pain was suddenly tingling enough: for it evidently ruffled the temper of my antagonist, hitherto as cool and collected as I myself was. He immediately made an onslaught upon me; and there was a moment when his life was at my mercy: but I had self-possession sufficient to adhere to my previously formed resolve, and to act, so far as circumstances would permit, entirely upon the defensive. His failure to accomplish his aim—added to the poignant smarting of his wound—irritated him all the more; and it was evident that he was quite losing his temper, whereas mine continued perfectly calm. Indeed I can conscientiously say that what I experienced at the time, may be expressed as a cool intrepidity. The weather was somewhat hot, and the sun was shining down upon the open space where the combat was being waged. A thought struck me. I feigned a gradual retreat as Lamotte continued to attack me, until I succeeded in drawing him into such a position that the sunbeams poured full upon his countenance. He at once comprehended that it was a manœuvre on my part; and its success augmented his excitement. He strove to extricate himself from that position: but he could not. He skipped about hither and thither: I retained my post; and as I was acting entirely on the defensive, and he was the assailant, he was constrained to keep the ground to which I had brought him.

Not for a moment did my looks quit his countenance: for even when following the movements of his sword, my range of vision carefully kept within its sphere the eyes of my antagonist. I observed that the perspiration was bursting forth upon his face, until the big drops, issuing from every pore of his forehead, began to trickle into his eyes. He felt all the disadvantage under which he was labouring,—smarting with a wound—and experiencing an increasing dimness of sight with the sunbeams and the perspiration. I could tell what was passing in his mind as easily as if he himself proclaimed aloud in words every successive thought and feeling; and I knew that he was now intent upon a last terrific effort to obtain the victory. His attack was violent, but still marked with a sufficient degree of skilfulness, notwithstanding his disadvantages of temper, sun, and sweat, to put me to the severest test. Our weapons clashed—they sent forth sparks—they seemed to twine for a moment with each other like metallic serpents: quick as the eye can wink they were asunder again—in the next half-dozen moments I had to parry as many thrusts: but still my coolness prevailed against Lamotte's increasing excitement, and he received another wound, accidentally inflicted by me, upon the left shoulder. His shirt in that part was in a moment crimsoned with his blood: he made one more tremendous effort to change the fortune of the conflict:—with the swiftness of lightning my weapon whisked round, and with such force too that his own sword was sent spinning and singing through the air, to the opposite extremity of the open space which was the scene of the combat.

The moment that this was done, I turned the point of my weapon towards the ground, and calmly awaited the next phase, whatsoever it might be, of the afternoon's proceedings. Lamotte turned abruptly towards his own second—while mine, coming up to me, rapped out a tremendous oath in the French language, as he seized me by the hand, vowing that my conduct was as admirable as it was generous. Indeed, methought that by the pleasure he evidently experienced at being present on this occasion, he was completely indemnified for having missed that "beautiful sight" in Germany when the Russian Baron was laid so pleasantly and comfortably on his back. The two seconds now proceeded to converse together for a few moments,—the result being that it was announced to me that if I myself was satisfied, Monsieur Lamotte was anxious to grasp the hand of one whom he considered to be a noble-minded antagonist. I of course responded in the affirmative: hands were accordingly shaken: and the surgeon proceeded to examine my late foeman's wounds. That on the shoulder was far more severe than the one upon the countenance: but neither was at all dangerous. The blood was soon stanched—plaister and bandages were used—and now the moment for departure came. Monsieur Lamotte begged that I would become his guest at dinner at his own abode,—adding that in a glass of champagne all ill-feeling should be effectually drowned. I assured him that I had never harboured any such sentiment towards him; and I declined the invitation, on the plea that my presence would be needed at the Duke de Paulin's mansion—but in reality because I could not bear the idea of following up with an orgie the solemn scene, where life and death were involved, which had just taken place. My second volunteered to convey me back into Paris: but previous to our starting, he promised Lamotte to be with him at his dinner-hour. Hands were again shaken; and I accompanied my second towards the vehicle, which was waiting for us at the spot where we had left it.

"You acquitted yourself in splendid style," said the French gentleman, as we were driven in the direction of the Champs Elysées. "Do you really mean to say that you never handled a weapon before?"

"Never," was my answer.

"And all the time you meant to act only on the defensive?"

"That was my sole object; and the two wounds which I inflicted, were completely accidental."

"It was a beautiful sight!" said my companion; "and I would not have missed it for all the world. I really quite envied you!"

"May I hope," I said, "that some means can be adopted to prevent this affair from finding its way into the newspapers?"

"Make yourself perfectly easy on that head," answered my companion: "we are all of us too anxious to avoid the possibility of the little transaction being traced to the place and the circumstances in which it originated, not to keep silent upon the matter. Ah! I wish you were a Frenchman, and that you entertained the same principles as ourselves—how we should delight to have you as a member of our society!"

"If it be not indiscreet," I said, "may I inquire whether there be many such associations?"

"A brave man can always be trusted," responded my companion; "and therefore I shall not hesitate to answer any question which you may put to me. In respect to the first, then, I have to inform you that the whole of France is parcelled out into districts,—every district having its Central Association, governing the proceedings of all the inferior local committees. Paris itself is in a similar way divided into sections; and the Central Society, into the midst of which you found your way last night, rules the proceedings not only of the Paris sections, but likewise of all the district associations in the provinces."

"And might I ask," I said, "what are your objects?"

"The overthrow of Louis-Philippe's dynasty and the establishment of a Republic. But do not for a moment imagine," continued my companion, now speaking with a gravity which showed that, with all his air of careless indifference, he could approach serious subjects with a becoming sedateness and a statesman-like deliberation,—"do not for a moment imagine that our aims embrace the assassination of the King. Those frequent attempts which have been made upon his life, had not the slightest connexion with the veritable republican party which has been organized in the manner that I have already described to you. No—we loathe and abominate such foul and bravo-like deeds; and though prepared to fight for liberty in a legitimate manner, whenever the opportunity shall present itself, we war not with the assassin's knife or bullet."

I was much pleased with this intelligence, conveyed as it was in a manner which stamped it with genuine and unmistakable sincerity. My companion proceeded to give me further explanations in respect to the organization of the Secret Societies, especially the one to which I had been so singularly introduced on the preceding evening. It was from these explanations that I was enabled, in the preceding chapter, to glance at the mode in which the various grades were represented in that conclave. I was perfectly astonished at learning how extensive, how minute, how intricate, and yet how well conducted were the ramifications of that perfect network of conspiracy which thus spread itself all over France; and I could not help asking whether it was not possible for Government spies to introduce themselves into the midst of the Secret Societies?

"Spies, my young friend!" exclaimed my companion: "we are inundated with spies! It is calculated that every tenth man in France is a spy. We met to the number of forty last night, and we therefore calculate that there were no less than four spies amongst us."

"Indeed!" I exclaimed, in perfect amazement: "then of what use is a watchword?"

"To keep the meetings as exclusive as we can—and to compel those who enter the society, to go through certain forms which prevent us from being more completely inundated with spies than we really are."

"But if there were spies at your meeting last night," I said, "why were you so anxious to keep secret the exact origin of this duel?"

"Because, if it become flagrantly public that a Secret Society meets at any particular place, the Government must at once interfere—the police burst in—and numerous arrests are effected."

"And why does not the Government order the police to burst into every place of meeting and arrest all present?"

"For the simple reason, my young friend," was the Frenchman's response, "that if such a step were taken to-night, a fourth part of the nation would be in prison to-morrow morning. The King knows what is going on: but he does not adopt any measure which would have the effect of revealing to the world the immensity of this conspiracy, inasmuch as it would tell its own tale, and prove the frightfulest exposure of his diabolic tyranny. Where there is despotism, there are always secret plottings; and the amount of the despotism is to be judged by the extent of these ramifications to upset it. The King is therefore morally compelled to tolerate what he knows to be going on,—at the same time hugging the hope that as our proceedings are all conveyed to him by means of his spies, he shall be enabled to frustrate and foil our projects as he has hitherto done."

"Then, of what use are your meetings," I inquired, "since all that you do is reported to the authorities?"

"Our sole object at present," was my companion's answer, "is to maintain the organization of our partisans."

"Might I inquire," I said, "who is that Mademoiselle Eugenie whom I saw last night?"

"Ah! my young friend," exclaimed the Frenchman, with a smile, "has her beauty made an impression upon your soul?"

"It is full well calculated to do so," I responded, "were it not that my affections are already engaged to another. But it is impossible to behold a beautiful young creature such as Mademoiselle Eugenie is, casting her destinies amidst deep political projects, without being more or less interested on her behalf."

"Mademoiselle Eugenie Delacour," rejoined my companion, "lost her parents in her infancy, and has been adopted by an old uncle—her deceased father's brother—who is a wealthy banker. He is so completely immersed in his affairs, that he does not notice his niece's frequent absences from home. She is one of the most enthusiastic of our female partisans; and I can assure you that we

have many of the gentler sex who entertain our principles, enter into our views, and share our hopes. You have seen that Mademoiselle Eugenie is beautiful: I could inform you that her character is as stainless as her loveliness is bewitching. She enters into our assembly with the full confidence that no libertine look will threaten her with insult; and though accustomed to shine in her uncle's splendid saloons—though riding in her carriage—and though the acknowledged heiress of his great wealth, yet she takes her turn along with the rest to perform the part of doorkeeper when the bell rings. Everybody belonging to the society admires and esteems her; and you saw last night the influence which she possesses when she interposed on the occasion of your being surrounded by the irritated group. Ah! by the bye," added my companion, "I could tolerably well understand how it was that the name of Ligny produced a certain effect upon you: for it has come to my knowledge that the Duke de Paulin's intimacy with a lady of that name has proved the source of much unhappiness between himself and his wife. Hence was it that I whispered something to this effect in our venerable president's ear; and you remember the observation he made in consequence thereof."

While we were thus conversing, the cab had entered the Champs Elysées; and I requested to be put down at the nearest convenient point to the ducal mansion. The French gentleman strove to induce me to change my mind in respect to Monsieur Lamotte's invitation,—assuring me that I should receive a hearty welcome. But I still requested to be excused, for the reason I have already mentioned,—although I did not specify it to my companion. He shook me warmly by the hand at parting; and I hastened to the mansion.

I can scarcely explain the feeling of joy with which, on ascending to my chamber, I tore up the letter I had penned to Annabel; and I looked back with astonishment at the ordeal through which I had so successfully passed. It appeared to me more like a dream than a reality; and I mentally breathed a prayer of thankfulness to heaven for having brought me safely and unhurt through an adventure in which my life might have been sacrificed, or in which I might have received a wound whose mark I should have carried to the grave.

CHAPTER LXXVI.

EUGENIE.

A MONTH passed away without any incident worthy of mention; and one afternoon, as I was walking in the Champs Elysées, I beheld the youthful Marquis de Paulin hastening along at a little distance. He did not notice me: he was evidently bent upon keeping some appointment, or had some special object in view. I have already said that he was a young man of great personal beauty—tall, slender, and delicate: he dressed with what may be termed an elegant simplicity, in which the ordinances of fashion were modulated to the requirements of good taste.

It was in the vicinage of shady avenues that I thus beheld him on the occasion to which I refer; and as I followed him with my eyes, I saw that he entered one of those avenues. I walked on in the path which I was pursuing; and, my thoughts gradually flowing into another channel, I forgot the circumstance of having beheld the Marquis. The weather was beautiful—the main road in the Champs Elysées was thronged with equipages and equestrian parties, just as Hyde Park is in the fashionable season. Half-an-hour had perhaps passed since I had observed the youthful Marquis de Paulin; and sated with the contemplation of the gay and elegantly dressed throng, I turned aside to seek a more secluded part of the Champs Elysées. I had fallen into one of those moods when I wished to reflect upon the incidents of the past and the hopes of the future, —to be alone as it were with the image of my beloved Annabel. In this strain was I meditating —getting farther and farther away from the resort of fashion—when my steps mechanically led me into an avenue where the embowering trees, meeting over-head, formed a grateful shade: for the branches had all put forth the verdure of an early Spring, it being now the month of April.

While proceeding along, and still reflecting on matters intimately regarding myself, I observed two persons at some little distance a-head; and then almost immediately a turning in the road hid them from my view. I continued my way; and on reaching the spot where they had thus disappeared, I suddenly came upon them, as it were; for they were now standing still, evidently engaged in deep and earnest discourse. Who should they be, but the youthful Marquis de Paulin and Mademoiselle Eugenie Delacour!—the latter dressed with an elegant simplicity, and looking still more beautiful, if possible, than when I had seen her at the secret meeting-place; for she had now upon the cheeks a heightened colour, which deepened into a blush as I thus so suddenly made my appearance.

I was instantaneously smitten with the unpleasant sense of intrusion; and being thrown as it were into embarrassment, I was about to retreat, —when Mademoiselle Delacour, recovering her own self-possession, made me a courteous bow, as if dealing with an equal. I raised my hat, alike to herself and the Marquis; and continued my way without once glancing behind until I reached a diverging road, into which I turned. I had no doubt, from the little I had seen, that the young couple were lovers. The deep and earnest conversation in the midst of which I had surprised them—the tell-tale blush upon Eugenie's damask cheeks — and the confused look which I had likewise noticed on the part of the Marquis,—all appeared to proclaim that fact. But was this love, then, kept secret? Evidently so!—for on the very face of it, the interview was a stolen one. And yet the son and heir of the wealthy Duke de Paulin might justly aspire to the hand of the rich banker's niece: indeed it was to be presumed that the banker himself would only feel too much flattered by seeing his young relative form so eligible an alliance. Perhaps it was because the Marquis himself was so young—indeed a mere boy of only seventeen and a half—that he did not dare mention his love to his parents. And did he know that the object of that love was so deeply

implicated in political conspiracy?—was he even aware of what her real sentiments were in respect to Royalty and Republicanism? Methought not: for the Paulin family were devoted to monarchical institutions: indeed they belonged to the aristocracy of the old *regime*,—regretting the downfall of the elder Bourbons, and looking with a sort of dismay upon the monarchy of the middle classes as typified in the person of Louis-Philippe.

I did not see the Marquis de Paulin any more for the rest of that day: but happening to meet him on the following morning in the great hall of the mansion, I was struck by his looks. It appeared to me as if they indicated a profound melancholy, blended with a certain degree of excitement: for the countenance was more than usually pale, and there was a restless glitter in the eyes. He did not notice me until I was just about to pass him: then he stopped suddenly short—flung upon me a peculiar look—and seemed as if about to say something under the impulse of the moment. I too stopped short, as a matter of course: but he evidently thought better of what he was at first about to do—and passed abruptly on. When I was again alone, I wondered to myself what that singular conduct could possibly mean; but all in a moment a light flashed in unto my brain. That bow which Eugenie had bestowed upon me—that salutation of mingled friendliness and gracefulness, as if recognising an acquaintance whom she chose to treat as an equal, though knowing him to be a menial——yes, here doubtless was the solution of the mystery! I comprehended it all now: the young Marquis had inquired how she came to be acquainted with me—she had not dared tell him—and hence his annoyance, his bewilderment, and the sudden impulse which had prompted him to question me when we thus met. I could full easily picture to myself the vexation he must experience: I was scarcely vain enough to think of jealousy as entering into the contexture of his sentiments;—and yet on the other hand I knew that love is jealous even when a Marquis and a menial may be concerned.

A week passed away, during which I availed myself of every opportunity to study the countenance of the youthful Theobald—for this was the christian name of the Marquis de Paulin. I observed, with a real pain, that his melancholy deepened: but when we met, he no longer showed any sign of wishing to speak to me, whatever he might have inwardly felt. It was at the expiration of this week that I received, by the post, a letter the address of which was evidently written in a feigned hand—for it differed much from the penmanship inside. This letter was in the elegant writing of a well educated female; and the contents were brief, as well as anonymous. They were simply to the effect that a person whom I saw at a certain place, and on a certain occasion, when I heard the name of *Ligny* pronounced, desired a few minutes' private conversation with me,—and begging me to be at a particular spot in the Champs Elysées at four o'clock in the afternoon of that same day.

I had no doubt in my mind that this billet emanated from Eugenie Delacour; and that its object bore reference to the little incident on which I had already speculated: namely, the gracious bow of recognition which she had bestowed upon me. I felt that I could safely and conscientiously attend to such an appointment, without proving in the slightest degree traitorous to my allegiance towards Annabel,—inasmuch as on the one hand Eugenie's affections were evidently centred in another, and my own had been by no means unsettled by her beauty. Therefore, punctual to the hour was I at the spot indicated in the note: it was a secluded one, remote from the fashionable resort, and at no very great distance from the avenue in which I had seen Eugenie and the Marquis together a week back. As I had expected, it *was* Mademoiselle Delacour who had penned the note: for she speedily joined me at that place. As she approached, I beheld the colour coming and going in rapid transitions upon her beautiful countenance: she evidently felt all the inconvenience of the step which she had taken,—a step to which she nevertheless no doubt found herself driven by circumstances of a more than ordinary character, so that their very imperiousness superseded the existence of impropriety in the proceeding.

"You must think it strange," she said, addressing me in the English language, which she spoke with perfect fluency—for she was highly accomplished,—"that I should have ventured upon a proceeding which at the first glance you may consider most indelicate."

"No, mademoiselle," I responded; "not for a moment do I so interpret your proceeding; and it may save you some embarrassment if I declare that I already fathom your motive."

"Indeed!" she said, with a renewed blush and a half-subdued sigh. "And yet I am at a loss——"

"You may speak frankly to me, mademoiselle," I observed, perceiving that she hesitated: "for I hope and trust that I am a young man of honour, and with a due appreciation of delicate feelings. Will you, however, allow me to hint my suspicion that there has been some little misunderstanding in a certain quarter?"

"It is so," was her modestly given answer. "You understand, then," she continued, "that the Marquis de Paulin and myself are——I mean that our affections," she hesitatingly added, "are mutually engaged? Oh, I am very unhappy! I dared not write to you at first, as I thought of doing: but at length I made up my mind;—for I knew you to be a man of honour—I felt assured that I could confide in you, and that I might ask you to assist me in the cruel embarrassment in which I am placed!"

The tears trickled down the cheeks of the beautiful Eugenie as she thus spoke; and the fair young creature who was so resolutely nerved and who displayed such strength of mind under the influence of her patriotic enthusiasm, was melted, beneath the far different influence of love, into all the softness that is characteristic of her sex.

"Rest assured, mademoiselle," I answered, as I profoundly compassionated her, "that whatsoever I can do to serve you, shall be cheerfully performed."

"I knew that I was not mistaken in my estimate of your character," replied the young lady. "I failed not to observe the mingled magnanimity and dignity of your conduct when in a certain

place and on a certain occasion; for if you were ready to resent the injurious treatment which you experienced at the hands of the hasty Lamotte, you were frank in your replies to the chairman and generous in pledging yourself to an inviolable secrecy. I have heard too of the duel into which you were most unjustifiably dragged; and I know how bravely you acquitted yourself. All these circumstances led me to form a particular estimate of your character; and therefore did I make up my mind to solicit the present interview."

"I feel flattered, mademoiselle, by the kind opinion you have formed of me; and I shall endeavour to deserve it. Indeed, I fear that I am more or less the cause of that misunderstanding to which I have already alluded, and which you have admitted to exist. I was grateful for the recognition you bestowed upon me the other day: but had you treated me as a perfect stranger, I should only have considered that you were acting with discretion and prudence."

"No, Mr. Wilmot," answered Eugenie; "I could not have been guilty of such ingratitude. I have not forgotten that when the venerable president informed you that all our lives were in your hand,—you, with an enthusiastic fervour, invoked heaven to forbid that either by treachery or imprudence you could ever compromise us. If therefore I had even foreseen that the recognition—which was one of grateful friendship—that I bestowed upon you when we met a week back, must be inevitably followed the very next moment by the completest rupture between the Marquis and myself,—rest assured that I should not have treated you as a stranger."

"Every additional word you speak, mademoiselle," I said, "renders it all the more imperious that I should serve you to the extent of my power. The Marquis de Paulin was doubtless surprised that you should bestow upon me that kind and affable recognition: he has questioned you—and you have been unable to answer him. Is it not so?"

"It is," rejoined Mademoiselle Delacour: and then she added, with a becoming maidenly dignity and with a lady-like confidence, "It is not that any feeling so mean as jealousy has entered into his heart—because jealousy implies suspicion, and I should at once repudiate a love that had suspicion mixed up with it: but it is that a certain degree of mystery seems to envelop the circumstance—and it naturally troubles the Marquis. I dare not enlighten him by an avowal of the whole truth; and it is not in my nature to condescend to a falsehood. You are aware that I am bound by an oath to maintain the veil of secrecy over whatsoever transpires in the midst of the association to which I belong; and that I dare not even mention its existence except to any one whom I may have the reasonable hope of obtaining as a member. But even apart from that oath, not for an instant could I bring myself to be guilty of any treacherous allusion to a matter so deeply concerning the interests and the lives of others. No—perish love, rather than that honour should be lost!"

"I perfectly well comprehend your scruples and your feelings, mademoiselle," I said: "and if you will only tell me in which way I can possibly serve your interests, you shall find me most anxious to relieve you from your perplexity and embarrassment."

"I can scarcely say that I have any positively settled plan in my mind," answered Eugenie. "I felt so unhappy—I could not bear to contemplate the pensive looks of the Marquis de Paulin—I was almost driven to despair—and it was with the faint hope that you yourself might possibly suggest some means of easing his mind and reasonably accounting for the fact of our acquaintance, that I at length resolved on consulting you. Perhaps, too, I might have entertained the idea ——But no matter! let me pursue another topic. When the Marquis has questioned me upon the subject, I have been compelled to do my best to turn the discourse into another channel—to laugh it off—to start as it were suddenly into a sportive, playful mood—to do anything, in short, rather than commit myself to an actual untruth, or be led into an avowal of the secret which I have sworn to keep."

"Ah! now that you have given me these explanations," I exclaimed, "I shall better know how to shape my conduct towards the Marquis. You perhaps are aware that I came to Paris as a gentleman—that I had ample funds at my command—and that while at Meurice's Hotel, I mingled with the genteel company there. May I not take an opportunity of casually hinting to the youthful Marquis that I met you in the society of some English family whom I visited at the time?"

"It is generous of you to make such a proposition, Mr. Wilmot," answered the young lady gravely; "but I cannot consent that you should condescend to a falsehood on my behalf."

"Then what is to be done?" I inquired. "Have you no idea—no plan——"

"There is——yes, there is an idea which has flitted through my mind on more occasions than one," answered Eugenie, hesitatingly and timidly, —"an idea suggestive of a means which would not merely clear up this mystery to the satisfaction of the Marquis, but would accomplish still loftier objects and render him all the more deserving of my heart's devoted love."

"Explain yourself, mademoiselle," I said: and methought that I had a slight inkling of her project as I awaited the words which were next to issue from her lips.

"Oh! dare I explain myself?—dare I propound such an idea to you? But you are generous and kind——Oh! if you could possibly induce him to accompany you to the next meeting of our association!" added the young lady, with a sudden access of enthusiasm. "Oh, to have him embrace the same principles as those which I cherish, and in which I glory—what happiness would it be! He is endowed with a high intelligence—he himself is fervid and enthusiastic—it requires but to understand freedom truly, in order to love it!"

"But cannot *you*, mademoiselle, without any violation of your oath, speak to him of these subjects and gradually lead him on to the comprehension of them?"

"Alas!" responded Eugenie mournfully, "I fear that if he heard such syllables flowing from my lips, he would deem them unmaidenly—he would be shocked before he had time to hear me to the end. Once or twice indeed, within this last week, have I began to touch on the subject;

and he has regarded me with an astonishment that has compelled me to desist. But if you could possibly engage him in conversation, and induce him to accompany you to one of our meetings on what is termed a *lecture night*, he would hear speeches calculated to electrify every nerve and thrill through every vein!"

"But I, mademoiselle, am not a member of the Secret Society; and therefore could not obtain admission."

"Yes—on the lecture-night admission may be obtained by the simple knowledge of the pass-word: for no secret business is transacted on those evenings:—and moreover, it is of course taken for granted that no member will communicate the pass-word unless it be to individuals who are friendly disposed or who can be trusted. And remember, Mr. Wilmot, that by appearing at the meeting, *you* do not pledge yourself to the adoption of our principles——"

"Put out of the question, mademoiselle, all considerations on my account. I have promised to serve you—and I shall do so with cheerfulness and with readiness. The only difficulty will be—menial as I am—to enter into conversation with the youthful Marquis: but accident may possibly favour me in this respect."

"Oh, you know not how grateful I am," exclaimed Eugenie, "for this promise that you have given! It would be the happiest moment of my life in which I beheld the cheeks of the Marquis glowing with enthusiasm, and his eyes lighting up with new fires, as his ear should drink in the fervid sentiments flowing from the lips of freedom's champions. On the third evening hence, there will be a lecture-meeting: it commences at nine o'clock; and the pass-word for the current week is *Liberté*."

"I will do my best," I answered, "to bring the Marquis to that meeting. But if he behold you there the moment he enters the room, and *before* the oratory of impassioned eloquence shall have wrought upon him that effect which you in your sanguine enthusiasm anticipate——"

"I will watch him unseen," interrupted Eugenie; "and when my heart tells me that a chord hitherto unknown is vibrating in his own breast—that chord which alone thrills to the talismanic sound of freedom's eloquence—will I come forth from my place of concealment: I will seat myself by his side—and all will be revealed!"

We now parted,—Mademoiselle Delacour previously expressing renewed thanks for the readiness with which I entered into her project; and I retraced my way to the ducal mansion, marvelling at her enthusiasm, and scarcely less wondering how I was to accomplish the part which I had undertaken. The youthful Marquis, though affable to his inferiors when thrown in direct contact with them, had never any occasion to address himself to me; and therefore I felt all the difficulty of taking so bold—indeed, so obtrusive and unseemly a step, as to initiate a conversation with him. Still I did not despair: for I had often found that when I was bent upon the achievement of any particular object, accident favoured my views.

And so I believe it is in large things as well as in little,—that our aspirations seldom exceed that which we intuitively feel ourselves competent to perform—and that when the humble struggler with the world keeps his gaze steadily fixed upon the attainment of wealth or position, it is simply from an inward conviction that what he grasps at is within his reach, however remote its ultimate attainment may be. It is the same too in respect to the man pushing his fortunes on a larger scale, as illustrated in the case of the Corsican who went to France to ask for bread in return for the service of his sword, and who even in the very earliest part of his career aspired to empire because he had that within his soul which made him feel that he could achieve empire for himself.

END OF VOLUME I.