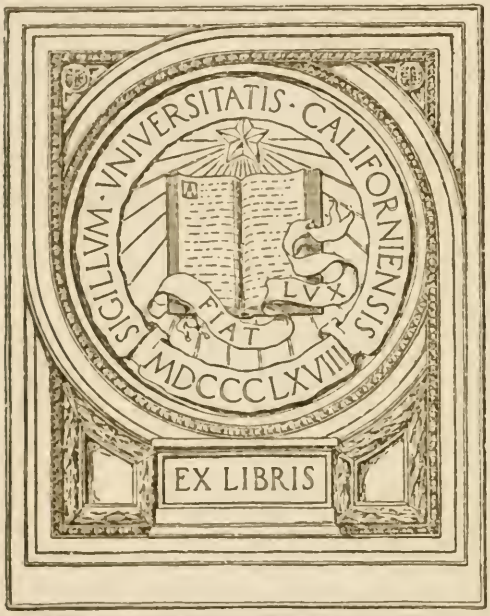

LADY-BIRD.

A TALE.

☞ The Author of this work gives notice that she reserves to herself the right of translating it.

LADY-BIRD.

A TALE.

BY

LADY GEORGIANA FULLERTON,

AUTHOR OF "ELLEN MIDDLETON," &c.

"With caution judge of possibility;
Things thought unlikely, e'en impossible,
Experience often shows us to be true."

SHAKESPEARE.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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LADY-BIRD.

CHAPTER I.

"A prince can make a belted knight,
A marquis, duke, and a' that,
But an honest man's aboon his might,
Guid faith! he mauna' fa' that.
For a' that and a' that,
Their dignities and a' that,
The pith o' sense, and pride o' worth
Are higher ranks than a' that."

BURNS.

"Virtue and knowledge are endowments greater
Than nobleness and riches; careless heirs
May the two latter darken and expand;
But immortality attends the former,
Making man a god."

SHAKESPEARE.

WEEKS and months passed away, and nothing worthy of remark disturbed the even tenor of Gertrude's life. She went once or twice to Woodlands, but the Apleys were often away, and none of them except Mark seemed particularly

anxious to keep up the acquaintance. Perhaps they had been alarmed at his evident admiration of her, and did not wish to encourage any further intimacy between them. Whenever he was at home he contrived to meet her in her walks, and to interchange a few words with her. Sometimes, when his manner was particularly eager, it occurred to her how easily, by a little encouragement, she might bring him to propose to her, and what a change would thus be brought about in her destiny; but it was never more than a passing thought. Her romantic admiration for Adrien d'Arberg forbade her entertaining it; and though she liked these brief interviews, and her manner did not by any means deter Mark from seeking them, yet one of the "fruits of virtue" which grew out of that sentiment was a reserve in encouraging attentions, which doubtless, as far as they went, were by no means disagreeable to her.

But this very reserve increased Mark's

admiration. At the breakfast he had been fascinated by her beauty and amused by her cleverness, which he did not quite understand, though it charmed him like a firework or a French play: but when he met her now there was something more thoughtful in her face, more gentle in her manner; and this became her so well, and gave him such an interest about her, that he would sometimes sit on his horse at the gate of Lifford Grange, gazing with a wistful look at her retreating figure, as she walked up the sepulchral avenue of yew trees towards that house into which no strangers ever entered, and which appeared to him almost like an enchanted palace.

Gertrude had amused herself one day by telling him a wonderful ghost-story about it, which made his hair stand on end, but which he liked so much to hear her relate that almost every time he met her, he used to begin again with, "Now you know I don't believe that story you told me the other day;" and each time she added some new detail

which made him exclaim, "O now come, that is too bad—you don't expect me to believe that?" But he went away for a long time that winter, and Gertrude missed him much, for it was impossible not to like to have her path crossed by such a kind smile, and such cheerful words. His good humour was like sunshine, and his merry laugh had grown familiar to her as something that belonged to those lanes and commons where she so often met him—as the smell of the gorse, or the song of the birds.

She still went often to the cottage at Stonehouseleigh, and now had a new and powerful interest in talking to Maurice. She asked him a thousand questions about the places where he had been with M. d'Arberg. During the years that he had spent with him in Rome, he had been engaged in writing that work which had so deeply interested her, and every minute detail concerning it she listened to with avidity.

"We lived at that time," Maurice told her, "in

an apartment near the quattre Fontane, and M. d'Arberg used to write in a little garden full of violets, with a trellis of lemon-trees on one side, and a view over Rome on the other. I often looked at him as he sat at work, and thought what a good model he would have afforded a painter for a St. John writing his Gospel, or a St. Thomas Aquinas his Summa: he never looked impatient or anxious, but used to write those eloquent pages so composedly and fluently that I could almost have fancied I saw his guardian angel by his side dictating to him; and if anybody interrupted him—some tiresome acquaintance, or some begging friar—he would put down his pen, and listen to them with a countenance as undisturbed as if he had nothing else in the world to occupy or engross him. When I look back to the time I spent with that man, I can hardly believe in the perfection of his character,—so perfect, just because it had so little pretension."

"He must be, however, a person to be afraid

of," Gertrude said; "goodness and cleverness combined would always be somewhat awful, I should think,"

"Well, I never felt that with him. He is so very indulgent,—not merely that he will not say severe things, but one feels sure he does not think them."

"Yet in his writings he lashes with merciless severity certain modes of action and of thought."

"Ay, but no one ever made a wider distinction between the sin and the sinner, the error that blinds a man, and the man whom error blinds; he made a brilliant campaign in Algeria some years ago, and was as distinguished by his valour at that time as he has been since by his literary labours."

"And what made him leave the army?"

"He had only entered it for a particular purpose. The first year that he went into society at Paris he happened to defend the character of one of his friends with so much warmth, that the

person who had slandered that friend conceived himself insulted, and called him out. He refused to fight, but the very next day proceeded to join the African army, where he established a reputation which raised him above the suspicion of cowardice. A splendid career was open to him, but he had no vocation for a military life, and retired from it as soon as a peace was concluded. He was adored by the troop he commanded—indeed I have never met with any one who has had any intercourse with him who could resist the influence of his character and of his manners. Have you read the life he wrote of Queen Christina of Sweden?"

"O no; have you got it?"

"I am afraid not. I went with him into the Tyrol, just at the time he was busy with it. He wished to see the Franciscan Church at Inspruck, which is connected with her history. I shall never forget his admiration of the wonderful tomb of the Emperor Maximilian, in that

glorious church. Those twenty-eight colossal bronze figures keeping their silent unremitting watch over the monument of the great warrior. How he liked the Tyrol! There was something so congenial to his feelings, so akin to his own character, in the strength and simplicity of its people; in the intimate connection between the highest beauties of nature, the devotional spirit of the inhabitants, and the pervading influence of religion, which seems there to impregnate the very air—to turn every hill into a Calvary, every valley into an oratory, and every church-yard into a garden. We had been staying at Venice, the city of my idolatry, the enchantress of the earth, the goddess of the sea; beauty bewildering every sense, music floating on the breeze, romance hovering over each stone of its palaces, each ripple of its wave, every stroke of the oar, every turn of the lagoons. I still remembered its moonlight nights, its noonday breezes; the Byzantine churches with their eastern

cupolas, their mosaic pavements, their marble landing-places; the gentle splash of the water as we neared them in the gondolas; the musical cry of the gondoliers, as we shot swiftly round the corners; the soft sweet accents of the Venetian tongue; the luxurious repose of the body; the dreaming activity of the excited imagination,—it was all vivid in my mind as an Eastern story just perused, as a fairy tale realised; and when M. d'Arberg pointed out to me one night the moon shining coldly and sternly on one of the snowy peaks of the Alps, while the forests of fir beneath were lying in darkness, except where a solitary lamp (an earthly star as he called it) was burning before a way-side sanctuary, half way down the mountain, I could not forbear exclaiming, 'Give me back St. Mark and its piazza, the sky of Italy and the moon of Venice.' He smiled and said, 'I am afraid, Maurice, that you would have preferred the enchantress, Armida, to the lady in Comus.'"

Gertrude's eyes were riveted on Maurice, and she longed for him to talk on. He saw those eyes and their expression; at that moment there flashed across him something that was at once like a fear and a hope. How many ideas the brain can hold in one instant, and what different emotions agitate the heart at the same time! He thought of their childish sports in the forest; he thought of the lessons he had given her—of her appearance at the cottage the day that her father had dismissed him—of the way in which she had come and stood by his side, when he was taken ill at the Woodlands' breakfast; and now, how often she took occasion to stop at the cottage, and to linger there in conversation with him: and the expression of her eyes just then! There was a light in them he had never seen before, and which seemed to put him beside himself. Was it possible that she loved him? It was a sensation of rapture mixed with a thousand misgivings and apprehensions.

His safety, his peace, had consisted hitherto in the utter hopelessness of the sentiment, the dream, the passion—whichever it was—that he had conceived; but in the light of that moment's wild hope he saw his own poverty, he saw duty, honour, and Mary arrayed before him in despairing distinctness. He was one of those men who have the love but not the courage of virtue. That he had hitherto felt her to be utterly out of his reach had been almost a satisfaction to him, for he fancied there was neither danger nor guilt in worshipping her at a distance. That could be no injury to her, and no treachery to Mary. But this new hope, this sudden suspicion that she was not indifferent to the homage which his eyes and voice and actions had involuntarily paid her,—was it bliss or was it pain? There she was with that fatal beauty which had so long enthralled him. Ay, he had often before compared her to Italy, and applied to her loveliness that startling epithet. There she was, resting her face on her

hand, and bidding him tell her more about his travels, more about M. d'Arberg and himself, and their life at Rome and Venice, their walks on the sea-shore, and their communings by the way, and each time there was a pause recurring to the same subject.

Another person in that room was listening and watching also,—

> "One who had poured her heart's rich treasure forth,
> And been unrepaid for its priceless worth."

Whether Gertrude was consciously or unconsciously stealing away from her the love which had been the sunshine of her life she knew not, and had the virtue not to decide; but the effect was the same. "She is breaking my happiness to pieces," was Mary's feeling; "perhaps only as a child might destroy a flower of great price which had fallen in its way. My *all* can be to her but the plaything of the hour, and yet she uses it as such, and seems not to know what she is doing. O Maurice, my

beloved one! You are not made for trials; you are not fitted for conflicts with the world and your own heart. I might have stood between you and many dangers; but this one nothing that I can do may avert. It is as if you were sinking into a gulf, or falling over a precipice, and I was forced to stand by and see you perish, with my hands tied and my mouth gagged. Could I but make you feel that if you love her she will break your heart!"

Always after Gertrude's visits Maurice was more affectionate than usual to Mary, and there was a refinement in the pain that this gave her. It seemed as if the very source of her happiness was poisoned, for these mute apologies were more grievous to her than unkindness would have been. Yet her manner never betrayed the least irritation; only there was a grave tenderness in her countenance quite different from the beaming look and playful shake of the head with which she had hitherto received his assurances of affection.

The winter passed by and the spring also. Maurice went to London for some months, where he gave lessons and played at concerts with considerable success, but the tone of his letters to Mary was restless and dissatisfied. It seemed as if he could neither stay at nor away from Stonehouseleigh with any comfort. He complained sometimes that she did not urge him to come back, that she did not write to him often enough. He spoke of his own health in a tone of depression, and of London with abhorrence. Mary's trial increased, for now she hardly knew what was her duty, what was best for him. Any sacrifice she was ready to make, but feared to take any step either backwards or forwards. It seemed to her best to wait and to watch, and Heaven knows there is often more suffering in this than in any decision, but of that she never thought.

In the course of the summer Edgar Lifford came home: he was a handsome and amiable youth, with a great deal of information and a

little pedantry. Gertrude—who was very glad of his return—laughed at him, and he did not resent it, but treated her with great condescension, and explained to her many things which he supposed she did not understand. Great pains had been taken with him, and he had had admirable instructors, but the essential part of the intellect was wanting, although he might have been said to have good parts, according to the strict letter of that phrase, for his memory and his aptitude for learning were remarkable. There was nothing he could not, and I had almost said, *did* not commit to memory. He was almost too young to be prosy, but he promised much in that line, especially if that shocking opinion be correct, that it is not possible to be a thorough-paced bore, without possessing a great deal of information.

Mrs. Lifford loved her son's goodness, his honest face, his civility to every one, and she imagined that his residence at home would be a great advantage and comfort to Gertrude.

Mr. Lifford was as fond of his son as he could be of anything, but as he was himself clever in his way—though no one could make less use of his natural gifts—he quickly perceived his son's intellectual deficiencies, and felt an additional irritation at Gertrude's superiority. When, with a few words of lively sarcasm hitting exactly the nail on the head, she overturned the well-set ponderous array of her brother's reasonings, or when he was really in the right managed to make his arguments appear ridiculous, his brow grew darker still than usual, and there was something painful in the looks he cast upon her.

Now that Edgar was old enough to dine with them there was a great deal more conversation at Lifford Grange than was usually the case. That it was lively could scarcely be said, for the two who in different ways might have made it so—that is, Gertrude and her uncle—were the most silent, and Mr. Lifford and his son had it a good deal to themselves. One day a little scene

occurred which was animated, at least, if not lively. Mr. Lifford had been pronouncing himself very strongly against all modern innovations, in which he included the diffusion of education amongst the poor, lodging-houses, wash-houses, and emigration, all of which he declared to have a Socialist and revolutionary tendency. "All this fuss made about the poor at this time is only a species of cant which belongs to the age, and has not an atom of real charity in it."

"True charity," Edgar observed, "consists, in my opinion, in individual exertions, not in combined action. Thus gratitude is awakened in the breasts of the poor, and kindness in those of their superiors."

"But, my dear Edgar, you cannot individually wash the poor, nor can you swim with them on your back to Australia, so that *some* combined action may be useful."

"I own to a great dislike to prospectuses, and lists, and——"

"Bills of fare," Gertrude maliciously suggested, having observed that her brother studied *that* prospectus every morning with considerable interest.

Mr. Lifford frowned and said, "Printed papers have as seldom any real connexion with good works as pertness has with wit."

"I met the other day in the railway," Edgar said, "a gentleman with whom I had a great deal of conversation on philanthropical subjects. I should almost have been inclined to think him a Socialist from some things he said, only that it seemed afterwards that he was quite the reverse. As long as he talked of what the higher classes should do, he seemed to stop at nothing in his requirements; but, on the other hand, he held temporal prosperity for all sorts of persons cheaper than I should be inclined to do, though of course I know that there are things of greater importance. He was a Frenchman, I found, though he spoke English extremely well."

"It was not Adrien d'Arberg, by chance?" Father Lifford inquired.

"That was the name on his portmanteau. He was just come from France."

Gertrude's colour had risen at the sound of the name that interested her so much, and she said quickly, "Did he know who you were?"

"I found he did, and that he had heard of my family and knew how ancient it was, and that we counted kings and crusaders amongst our ancestors."

"How you must have purred when he said that," Gertrude murmured, but not loud enough for her father to hear.

"I did not quite approve of his tone on the subject; he liked old recollections of that kind, he said, and the romance attached to them. It was like the armour that we hang upon our walls, of no real value in these days, but having a certain charm from association."

"A manufacturer's son, no doubt, a Jeune-

France!" Mr. Lifford ejaculated with unspeakable contempt.

"No, he does not belong to that school, and he is a far better man than you would suppose," Father Lifford answered.

"And why in Heaven's name," Gertrude exclaimed to herself, "should one *not* suppose him to be so? But, patience. 'Wisdom is justified of her children.'"

"He has written a clever book enough, which has made a great sensation in France."

"O, an author too! a Frenchman, and an author! From all such Heaven deliver us! I hope, Edgar, that you were not by way of making more than a momentary acquaintance with him. That is the worst of those infernal railways: they expose one to come in contact with all sorts of people."

"O, I took care not to commit myself in any way to his acquaintance, for I could not tell, you know, what his birth or position in society might

be. Dear me, Gertrude, how red you are! Are you very hot, dear sister?—Shall I open the window?"

All the open windows in the world would not have cooled Gertrude's cheeks at that moment, or restrained her from breaking forth. "I pity you, brother, if you could not discern in that man's appearance a surer patent of true nobility than lies in parchments and escutcheons, and a greater honour in having had an hour's conversation with him, than in descending from crusaders and Spanish grandees."

There was an awful pause after this sentence. The sneer at the "Grands d'Espagne" had particularly nettled Father Lifford, who was more than half a Spaniard in his feelings. Edgar was exceedingly puzzled—both at the extreme impropriety of his sister's sentiments, and at her warmth on the subject—as well he might be, not knowing that she had ever seen d'Arberg, or that she was acquainted with his works.

"Really, sister," he began, but his father interrupted him. "Pray do not attempt to reason with Gertrude; since her love of contradiction and perversity of feeling is getting to the point of putting herself in a passion, and insulting us all about a perfect stranger in whom she can take no interest, but on account of his probable low birth and his sneers at what we value and respect, the more we leave her to herself the better; only I do not choose to hear such words uttered again before me; and therefore, Miss Lifford, whatever your degrading sentiments may be, take care that you never let *me* hear them again."

Gertrude had been much to blame, she knew and she felt it, and her irritation had vanished; but a dull aching at her heart succeeded it. When they all left the table she went to the window, and laid her forehead against the glass. Her father and her brother had left the room, and her uncle was following them; but when he got near the door he turned round

to look at her. She also turned at that moment, and rushing to him with impetuosity, threw herself into his arms. He did not repulse her, but said, "Pshaw, don't make a scene; you are a bad incorrigible girl." But the manner was not harsh as the words.

"O Father Lifford," she exclaimed, "I have been so wrong. I have behaved ill to you,—you who have been so kind to me!"

"Never mind that; you should grieve at having displeased your father."

"I *cannot*. *You—you* I am sorry to have offended, and if you would let me, I would kneel to ask your pardon."

"No, no, Gertrude, not here. It is not *thus* or *here* that you must sue for pardon; remember your father's must be asked, and that not in outward form alone, but with a humbled heart and a penitent spirit. God bless you, my child!" he added, for he saw the resolution was made, and the proud spirit conquered.

CHAPTER II.

"I looked, and looked, and still with new delight
Such joy my soul, such pleasure filled my sight;
Nor sullen discontent, nor anxious care,
Even though brought hither could inhabit there,
But thence they fled as from their mortal foe,
For this sweet place could only pleasure know."

DRYDEN.

"About me round I saw
Hill, dale, and shady woods, and sunny places,
And liquid lapse of murm'ring streams; by these
Creatures that lived and moved, and walked or flew,
Birds on the branches warbling; all things smiled;
With fragrance and with joy my heart o'erflowed."

FAYRYE QUEEN.

EDGAR observed that his sister was looking somewhat pale and out of spirits, and his good-natured disposition attributing it partly to the scene which had taken place, and of which he had unintentionally been the cause, he set about

thinking on some mode of pleasing and amusing her. Having heard her express one day a great wish to ride, he now endeavoured to find out some means of giving her this pleasure.

"Would you not like to ride, Gertrude," he said to her one morning. "Would not the exercise be beneficial to your health?"

"I don't know what it would do to my health, dear old boy, but I know it would be of use to my temper,—it would shake a great deal of malice out of me."

"Would you be afraid to ride my horse?"

"I would ride anything, a cow, a stag, a crow, or an eagle."

"If so, I will borrow the gamekeeper's pony for myself, and you can ride Conqueror. I must see about the side-saddle, and you must get something of a habit."

"I don't know what I can do about that. Perhaps I might wear mamma's, which has been put by for so many years. Do you think its old-

fashioned shape and embroidered facings will signify?"

"O dear no. I have no doubt it will look very well, and we will go towards the open country, where we shall probably not meet any one. You will like, perhaps, to see a large encampment of gipseys on Oakley Common?"

"O, of all things; I delight in their picturesque faces. What a dear boy you are, Edgar, to have thought of my riding. I will copy the *tree* for you this evening, and not say anything disrespectful about it."

"I hope you will not for your own sake, Gertrude, and I am much obliged to you for the promise."

Then they parted, and both were successful in their researches.

At five o'clock, for the day had been very warm and they did not start till then, Gertrude appeared on the steps in her picturesque attire, and sprang lightly on the horse, which appeared at

first rather uneasy at the flapping of her riding-habit, but went pretty quietly after a few minutes. She was delighted at finding herself on horseback, and when they got into a green valley, a little beyond the park, she set off at a quick canter till the ground grew broken and uneven, and then they proceeded at a foot-pace through a narrow ravine, and by the side of a rapid stream. She was silent, for her enjoyment lay in thoughts that it would never have occurred to her to communicate to Edgar; only now and then she said, "How pleasant this is!" or, "How fine it is to-day!" He stopped sometimes to gather branches of honeysuckle or white convolvuluses, and handed them to her, discoursing the while on botany, geology, and various branches of natural history, and telling her the names of every bird and insect they saw on bush or hedgerow. She thanked him for the flowers, and listened with apparent interest to the comments, but her thoughts were often far away.

"There is a lady-bird," he said, as one of those little creatures settled on his horse's mane.

"Ay, a lady-bird," she exclaimed, roused from her abstraction; "my namesake! Do not you remember?—it is the name that Maurice Redmond and Mary Grey have always given me."

"But I hope they don't do so now, Gertrude; it would be very familiar."

"I wonder," she said to herself, "that he does not add—'and familiarity breeds contempt.'" But without answering him, she held out her hand and made the little insect come upon it, and gazed upon it earnestly, while she murmured to herself in a low voice the pretty nursery rhyme—

"O lady-bird, lady-bird, fly away home,
The squirrel and field-mouse have gone to their rest,
The daisies have shut up their sleepy red eyes,
The bees and the insects and birds are at rest.
O lady-bird, lady-bird, fly away home,
The glow-worm is lighting his glittering lamp,
The dew's falling fast, and your fine speckled wings
Will be moistened and wet with the close clinging damp.

O lady-bird, lady-bird, fly away home,
The sweet little fairy bells tinkle afar;
Make haste, or they'll catch you and harness you fast
With a gossamer cobweb to Oberon's car."

As she ended her song the little creature, that had been for awhile so motionless that it scarce seemed alive, suddenly expanded its hitherto invisible wings, and flew away in an instant.

"Ah, so I too shall fly away some day, to your great surprise," she said, turning to Edgar; "I must see something of the world before I die."

"I hope you will be well married in a year or two, sister, and then I dare say you will persuade your husband to take you a tour abroad."

"Unless I am married by proxy—like some of the great people we descend from—I do not see the individual who is to have the honour of my hand."

"My father will look to that."

"He may look, but he will not see. Besides, it is my business—not his."

"I cannot admit that, Gertrude; nothing

concerns a father more than the marriage of his children, and the alliances of his family."

"Of his sons, certainly," she answered, with an affected gravity; "I would not have you, my dear brother, swerve an inch from that conviction or think of choosing a wife for yourself—not even if you were to meet with an angel from Heaven—if she could not prove sixteen quarterings, or had not had well-attested grandfathers on grandfathers. I feel that on you will rest all the responsibility of the family greatness, and I am sure you will not shrink from any choice that will be made for you, be she ever so ugly, if her ancestors are all right."

"I think virtue is the first thing in a wife, but next to that, I own that I attach more importance to family descent than to personal beauty."

"O my dear Edgar, how absurd you are! Do not be angry." But there was no occasion for this appeal, for Edgar had the best of tempers, and the happiest conviction that he was always

right; so that nothing ever ruffled or disturbed him.

After a ride of some length, and mounting a while, they arrived at a wooded eminence near the downs, which commanded a magnificent view. The stream, which had been compressed within its banks in the narrow valley, expanded into a river in the plain; the hills, overhung with wood, threw broad shadows on the waving corn-fields. The declining sun gilded the rich foliage with its evening light, and odours rose in balmy sweetness from the clover on the one side, and the wild thyme on the other. Edgar, who always was more intent on little matters of detail than on the general beauty of a scene, and whose favourite pursuit just then was entomology, espied a singular insect flying under some trees a little way beneath them. He got off his horse, and tying the bridle to a tree, ran after it amongst the bushes where he had seen it disappear. Gertrude sat negligently on her

saddle in delighted contemplation of the scene before her. She let the reins hang on her horse's neck, and allowed him to crop the short grass at his feet.

At that moment a gun went off in a neighbouring field, startling a covey of partridges, and frightening both the horses, which set off at full gallop. Edgar's broke away from the bush where it was loosely fastened, and rushed past the spot where he was still looking for his insect. He ran after it down the hill, and it was some time before he caught it. When he returned to the spot where he had left Gertrude she had disappeared. He called to her as loudly as he could, but no answer came. Then pushing on his horse, he looked about the downs in every direction and could not see her. In serious alarm he rode on, but unfortunately in the opposite direction to that which her horse had taken. It had started off at the same moment as his; she kept her seat and seized the reins, but beginning

to pull at its mouth with all her might, it stuck its head down, and got entirely beyond her control. She was soon out of sight of the spot from whence she had started, and began to feel sick and giddy with the pace at which they were going. She felt herself rushing up and down hill, and over some ditches and through some fences, and then across a road, and again for what appeared to her an interminable time along the open downs, and at last through a gate into what seemed to be a park; there the horse came suddenly to a stop: this threw her off her balance, and she fell on the grass. It was soft and she would not have been much hurt if her foot had not been under her, and in this way severely sprained her ankle. She felt a little stunned, but endeavoured to get up and to walk a few steps, but pain compelled her to sit down again, with her back against a hay-stack, which she now saw was the obstacle that had checked the speed of her horse.

It was getting late, and the night was waning fast; she could discern nothing but trees, and heard no sounds but the cawing of rooks. All sorts of ideas began to pass through her mind,—if nobody passed that way what would become of her that night? Once more she tried to walk, but now she could not even put her foot to the ground. Then she called out as loud as she could, and the rooks seemed to caw louder in answer, but nothing else responded. Then something rattled in the hedge behind her, and she held in her breath with affright. Her foot began to swell very much, and she grew faint with the pain. By degrees her thoughts became less clear, and almost assumed the character of dreams; but still they turned upon her present position, and the vague fears it inspired.

Would she die if she remained there all the night? It was a summer evening, and the sky over her head was clear, and the stars beginning to shine one by one; but the air felt very cold,

and the grass was damp. If she should have a dangerous illness, would her father grieve for her, and would her mother have strength to come to her bedside, and give her a kiss as she used to do when she was a little child? Would Father Lifford weep if her life were despaired of, or was he a man who never shed tears? She kept asking herself these questions over and over again, and fancying how everybody would look and what they would say at Lifford Grange, if she *were* brought back *dead*. How strange it would be! The chapel would be hung with black, and candles would be lit on the altar, and the "De profundis" would be sung. Then she mechanically repeated over and over again,

> "Eternal rest give unto her, O Lord,
> And let perpetual light shine upon her.
> May she rest in peace!"

Then she ceased to think, but dreamed that she was in her coffin, and that it was being slowly lifted up and carried along. Was she

going to Heaven? No, it could not be Heaven, for she was so sensible of suffering great pain. It was purgatory, perhaps. Then everything grew indistinct and confused, and a sense of repose stole over her. But she could not move nor speak.

Then she heard the sound of voices and of footsteps about her, and she felt herself talking at random, and heard some one say that she was light-headed. Then later somebody came in and felt her pulse and her forehead, and a glass was held to her lips. Some hours afterwards she awoke, and looked about her with astonishment. She saw nothing but snowy white muslin curtains, and opposite to her a marble chimney-piece, and upon it a transparent night lamp, with a kneeling figure of a woman in a church, the light shining through the mimic Gothic windows. Her feverish hands were resting on a pink silk eiderdown quilt, and her flushed cheek on a pillow fringed with lace. She saw all this, but

felt too weak to wonder at it, and closed her eyes and went to sleep again. The next time she opened them daylight was shining through the chinks of the shutters. She heard some one talking in the next room, and supposed she was still dreaming; but soon the speaker came in, a pretty well-dressed person, and bending over her she said, "Do not be frightened, Miss Lifford, at finding yourself in a strange place. This is Mr. and Lady Clara Audley's house. You were brought here last night after your fall from your horse. For some time we did not know who you were; but the doctor, when he came, recognised you immediately. A message was sent to your parents to let them know that you were safe, and Lady Clara is anxious that you should feel yourself quite comfortable. I am her maid, Miss Lifford. I hope you find yourself pretty well this morning."

"Yes, thank you," Gertrude answered, and without quite knowing why, could scarcely keep

the tears from rolling down her cheeks. "How came I here?" she asked with a bewildered expression. "What happened to me last night? You said I fell from my horse. Where was I found? I was stunned, I suppose?"

"You were found lying near a haystack in the park, Miss Lifford; you had fainted right away, and one of the gentlemen carried you here; it was some time before you came to yourself."

"I scarcely feel even now, as if I had," she ejaculated. "Everything seems so strange. Will you thank Lady Clara for her kindness? I suppose somebody will soon come from my home."

There was a nervous sensation in her throat as she said those last words. She felt very lonely, and partly from physical weakness, partly from the strangeness of her position, she found it difficult not to give way to her emotion.

When the maid left the room she clasped her hands together, and hiding her face in the pillow,

murmured, "Nobody loves me—nobody cares for me—I might have died last night, and nobody would have been sorry except poor mamma." Such were her thoughts, not very logical or reasonable ones, certainly, but springing nevertheless from a sense that she had never been watched over or cherished in her home; and how often it happens that in illness or loneliness the long kept-down emotion, the long standing heartache, the sense of an injury long forgiven and all but forgotten, will sometimes start up with all the vehemence of former days, and the trifle as light as air—which at other moments might only have excited a smile—will in those hours of weakness call forth a burst of feeling which shakes to pieces the barrier with which the soul had fenced itself round, and imprisoned till it had subdued its own impetuosity. Sometimes that calmness is the result of heroic virtue, sometimes of the force of habitual endurance, and sometimes again of an odd sort of levity, a recklessness of the

same nature as that which will make some children (boys especially) utterly heedless of physical pain, and will let them play and exert themselves as usual with a dislocated limb or a festering wound; in any of these cases momentary reactions may take place, but the effects will often be different. Through them the spirit may descend a step towards evil, or it may but grasp more firmly the hand held out to it from heaven.

The next time that Mrs. Martin, the good-natured ladies' maid, came in, it was to bring Gertrude her breakfast, served in beautiful Sèvres china, on a small silver tray. She opened the shutters, to let light into the room. Gertrude asked her to throw open the window also; and rising in bed, she looked upon such an enchanting scene as had never yet met her sight. The place was one well known to her by name, for it was famous for its natural beauties, and for all that art had done for it. The house stood in a

commanding position on the brow of a hill, backed by a magnificent bank of wood, and from it the eye rested on a succession of terraces, each forming a gorgeous flower-garden, now in all the glory of summer just verging upon autumn. Large dazzling masses of the scarlet geranium faced the deep blue beds of the salvia or the gentian. The heliotrope and the variegated verbenas, the stately hollyhocks and the graceful fuchsias, the dahlias like court beauties in their pompous array, the tall white lilies, standing alone in their majestic purity, were all there in clusters, or in rows. The passion flower, the jessamine, and the convolvulus covered the walls which stretched from one end of each terrace to the other. Red roses in marble vases adorned every flight of steps, and in the centre of each division of this flowery mosaic, on every story of this sloping garden, a fountain played, which high and clear into the morning air shot up sheets of pure water, or clouds of glittering spray,

through which the sun shed its rays on this scene of enchantment.

The last of these terraces overhung the river Leigh, which broadening into a lake at this period of its course, reflected on that morning the azure of a cloudless sky, and then immediately narrowed again, as if on purpose to show off its silvery windings through the green valley of Arkleigh. A little skiff was lying at anchor, near the stone steps of the landing-place, its white sail gleaming in the sunlight, and its streamers gently fluttering in the breeze. The banks of wood which reached to the edge of the water, on the other side of the stream, were just beginning to display their rich autumnal hues. The foliage of the copper beech, the coral berries of the mountain ash, and the red leaves of the Virginian creeper, stood out in contrast with the masses of summer's richest green. There was a brightness, a brilliancy, a gaiety in this view which no description can convey. The statues placed amongst the flowers,

or presiding over the fountains, were all in some graceful or joyous attitude. Either they seemed to play with the large leaves of the lotus, or to throw up into the air, in mimic sport, the water that fell back in sparkling showers on their marble shoulders, or they seemed to bow their graceful heads under the rays of the sun, and to inhale sweet odours from the glowing masses of flowers which surrounded them.

A part of the park was also visible from the window:—the deer starting from the midst of the tall fern, the cattle standing contemplatively by the brink of the river, the Gothic towers of an old church appearing in the distance, and the blue hills of Westmoreland forming a back-ground to the picture. It was a view not to weary of, and the inside of Gertrude's room corresponded with the beauty without. It was furnished with a magnificence that would hardly perhaps have been in good taste if there had not been something poetical in its smallest details.

Each piece of furniture, each picture, each bit of carving, the mirrors, the carpet, the writing-table, the stools, the luxurious arm-chairs, the patterns of the curtains, the mouldings of the cornice, all suggested to the mind something pleasing in Nature or in art. Flowers, birds, children's laughing faces, ivy wreaths and clustering grapes, sunny landscapes and graceful figures, appeared at every turn, and as Gertrude closed her eyes for a moment and thought of Lifford Grange, it seemed to her that she must have dreamed of the scenes just described, or else been transported to one of those fairy abodes which she had so often pictured to herself in her childhood.

At that moment she caught sight of a well-known figure on a rough stout pony, making its way towards the house, looking ill suited to the brilliant scene around him, but more welcome to her just then, than all its beauties put together. Father Lifford—for it was he—was looking paler

than usual; not one glance did he bestow on the fine scenery he was passing through. His black coat was wet with the morning dew, and his hair seemed more grey than the day before. He had suffered very much, from the time when Edgar had returned home without his sister, and alarmed the house for her safety. At first, he did not so much think of an accident, as that the child had done something strange. He loved her more than he was aware of, but had never felt easy about her, and he now shuddered as he remembered her weariness of home—her pining for change—her strange questions and her odd fancies.

When her horse was brought home late at night, having been found in a field by some labourers, his anxiety grew intense, and he had never found it so difficult to be calm. Men were sent to seek for her in every direction, and it was only with his head buried in his hands, in incessant prayer before the altar, that he could

command his feelings. When the news of her safety arrived, his only thought was to go to her. There were reasons that made him hate entering the walls of Audley House, but they were all swallowed up in the determination to see the child, and ascertain for himself that she was not seriously hurt; and leaving orders for her maid to follow him, he never rested till he stood by her bedside.

She held out her hands to him, while the tears chased each other down her cheek. "A pretty business this," he growled out, "a mighty pretty business, to have you laid up here in this new-fangled place, with nothing and nobody that is not strange to us about you;" and he held her hand and stroked it gently, while she could hardly forbear a smile at his entire want of appreciation of the beauty and the comfort which were apparent in the smallest details, as well as in the general aspect of her present abode.

"And what is to happen, child? They tell me

that you cannot walk, and that the doctor will not let you be moved. This is sad work indeed!"

"Lady Clara says that I must stay here, and ——"

"And what business has she to say anything about it?"

"I mean that she says I *may* stay here, and indeed my foot hurts me so much at the least motion that I do not think I could stir."

"Then you shall not stir. Why do you move about? Can't you be quiet? So you must stay here, I suppose."

"Is papa angry with me? Was he at all anxious last night?"

"Why, you don't suppose we were any of us very comfortable, do you?"

"Poor mamma! I thought of her, as long as I could think of anything."

"Well, there was some grace in that. But we did not tell her anything till we knew where you were."

"And Edgar?"

"O the boy! He cried, but he ate some supper." Gertrude smiled, and laid her hand on the old man's sleeve.

"Father Lifford, I believe you love me, though you never say so."

"Nonsense. I love everybody, it is my duty."

"Well, I don't think you love Lady Clara Audley," she maliciously replied, for with her needle-like penetration she had long ago perceived that the mistress of Audley House for some unknown reason was his favourite aversion. She had not indeed seen them together, but the mere sound of her name was at any time sufficient to discompose him.

"Lady Fiddlestick!" he answered impatiently, "I wish her well, but ——" at that moment there was a gentle knock at the door.

"Here she is, I am sure," Gertrude whispered.

"Ah well, I'll go now, child, and come back again another time. Is there another door?" he ejaculated with a look of real distress, but

while he was desperately endeavouring to get out at one door and entangling himself in the embroidered curtains of its portières, the enemy entered through the other, and cut off his retreat.

This enemy was about thirty-eight, but looked younger—at least not many women of thirty-eight retain as much beauty—such a smooth fair skin, such glossy hair, and such youthful delicacy of feature. There was something that reminded one of feudal times in her appearance. Something grave, dignified, and almost majestic, though combined with a particularly feminine grace. Her eyes were hazel and rather prominent, her hair auburn, and her lips somewhat thick, though not too much so for beauty. She was dressed in a black velvet gown with wide hanging sleeves, a guipure shawl hung over her shoulders, and a lace cap was fastened by two diamond pins to the thick tresses of her hair. She bent over Gertrude, rapidly said some kind things to her, and then turning to Father Lifford bowed to him most

graciously, and murmured something about not having met for a long time. He bowed in return, gravely and coldly, but with perfect civility; for with all his bluntness he was invariably well bred. She then inquired after Gertrude's parents in a kind of half compassionate half mysterious tone, which seemed to annoy him, and he answered the question briefly and abruptly. To her expressions of delight at having the opportunity of seeing Gertrude in her house, and her hopes that she would remain till perfectly recovered from her accident, "that they would not deprive her of the wounded bird that had nestled under her wing," he responded as if poisoned honey had been distilled into his ears, and said that his nephew and Mrs. Lifford would doubtless much regret the trouble which their daughter's accident had occasioned; but though the words were civil, there was something so chilling and formal in the tone which accompanied them, that Lady Clara, who observed it, said:

"Time often perpetuates estrangements between those who once were friends, but I entreat you to tell Mr. Lifford that his daughter cannot be a stranger here, and that if he will trust me with his treasure, I will cherish it as I would my own, had Heaven granted me one."

A still graver and colder bow was the Father's only reply, and he withdrew after giving Gertrude his blessing, and promising to send over some things which she wanted from home.

And now the lady of the enchanted castle and her young guest remained alone together. Lady Clara fitted well that abode. She had created it chiefly herself, and it seemed in every part of it to bear the impress of her mind and tastes. She had been, from the day of her birth, "a lady nursed in pomp and pleasure;" but not in vulgar pomp or in senseless pleasure. Nature had given her a sweet temper, a love of the beautiful, and a kind and noble spirit. Education had added delicacy, grace, and refinement of manners.

Nothing mean or vicious had approached her. She had neither suffered, struggled, nor sinned, as the world considers it, and she was the *chef d'œuvre* of what a happy disposition, the best kind of worldly education, and earthly safeguards from temptation can effect. With a slight alteration she could be well described in the words of a living poet:

"She floated o'er life like a noontide breeze
Or cradled vapour on sunny seas,
Or an exquisite cloud in light arrayed,
Which sails through the sky, and can throw no shade;
She cared for no sympathy—living in throngs
Of her own sunny thoughts and her mute inward songs.
She was chaste as the white lily's dew-beaded cup,
Which bold—because stainless—to heaven looks up.
Her mind was a fair desert temple of beauty,
Unshaded by sorrow, unhallowed by duty."

When just passing from early girlhood into womanhood, beautiful as a poet's dream, as a painter's ideal, she had appeared to the young owner of Lifford Grange. He saw her at a county ball; he was invited to meet her at a neighbouring country-house and then to her father's

house ; he fell desperately in love with her. It was one of those violent absorbing passions that make wild havoc in a man's heart. He was handsome and clever: she was pleased with him, and without hesitation accepted him when he proposed to her. Her parents, though they disliked the marriage, never thwarted their idol, and all of them went to London together, and Lady Clara was engaged to Henry Lifford. But jealous, tyrannical, and proud—he soon alienated from him the inclination which the beautiful spoilt child had felt for him. The outbreaks of his fierce passion disquieted and alarmed her. Gentle, refined, and pure, caring more for the charm and the sentiment of a mutual affection than for the kind of love which made him at one moment adore and at another reproach her, she broke off her engagement as unhesitatingly as she had entered into it, and without a struggle or a regret—as she would have thrown aside a nosegay in which a thorn had stung her—she dismissed him at once, and

went on her way as free, as happy, and as calm as if he had never crossed her path.

He went almost mad with anger and despair; and then the pride which was in him as strong as life itself enabled him to subdue at once all outward expression of love, or of regret: but, like an extinguished volcano, which has consumed every trace of vegetation and leaves behind it barren and unsightly ruins, the flame thus suddenly extinguished seemed to have burned out of his heart every trace of gentle feeling and affection. He went almost immediately to Spain, and there married the beautiful Angustia, but no sooner was the ceremony performed than he felt himself undone; and the cold admiration—if even such a term as that be not too strong—or rather the assent he had given to the general opinion of her beauty, changed into a feeling of aversion, which he took little pains to conceal.

When they returned to England Lady Clara

had married Mr. Audley, the owner of a large property about twelve miles distant from Mr. Lifford's place, and they generally stayed there during a part of the year. He neither would see nor appear to avoid her—and a total seclusion from the world was the alternative he chose. He would hardly ride out of his own grounds for fear of meeting her. Once in the course of sixteen years he did so, and then the deadly paleness of his cheek, and the expression of his eyes, left it in doubt by which of the two aforesaid passions his spirit was swayed. She, the while, went along the stream of life with "youth at the prow and pleasure at the helm." The person she had married was young, good-looking, and amiable. She loved him enough and not too much for her happiness—enough to make life agreeable in his society, not too much to give her any of the heartaches which are almost invariably attached to an absorbing affection.

It was impossible to see her and hear her talk,

at times, without feeling that there was in her nature a power of loving which had not been called into full exercise. She had never had any children, and had not felt the want of them: to those who surrounded her she stood almost in the light of a child herself, although her disposition was not in reality childish; but she lived in an atmosphere of beauty and luxury, of refinement and amusement, which supplied the place of the graver cares and duties of life. In the love of Nature and of art, in transient but not contemptible attempts at literary composition, in intercourse with men of genius, in the creation of the earthly, intellectual, and poetical paradise which surrounded her—she expended the sensibility and the energy which had not been otherwise called into play. Study, reading, and society furnished her with occupation, and a succession of pursuits and of fancies—generally harmless, and discarded as soon as they became wearisome—filled up her time. Such was Lady Clara Audley's

existence; it had transcended the ordinary course of human prosperity. That she was a happy person some will not need to be told, while others may remain in doubt, according to the view they may take or the theories they may have on the subject of happiness. It had been a matter of curious speculation to her to wonder over the strange mode of life which had been adopted by her first lover and his Spanish wife. She sometimes reflected—now that it was long past and had become merely a page in the history of her youth—on the sort of passion he had felt for her; and though she fervently rejoiced at having escaped such a marriage, yet she seldom looked on the gates of Lifford Grange without an odd sensation of curiosity and interest. It was therefore no common excitement to her when chance brought into her house Henry Lifford's daughter, of whose beauty she had often heard from Mark Apley and others.

After a few preliminary sentences of thanks on

the one side and kind answers on the other, Lady Clara looked fixedly at Gertrude, and said: "You are like your father, I think,—but I suppose you have your mother's Spanish eyes."

"You have seen him, then?"

"Years ago, when we were both young."

"Was he ever young? I cannot fancy him different from what I have always known him; but I can well imagine I may be like him: I feel it sometimes."

Lady Clara laughed. "What an odd thing to *feel*." Then, seeing her eyes turned towards the window, she said:

"You seem to like my garden. Have you a passion for flowers, as I have?"

"For some, but I hate others; a tiger-lily, for instance, and every sort of calceolaria."

"I believe you are right, and that it is as foolish to ask that general question as those other ones—do you like children, or do you like dogs? Somebody said one might just as well

say: 'Do you like people?' What can be more different than a pæony or a rose?"

"Nothing," Gertrude answered with a slow smile, "except some faces I have seen, and——" she hesitated.

"What were you going to say?"

"Oh, I was thinking of Mrs. Apley's and of yours." Lady Clara laughed, for the comparison was very apposite.

"Yes, you put me in mind the first instant I saw you of the moss-rose, the fairest and most richly-dressed of flowers."

"Ah, you have read the pretty German fable on that subject?"

"Not in German, but Maurice Redmond translated it for me, and set it to music."

"What, my handsome young music-master? Is he a poet also? Can you repeat to me the English lines?"

"I hardly know if I can remember them; but I think they run thus:"

Weary of pleasure,
And laden with treasure,
The Angel of flowers
Had wandered for hours,
When he sunk to his rest
With his wings on his breast,
And the rose of the glade
Lent her beautiful shade
To guard and to cover
The flower-king's slumber.
When the angel awoke,
Then in rapture he spoke :
" Thou queen of my bowers,
Thou fairest of flowers,
What gift shall be mine,
And what guerdon be thine?"
" In guerdon of duty
Bestow some new beauty,"
She said, and then smiled
Like a mischievous child.
In anger he started,
But ere he departed,
To rebuke the vain flower
In the pride of her power,
He flung some rude moss
Her fair bosom across ;
But her new robes of green
So became the fair queen,
That the Angel of flowers
Mistrusted his powers,
And was heard to declare
He had granted her prayer.*

" I should like to have a statue made on that

* From the German of Krummacher.

subject," Lady Clara observed. "The angel of flowers hurling the moss at the vain rose; and then, we might place it in the centre of a bower of pink and white moss-roses;—Would it not be charming? I will not ask you if you like statues, for I suppose you have not seen many yet, but I feel sure that you like everything beautiful and poetical, or else your eyes belie you. Tell me, is it true that you are called Lady-Bird in the village of Stonehouseleigh?"

"Yes; I believe I am well known there by that name."

"O then it is so; I was once waiting in the pony-chaise, at the door of a cottage, and some little brat called out — 'there goes Lady-Bird.' I called him, and asked who he meant; he would only repeat 'Lady-Bird'—then his mother came forward, and said he meant Miss Lifford. I was so provoked at not having seen you, for I had long wished to do so. But that name takes my fancy strangely. There is something old-fashioned in

it, and I like everything quaint and original,—old books, old names, old curtains, and old houses. The present is so dull, compared with the past."

Gertrude looked round the room, then pointed to the window and said, "If Audley Park is the *present* and Lifford Grange the *past*, I cannot agree with you, Lady Clara."

The latter smiled at the unconscious allusion contained in Gertrude's words, and said, "I have erected this place myself, schemed, planned it, and seen it rise before my eyes. It has been like writing a poem, but now that it is finished it wearies me to be always reading it over again."

"I should like one day to hold such a pen as that in my hand, but to read your poem is for the present enough pleasure. Speaking to a stranger is an event in my life."

"And yet you to me are not shy, my pretty Lady-Bird."

"I have no idea how to converse. I wonder that I learnt to talk at all."

"I imagine that that talent is intuitive, my love, and that the less art there is in it the better."

"Do you think I am *artless*, Lady Clara?"

"Why I can hardly judge of that yet. The perfection of art is to appear not to have any."

"O then I think you must be very artful."

"A compliment, Lady-Bird!"

"O no; I talk of you just as I would of the flowers in the garden. I say what comes into my head, and if it is flattering, it is more fortunate for me than for you."

"Do you know that you amuse me very much. I hope they will let you stay with me some time. I could not gather anything from Father Lifford's manner; does he always seem so stern?"

"He is not given to the smiling mood, certainly; but I cannot disguise from you, Lady Clara, that he looks less benignantly upon you than on the rest of man or womankind. Did you know *him* in his youth also?"

"My dear child, he must have been near forty when I was born!"

"Then why does he look as black as thunder when you are mentioned? What can you have done to him?"

Lady Clara looked pensive an instant, then said, "If we can but keep you here, your convalescence will be the pleasantest thing in the world. We shall carry you gently down stairs, and make you lie on the sofa in the conservatory, amongst the camellias and orange-trees; then you shall drive slowly through the rosery in a garden-chair, and a little later sail on the river in our little skiff, and everybody here shall pay you their court. There are numbers of people in the house longing to see you: my cousin, Lady Roslyn, all the Apleys, Mr. and Mrs. Crofton, and Adrien d'Arberg,—and Maurice, as you call our young musician, is coming on Thursday."

"Is M. d'Arberg here?" Gertrude asked, with

a look of sudden interest, which did not escape Lady Clara's attention.

"Yes. Are you acquainted with him?"

"I can hardly say I am; and yet, I feel to know him well, for I have read his books."

"I think you will be as much struck with his appearance as with his writings. I have met with but few men as handsome, and with none who possessed the same charm of countenance and manner."

"I have seen him once," Gertrude quietly remarked, and then changed the conversation by asking some questions about a view of Tivoli, which hung over the chimney.

It was enough for her to hear that she would see him again. She was secreting that happiness in her heart, and did not feel inclined to talk about it then. Lady Clara explained the position of the waterfalls, and said, as she rose to go,

"To-day, the doctor enjoins perfect repose; nothing but short dull visits from me, but to-

morrow, I trust, his rigour will be abated; and that my Lady-Bird's receptions will commence. Somebody said that an invalid to visit was an indispensable addition to the enjoyment of a party in a country-house. Imagine what a resource you will be to my guests, who having been here a week, were actually beginning to talk of charades and tableaux, and worst of all, of *jeux d'esprit;*" and with a kiss, Lady Clara took leave of Gertrude for the moment.

She remained with her cheek on the embroidered pillow, her eyes sparkling with excitement, her hands playing with her rings, and only one fear standing between her and the rapture of anticipation that was beating in her heart. She had misgivings that her father would at almost any risk order her home, as soon as she could leave her bed; and had she known his feelings about Audley Park and its mistress, she might have feared it still more. She saw herself carried away from this scene of enchantment, and now

of deep interest, restored to the dull room which she had so often wished to leave, and which no agreeable associations endeared to her. It was an alternative between so much enjoyment, and so much disappointment that she could hardly remain quiet in that state of suspense, and would have probably grown very feverish in the course of the day, if her maid had not arrived with the things she had sent for, and news from home.

It appeared that by that morning's post there had arrived some intelligence from Spain which imperatively called for Mr. Lifford's presence there to assert his wife's right to an inheritance which had unexpectedly devolved on her. He had made instant preparations for departure, and was to set off in the evening, and to take Edgar with him.

"And what did he say about me, Jane? Did you hear anything from mamma, or Father Lifford?"

"Only Isabella told me while I was packing

up the things, that your mamma was surprised your papa had not said one word on the subject, and that she had not mentioned it to him. But of course, Miss, you are not to move till the doctor says you may, and Father Lifford, no doubt, will send the carriage to fetch you when the time comes: so you need not fret about it."

"I suppose papa will be absent for some time?"

"Two months, I heard it said, at the least." Then Gertrude was silent, and tolerably contented. She should probably stay where she was for a few days at least, and she did not despair of obtaining her mother's permission to pay another visit to Audley Park before her father's return.

In the afternoon Edgar came to see her, and made Mr. Lifford's excuses to Mr. Audley, *not* to Lady Clara, for the trouble that Gertrude occasioned in his house, and his apologies that his own sudden departure for Spain prevented him from calling to acknowledge in person their kindness

to her. Mr. Audley, who had taken very little cognisance of the whole affair, was quite puzzled to find himself made so prominent in it, but he was very gracious and civil, and was sure it was a great pleasure to Lady Clara, and hoped Miss Lifford would stay with them as long as possible, and all sorts of kind expressions; and then Edgar met his father at the station, and nothing passed between them beyond a brief question whether Gertrude was going on well, with the affirmative answer,—which was received without comment; and both were that night in London, and embarked the next day for Spain. It was Mr. Lifford's pride that had forced him to a piece of civility which cost him a great deal, but which he was too well-bred to omit: but it seemed to him as if Gertrude was destined to be a perpetual source of annoyance, and that chance had now connected her with the plague spot which had been so long festering in his heart.

Gertrude wrote little gay affectionate notes to her mother, in which she spoke of her enjoyment of the change of scene which her accident had so unexpectedly procured her—of Lady Clara's great kindness, and wish to keep her as long as possible; but she added that as soon as she could, she must go home, and show her that she was well again—and that in the meantime, she would write every day. With something between a smile and a sigh, Mrs. Lifford gave these notes to her uncle, who took snuff, "pshawed," and said, "Foolish people, all of you." Whom he exactly included in that general condemnation was not quite apparent, but Mrs. Lifford found safety in the number, and satisfied herself that at all events he did not blame her more severely than the rest, whoever they might be whom he so vaguely designated.

CHAPTER III.

"Whence and what are we, to what end ordained?
What means the drama by this world sustained?
Business or vain amusements, care or mirth,
Divide the frail inhabitants of earth.
Is duty a mere sport, or an employ?
Life an entrusted talent, or a toy?"

COWPER.

On the third day after Gertrude's accident, Lady Clara was sitting writing letters in her morning-room, which opened on one side on a conservatory which formed a kind of drawing-room, and on the other on a library where several of her guests were assembled. The three Miss Apleys were sitting round a table, one of them occupied with some abstruse embroidery, another with a design for a flower-garden, and

the third, Harriet, alias Cherry, with a music-book, into which she was copying German waltzes. Mrs. Crofton and Mrs. Apley were reading the newspapers near the window, several men were lounging about the room, and the sound of billiard-balls in the one beyond it indicated that others were killing time in a somewhat more active manner.

"Harriet," said Mrs. Crofton, "have you been to Miss Lifford, yet?"

"O yes, I went up to her room last night, after dinner; she is looking prettier than ever."

"O, do you think so, Harriet?" exclaimed Fanny, the next sister, "I was disappointed with her. Have you never observed that her teeth are not quite even?"

"I never knew any one like you, Fanny, for detecting faults," said Mark Apley, who was picking off the leaves of a tall geranium that was apparently growing out of the middle of an ottoman, on which he was stretched out nearly at

full length. "If there is a spot, a blot, a flaw in anything, you are sure to pounce upon it. Now, Cherry likes to admire, and I think she is right."

Fanny put down her pen, for she was the copier of music; and going up to him, said something in a low voice which made him laugh and colour, and say, but not angrily, "Leave me alone, don't spoil the button of my coat. Come and look at them playing at billiards."

"No, I will not! your friend Adrien is conceited enough already, without our going to stare at him."

"O Miss Fanny, it would be lucky for you if you had but half as little conceit in your foolish little head as there is in his wise one."

"You are so *entiché* with him."

"Don't use French words, like Lady Roslyn —it is so affected."

"You do not call her affected, do you?"

"Why, no, but then——"

"If she is affected," Mrs. Crofton said, "I think she must have been born so. I have no doubt that in the nursery she cried out for a *tartine* instead of for bread and butter, like other children."

Mr. Latimer, one of the men who had been reading before the fire-place, put down his book and said, "There are some people whom nature has provided with stilts, and they may be very charming in their way, but it never answers to provide them for oneself."

"There, now," Mark said, "don't you attempt to get upon them, little Fanny; you are a great love in your way, but in no other way, and certainly not in Lady Roslyn's, whom you as little resemble as your pretty Fido Lady Clara's greyhound. Are you angry, little woman?"

"*Tout autre que mon* [*frère*] *l'eût éprouvé sur l'heure*," she answered with a smile. "There is a bit of downright French; you don't object to that, do you? And now," she added, in a low voice,

"let us go to the billiard-room, and learn grace from Mr. Crofton, dignity from Mr. Ashton, and every earthly perfection from M. Adrien d'Arberg."

The last person whom she alluded to was standing near the window when they entered the room, absorbed at that minute in his own thoughts, which Fanny somewhat unreasonably always ascribed to conceit. Not to be occupied with her presupposed, in her opinion, too great a preoccupation with self.

Few people would have had a better right to be conceited, if advantages of every kind of looks, of mind and of fortune could justify such a feeling: a regular beauty of features, such as is seldom seen in real life; eyes which without being very large were perfectly shaped, and so shaded by thick eyelashes that they appeared dark, whereas they were blue; so earnest an expression, that it might have been thought almost melancholy, if serenity had not reigned in their inmost depths; a mixture of repose and

of mobility was a singular characteristic of that remarkable countenance. He seemed as if his own rapid thoughts were passing before him in luminous array, suggesting every instant some new train of contemplation to an ever eager spirit, and an intellect that seemed almost to spiritualise his face. Many, like Fanny Apley, were apt to misunderstand him, because he was so often absorbed in his own meditations that the remarks of others were unattended to, and their attentions to himself unperceived. His own ideas were sometimes followed up by him in a manner that might look like egotism to superficial observers, who did not understand the deep simplicity of his uncommon character. No one ever forgot himself so completely as Adrien d'Arberg did. He was profoundly religious, and there was in his nature a tendency to mysticism that might have led him to a too intense and metaphysical contemplation of the God he adored, if the strong hand of the Catholic religion had not been over

him, restraining every exaggerated tendency or fanciful bias, and saying to a naturally ardent imagination and investigating understanding, "So far shalt thou go and no farther."

He was by descent a German, by birth and also position a Frenchman, and had been partly educated in England. These circumstances seemed all to have contributed more or less to the formation of his character, and to the tone of his mind. He would have been perhaps a dreamer, had not his life been from his earliest youth devoted to useful objects, and a passionate wish to serve his fellow-creatures been at once the subject of his dreams, and the incentive to incessant labours towards that end. He had something of the *insouciance* of the French character; but his zeal for the honour of God and the happiness of men had prevented its degenerating into levity,—had given seriousness to his views of life, and importance in his sight to his own actions, as well as to the events that

passed around him. It had only left him careless of worldly advantages, which sat so lightly upon him that at times he scarcely seemed conscious of possessing them. His English education had imparted to him that keen sense of honour and that gentlemanlike regard for truth which most even worldly-minded Englishmen possess, or at least appreciate. Even in manner there was something which made English people feel at home with him. He spoke our language with the utmost correctness, and a good accent; it was only by its resembling a little more the English of books than the careless routine of common conversation that he would have been detected as a foreigner, or else by his abruptly changing it into French, if any strong interest or emotion impelled him to the use of his native tongue.

He was distantly connected with the Apleys, and when a boy had sometimes spent his holidays at their house. Mark Apley and he had thus been friends from childhood, and their

intimacy continued from habit rather than from any congeniality of minds or of character. On Adrien's side there was an affectionate regard for one whose amiable qualities, but weak understanding, commanded more love than respect; on the other, there was all the reverence and admiration which an inferior intellect yields to a superior one, when as in this case the acknowledgment is unmixed with the slightest amount of jealousy or of envy.

"Who is winning?" Mark asked, as he came into the billiard-room with his sister and joined Lady Roslyn, who was leaning against the corner of the chimney, while Mr. Ashton stood on one leg at the end of the billiard-table, with his body stretched across it, and his face screwed up into a shape of intense and ugly earnestness, which contrasted with Adrien's easy attitude.

"O d'Arberg is beating me hollow, and it is a great shame, for I practised five hours yesterday, and took lessons all last year in London."

"Well, I am sure that is more than Adrien has done," Mark rejoined with a loud laugh.

"How do you know," Adrien said, turning suddenly round with a smile; "how do you know that I do not get up before breakfast to practise?"

"To judge by the books in your room," Mark said, with another burst of laughter, "I should say that you studied canon-law more than such cannons as those."

"You do not suppose that I read all those folios, do you?"

"Then why have them on your table?" Fanny observed.

"To press flowers in," he answered; "or to make people think me wise. There, Mr. Ashton, that is game, I think," and as the red ball flew into one pocket, and the white one into the other, he put down his cue and left the room.

"By Jove, I'll practise till dinner-time!" exclaimed the defeated man, with the energy of a Haydn determined to learn counterpoint, or

an Austrian general returning to the charge after twenty defeats.

Adrien meanwhile had joined Lady Clara in her morning-room. There were some of her guests who had acquired a sort of tacit right to invade it, and he was amongst the number.

"How is your Lady-Bird?" he said, as he sat down by her.

"O much better, and she is coming down this afternoon, so mind you come in here after luncheon. I am longing to show her to you. It is the very prettiest bird you ever saw; and now that I have caught her, I mean to make an immense deal of her, and——"

"Spoil her," he suggested.

"No, no, it will improve her to see something of us."

"Who are *us*."

"You and I, if you will not be affronted at the companionship. She is not at all aware of her own cleverness."

"And we are to open her eyes to it?"

"Certainly, I am always against keeping people in the dark about their own merits, as well as about anything else. Truth, M. d'Arberg, never does any harm."

"Why, is not there an ignorance which may be not only a bliss, but a blessing?—and is not the one you speak of such? To destroy it seems like brushing away the bloom of a fruit."

"O but you must not suppose that this charming Lady-Bird is all *naïveté* and humility. She does not know how clever she is, but is not without some notions of her own abilities, and has rather a restless wish to put them to the test. And, for my own part, I believe that people are twenty times more likely to be really modest, who have satisfied themselves and others that they have something to be modest about, than if they remain all their lives beating about the bush, instead of ascertaining once for all the capabilities of their own understandings."

"There is truth in that, perhaps, but not the *whole* truth," Adrien said.

"What is your *arrière-pensée?*" Lady Clara asked. "You always have one, I know, when you are talking to me."

"None about this that I wish to keep back. You have taken a great fancy to this girl, who must be, by all accounts, a very peculiar person; and if you lavish praises upon her, and turn her head, you will be amusing yourself in a less safe manner than by writing pretty poems, or inventing new conservatories."

"Well, I will confess to you that she does interest me as a poem; that she does charm me as a flower. There is an inconventionality about her, which is quite refreshing, and a readiness of repartee which amuses me beyond description. Every new idea you put before her, every new subject you start, seems to be immediately laid hold of, and viewed in the light of her fanciful imagination. I long to see her in society, *aux*

prises with Mrs. Crofton, cross-questioned by Edward Latimer, made love to by Mark Apley."

"Now I *have* an *arrière-pensée*—will you ask me for it?"

"Yes, if it be not severe."

"Would it be severe to say that you are making a plaything of something too valuable to be played with?"

He looked at her in the earnest calm way which was peculiar to him, and she said quickly, "You take things too seriously, M. d'Arberg. I have passed through life gathering roses, and have found no thorns, and I will teach my Lady-Bird to do so too. I have often talked to you of her father. She sometimes puts me in mind of him. But if he had been half as charming as she is, I should not be now the happy person that I am."

"Ay," said Adrien with a smile, "did not you then gather a rose and find a thorn?"

"Ay, but I flung away both the rose and the thorn."

"No, I think you gathered the rose and left the thorn behind. But to return to what we were saying just now. It is from my own experience that I dread even kind interferences in what may vitally influence the destinies of others."

"How so, M. d' Arberg? Are you not the most cautious of men?"

"Not always. For instance, when I took Maurice Redmond to Italy I was giving myself the immense pleasure of an *engoûment* acted upon, of seeing enjoyment and apparently showing kindness; but I have often felt since that it would have been truer kindness not to have forced open a bud which, if destined to blow, would have been more surely developed by a slower process. To resist good impulses is one of the most difficult lessons to learn."

"And one I never intend to learn; I think

it quite sufficient to resist bad ones, dear M. d'Arberg, and to make this hitherto imprisoned Lady-Bird try her wings, and enjoy her liberty, is I am convinced a good one. So the moral of your story is lost upon me, especially as I like you ten times better for having done an imprudent kind thing than for all the prudent good ones you have ever accomplished. But then you will not help me to turn the pretty head I shall show you after luncheon?"

"No, but I shall come and watch the working of your system."

After luncheon Gertrude was carried down to the drawing-room, and thence conveyed in a garden-chair to the conservatory on the other side of the parterre. It was fitted up also as a drawing-room, and Lady Clara often spent there several hours of the day. She placed her on a couch in the midst of a kind of bower of American shrubs, through which the sun was shining and forming with its rays a fanciful pattern on

the tesselated pavement. The smell was sweet but not too powerful, the breeze from without gently shook the blossoms of the pink azalias which now and then fell on the silk coverlet which had been thrown over her feet: on the table by her side were poems, new novels French and English, prints and drawings without end. Lady Clara sat opposite to her, arranging cut flowers in fanciful vases of Venetian glass and Bohemian crystal.

"I have sent everybody out this afternoon in the calèche and the pony-chaise—that is, everybody that I did not want to join us here. I shall only let them see you by degrees, Lady-Bird. My favourites shall be first admitted."

"And who are they, Lady Clara?"

"My cousin, Ellen Roslyn, Adrien d'Arberg, and Mark Apley:—that is my beauty, my hero, and my Newfoundland. Here comes the last." And Mark rushed up to Gertrude with a beaming face, and a thousand expressions of delight at

seeing her again. "I hope Harriet told you, Miss Lifford, how overjoyed we were at your accident—I mean how sorry we felt about that, but how glad that it brought you here."

"It has been, indeed, a pleasant accident to me," she said. "Had my horse chosen to deposit me under one of my native oaks I should have been less obliged to him."

"I only wish I had had the luck to find you that night, Miss Lifford. I should have been frightened to death, but still so happy."

"By the way," she said, "who *did* find me? How strange it is that I have not yet asked the name of the person who discovered me that night."

"It was Adrien d'Arberg—lucky fellow, and he carried you to the house. I have done nothing but envy him ever since."

Gertrude remained silent, and opened a book as if in absence. "Did I not dream of Heaven that night!" she inwardly ejaculated.

Then she looked up, and the form and the face which for nearly a whole year had haunted her incessantly were once more before her. It was not exactly emotion that she experienced in seeing them again—her heart did not beat quicker, and no deeper colour rose in her cheek. On the contrary a great calm seemed to come over her, a sensation of indescribable repose; it was like a void filled up, a hope accomplished, a prayer granted. "God be praised!" she said to herself, and then marvelled at the solemnity of that mute thanksgiving.

"M. d'Arberg, let me introduce you to Miss Lifford." That insignificant commonplace sentence, so carelessly pronounced, and yet containing in itself the germ of so many happy and so many miserable destinies!

Adrien bowed and said, "I once impertinently introduced myself to Miss Lifford. I hope she has forgiven it."

Gertrude made some scarcely audible answer,

but her eyes looked all that such eyes as hers *can* look. From that instant a new era in her life began. What arose in her mind was neither a hope nor a project nor a design, but a conviction that there was for her but one destiny, one future, one possible fate. It was to love Adrien d'Arberg, and to walk this world with a spell on her soul, a secret in her heart, which might either exalt, transform, or annihilate her, but which would never leave as it had found her, which must be the source or the ruin of her happiness.

This kind of sentiment is either so deep and so intense that from its very excess it commands respect, or else it is degrading. There is no medium. Gertrude instinctively felt this, and it was this consciousness that preserved her self-respect, and gave her face such a beautiful expression at that moment. Mark Apley said to himself, "If I could think that that girl was in love with me I would propose to her directly."

Adrien did not seem to think much of anything just then, except of a print from Landseer, which he had taken up and was examining. She felt glad that he did not speak to her at first, that she had time to get accustomed to his presence before he directly addressed himself to her, and she began an insignificant conversation with Mark Apley.

"How well you are working those carnations, Miss Lifford! They seem to grow under your fingers. I wish men could work. Don't you think it would make them much pleasanter?"

"Perhaps it would, but there are only some men who ought to work."

"What sort of men?"

"Awkward clumsy ones. It would never do for a man to work well."

"Then," said Lady Clara, "they should not work at all, on Dr. Johnson's principle."

"Oh, but I quite disagree with the old Doctor."

"Do you really?" Mark exclaimed with a broad grin.

"A woman, for instance, might shoot, if only she did not know how to load her gun and held it as a parasol, and people may sing and act, but they must take care not to do so as well as professional singers and actors. Then, a woman may know Latin, if she does not know it too well."

"You seem very much afraid of perfection," Adrien said, raising his head with a smile.

"Yes, I am," she answered, turning her eyes slowly upon him.

"And I worship it," Lady Clara exclaimed, "wherever I find it."

"And where do you find it?" Adrien asked.

"There," she answered, as her favourite cousin appeared at the door of the conservatory, and certainly, if not in every respect, in outward appearance at least she seemed quite right.

Lady Roslyn was tall and beautiful, and her manner, which was exceedingly peculiar, was in

harmony with her looks. It was pretty to see her and Lady Clara together. They were very fond of each other, and family likeness gave a kind of resemblance to two faces and manners, which were yet essentially very different.

"We were talking of perfection, Ellen, and you appeared at that moment—the living proof of an assertion I have just made."

"What assertion, I wonder?" Lady Roslyn said with a smile, as she sat down by Gertrude, whose hand she had affectionately pressed.

"That I adore it. There is a riddle which your modesty will not guess. But tell us, Ellen, whether you worship perfection as I do, or are as afraid of it as this Lady-Bird is."

"You must first define what you mean by perfection, Clara."

"Ay," Adrien said, looking up from the prints he was examining, "*that* is the question. No two of us would agree, perhaps, on that point. Our heroes, I suspect, would be as

various as our notions of heroism." Gertrude thought two might perhaps agree, if *one* would explain his own ideas on the subject.

"Well, I am like Miss Lifford," Mark Apley exclaimed; "I am afraid of heroes."

"What is your ideal of a hero, Lady Clara?" Gertrude asked, somewhat timidly, thus hoping that afterwards Adrien would describe his.

"Oh, mine is a polytheism,—a general hero-worship; I have hundreds of favourites in every age and clime, who would have fought like cat and dog had they met upon earth, as their works or their histories meet on my table. Adrien would consign to perdition some of my idols."

"No, I will hope the best for them all; so do not tell me their names."

"Severely charitable!" she exclaimed: "O Mark Apley, who is your hero?"

"The Duke of Wellington, of course," Gertrude said, for she already knew her

admirer well enough to be sure that his imagination would not cross the sea in search of one; but when he re-echoed, "The Duke of Wellington, of course!" she coloured violently, suddenly remembering that Adrien was a Frenchman, and fancying she had shown a want of tact in suggesting to Mark his choice of a hero. Adrien perceived it, and relieved her distress by laughing at her about it. She looked at Lady Clara, and said,

"I often speak without thinking, perhaps because I have so often been obliged to think without speaking."

"That must be very disagreeable," Mark observed, "it never happened to me. Whatever I think, I always say."

"Your thoughts, I am afraid, do not soar very high, dear Mr. Apley," Lady Clara observed in too low a voice for him to hear.

"But perhaps they run very straight, which may be better," Adrien whispered.

Mark was a great favourite with his friends. He was so spirited, generous, and kind, and there was an ingenuousness in his simplicity that made it quite loveable. Whenever he said anything foolish, they did not say "poor Mark," but "dear Mark." He was too good to be pitied.

"Guess who I expect to-day," Lady Clara said, but not àpropos of heroes; by the way, we have none of us produced ours, except Mr. Apley."

"Let us leave them alone, then," Lady Roslyn said, "and tell us who you expect."

"Sir William Marlow, and my brother Henry."

"Oh, is Egerton coming? I shall be delighted to see him," Adrien exclaimed.

"Shall you really, M. d'Arberg? That pleases but surprises me; of all human beings, I should have thought he would have suited you the least."

"And why so, Lady Clara?"

"You differ so entirely on almost every subject."

"But sympathy and liking are quite separate things."

"And there can be sympathy without agreement."

"Of that I am not so sure, except in the case of a predominant affection, which has struck such profound roots in two hearts originally cast by Nature in the same mould that nothing can ever go deep enough to reach the electric bond of their union; except in such rare cases where love is stronger than death, or life also. I can hardly allow that there can be much sympathy where hopes, fears, wishes, and interests are all dissimilar. Do I make you understand what I mean, Lady Clara? The affection that creates sympathy under such circumstances is of the highest and most intense kind; but short of it, there may be regard and liking, but not sympathy: that is at least my view of the subject."

"Then, do you mean, for instance, that there is no sympathy between us?"

"Not the least, I should say." She laughed, but did not seem quite pleased.

"I should have thought that in our tastes and our feelings, our love of beauty in Nature and in art, our interest in literature, there were sufficient grounds of sympathy."

"No, there is matter for agreeable conversation, for very pleasant intercourse, for great kindness on the one side, and a grateful and admiring regard on the other; but sympathy, dear Lady Clara, does not consist in reading the same books, admiring the same views, liking some of the same occupations."

"What does it consist in then?" she asked somewhat impatiently.

"In what would make you understand at this moment all I dare not say on the subject. In what would make you feel that we might not have one taste in common, and yet the most perfect sympathy. But after all I may be quite wrong: as in the case of heroes, we may

apply a different meaning to the same word."

"As different," Gertrude said in a low voice, "as when we speak of admiring the Duke of Wellington or St. Vincent of Paul."

Who could have doubted what sympathy meant who saw their eyes meet at that moment?

"Do you and Henry dispute much, M. d'Arberg?"

"No; I believe we disagree too much to dispute."

"You are afraid of quarrelling?"

"No; your brother has an excellent temper, and I am too phlegmatic to lose mine easily, but to argue one ought to have certain points of agreement to start from, and that is just what we have not. Egerton has no chance of convincing me, or I him, because, like Archimedes, we can find no world to rest our levers on; our point d'appui is not the same, and so we cannot bring our arguments to bear."

"For my part," Mark said, "I hate arguing,—it is such provoking work,—and especially with Lady Clara, who always manages to be in the right."

"Or to seem so," Adrien added, "which, perhaps, she will think as great a compliment."

"It is an equivocal one, but I will take it in the best sense. My quarrel with you, M d'Arberg, is, that you never will let one penetrate to the bottom of your thoughts."

"What is it you wish to see there?"

"Your opinion of me."

"Then it is yourself and not me, that you wish to get acquainted with?"

"O *you!* I despair of ever finding *you* out. I do not know if you are the deepest of enthusiasts or the calmest of reasoners, the most enlightened philosopher or the most bigoted Papist."

"But what if the calmest reasoning awoke the deepest enthusiasm? If what you call the most

bigoted, and I call the most earnest Popery, were to turn out after all to be the most enlightened philosophy—as many of the deep thinkers of our age are beginning to suspect?"

"It would require a miracle to convince me of it, and more than one of your modern miracles."

"That is hard upon him, Clara," Lady Roslyn said. "You insist on a miracle, and will not have a modern one. But the thinkers you were speaking of, M. d'Arberg; they may be *deep*, perhaps, but not *free*."

"And do you like free thinkers, Lady Roslyn?"

"I like freedom of thought."

"And is not that free thinking?"

"You are playing upon words. I do not like the free thinking that ends in infidelity."

"Then the freedom you advocate must walk in leading-strings of your own selecting."

"Not of my selecting, M. d'Arberg."

"Of whose choosing, then?"

"Oh, if Ellen once begins an argument, we shall never get out of it again," Lady Clara exclaimed, "and it is not your religion but yourself I want to understand. At times I have supposed you to be a devoted supporter of legitimacy, a chivalrous admirer of the exploded theories of divine right, and at others, almost found you out to be a thorough-going democrat, with a lurking tenderness for Socialist opinions."

Adrien laughed, and said, "If you will not use the *key*, Lady Clara, how can you expect to unlock a door?"

"You have never yet given me the 'Open Sesame' into the secret chambers of *your* opinions."

"Has she ever asked you for it?" Lady Roslyn said, with a smile, "*C'est l'obstacle qu'elle aime—elle ne veut que chercher.*"

"You do not know him yet, Ellen; he has at once the most audacious and the most humble,

the most impetuous and the most imperturbable spirit imaginable, and while I am saying all this to him he sits looking at me as if I were neither praising nor insulting him."

"Because I suppose you do not intend to do either."

"I believe you like to be a riddle, and to baffle all my penetration. Is not this trying, Gertrude?"

"To which of you, Lady Clara?"

"To me, you most impertinent child," Lady Clara answered, with a smile. "I read his books, and fancy that through them I learn to know him; but when I see him again he puzzles me afresh. He writes pages of the most exciting eloquence; he carries you on by the might of his enthusiasm till you almost lose your footing, and feel, at least, if you do not always think, with him; but when you meet him face to face, he changes his tactics and draws you out instead of on, listens to you patiently, hopes the best for you, as he said just now of my

heroes, but leaves you in doubt what is the sentence passed in the secret tribunal of his thoughts."

"If I thought you in earnest I would defend myself, but you must not misconstrue my silence. I do not plead guilty."

"Gertrude shall judge between us in a few days. If she finds you less impenetrable than I have done, I will give in."

He smiled and said, "But perhaps she will use the key I was speaking of." Again Gertrude's eyes met his, but she hastily turned hers away, for she felt that they might express more than she wished.

"But it is very provoking," Lady Clara continued, "that you should be too modest or too proud to talk up to your books."

He looked at her with an amusingly imploring expression of countenance and said, "Dear Lady Clara, I will call on your favourite phrenologist the next time I go to London, and get him to

write my character for you; I will talk like a book if you wish it, and hold forth every evening on any subject you may select, if only you will not discuss me any more."

At that moment the sound of a carriage driving up the avenue was heard, and Lady Clara exclaimed, "That must be Henry!"

"Does Sir William Marlow come with him?" Mark inquired.

"Yes, I believe so; I hope they will tell them we are here."

"I will let them know," Adrien said, "I am going to the house."

As he left the conservatory Gertrude watched his tall figure as it disappeared amongst the trees. Mark observed the direction of her eyes and said, "You had never seen d'Arberg before, had you?"

"Yes, once at your house, the day of the breakfast."

"Did you ever see anybody half so handsome?"

"Half perhaps, but certainly not more than half."

"He is a capital fellow. Fanny says he is conceited, but it is not true, nobody thinks so little of himself. How different he is from Sir William Marlow."

Just then Lady Clara's brother Mr. Egerton and the identical Sir William Marlow were seen at a distance walking from the house, and in a few minutes they had joined them. Mr. Egerton was good-looking without being handsome. He seemed pleasing and intelligent. His companion was short and slight, with delicate features and a remarkable forehead. His dark hair was brought back in a way that gave him a rather wild expression. Mr. Egerton had just sufficient shyness in his manner to make apparent his friend's singular want of it. In his way of standing, sitting, shaking hands, or performing any of the ordinary actions of life, there was the stamp of a most profound conceit. His self-complacency hung

about him as a garment, or rather it seemed as much his natural attribute as the strut, the hop, or the twitter of certain birds belongs to them. The very sound of his voice was conceited. His calmness was irritating, the way he crossed his legs and caressed his foot exasperating, and the clearness of his articulation despairing. He united in his own person the active and the passive moods of vanity. Soon after the revolution of February, M. de Lamartine declared that a Frenchman's proper occupation is the contemplation of his own magnanimity, and at the same time an English journalist described England as sitting in unapproachable greatness. Now, Sir William Marlow seemed to unite in himself both the characteristics of these two very different nations. From the height of his unapproachable self-satisfaction, he seemed eternally to contemplate his own perfections. That he had good qualities, that he was clever, and that he had a considerable command of language could not be

denied. Lady Clara liked him, and perhaps she was right. It certainly is not right to dislike conceit as much as people in general do. It is better to be conceited than to be vicious or cruel, but the strut of a peacock and the impudence of a sparrow are often more irritating than the fierceness of a vulture or a hawk; it is not easy to be just when we are affronted, and such people as Sir William are a walking affront that our own conceit, however kept in order, can with difficulty endure.

Mr. Egerton was evidently struck with Gertrude's beauty. Sir William was never struck with anything. For a few moments Lady Clara kept up an animated conversation with the new comers, in which Lady Roslyn and Gertrude occasionally joined; and then, looking tired with that kind of fatigue peculiar to those who make society the business of their lives, she said she must lie down for an hour before dinner and proposed to go home. Mark Apley drew Gertrude

in the garden-chair across the parterre. Mr. Egerton talked to her as they went along. Sir William gave his arm to Lady Clara, and made clever answers to her brilliant remarks; and the sun went down behind the hills, and the dew was thick upon the grass, the flowers gave out their sweetest odours,—the air blew freshly on Gertrude's cheek, and an animated sense of enjoyment excited her spirits. Life appeared to her under a very different aspect than it had ever presented before; she thought it pleasant to be young and pretty, admired and amused. She felt as if her tastes and inclinations were in harmony with the refined beauty of the objects that surrounded her, while a romantic sentiment of admiration for one well calculated to inspire it imparted a meditative character to her enjoyment, which increased and exalted it.

When she reached her room, she sat down in a luxurious arm-chair, before a small wood fire that burned brightly in the grate, and opened a

volume which she had carried off from the drawing-room table. It was the Life of Christina of Sweden, which Maurice had once mentioned to her. Adrien's name was on the title-page. "I understand him," she said to herself, "but will he ever understand me? I dare not give him the key to my inmost thoughts, which he so fearlessly holds out to me of his own;" and taking a pencil she sketched in the faintest manner a key on the blank page of the book before her, and wrote under it these lines:

"Da me posso nullo
Con Dio posso tutto,
A Dio l'onore
A me il disprezzo."

CHAPTER IV.

" Di gelosia mi moro
E non lo posso dire !
Chi mai provó di questo,
Affanno piú funesto
Piú barbaro dolor."

METASTASIO.

MAURICE REDMOND had been for some time past engaged to spend a few weeks at Audley Park. He had given lessons the year before to Lady Clara, or rather played with her and to her; and she had soon perceived that his education and his manners fitted him for any society, and that he was an addition to hers. She had accordingly invited him to spend part of the autumn with them; and as he travelled from London to Stonehouseleigh, on his way to Audley Park, he

had often turned over in his mind the probable chances of meeting Gertrude at his mother's house, or in some other chance manner, without dreaming that he should soon find her established under the same roof with himself. It was Mary who announced it to him, soon after his arrival. He had devoted two or three days to his home and to her; and one of the first things he heard was the account of Gertrude's accident, of her residence at Audley Park, and of Mr. Lifford's departure for Spain. He had left London with the firmest resolution of banishing from his mind all vague hopes with regard to Gertrude. He had latterly wondered how such ideas could ever have occurred to him: it had, indeed, been but a transient dream called forth by her presence and her unconscious glances, and dissolved in absence; he had now resolved to press Mary at once to fix a period for their marriage, and this satisfied his conscience. It seemed as if he had given up something, whereas it was only that

calmer thoughts had shewn him the utter impossibility of another destiny, and what he did not give up was the passion which he still nourished in the secrecy of his heart.

Mary thought him looking ill, and hoped the country would do him good. He had worked hard in London, and made a little money. He smiled as he told her so, and asked her if she could begin housekeeping on such slender means as they could command. She made an evasive answer, and looked at him very earnestly. There was evidently something that disquieted her in his appearance: "Why do you look so wistfully at me, Mary?—Are you trying to read something in my eyes?" She gave a quick suppressed sigh, and shook her head.

"Then, Mary, will you agree to it? Shall we be married next spring?" She was silent, and seemed to be struggling with herself.

"Are you afraid of making me too happy by such a promise?" he said, and putting

his arm round her waist, he tried to look in her face.

"Too happy," she slowly repeated. "No, my only wish is to make you happy."

"Then, you will consent to become my wife?" She looked as pale as the white roses of the porch where they were sitting, but assented gently to his proposal, and in a few minutes left him and went up to her room.

There kneeling by the bedside she burst into tears. In a few minutes she got up and bathed her eyes with cold water. "*His* eyes must not shed tears," she said to herself. "*They* must not burn with hot drops like these. O my God, let him not weep. Let me stand between him and sorrow—and never in the way of his happiness. But *that* never, never could be happiness, and I will stand, so Heaven help me, between him and her. She shall not break his heart. O these blinding tears!" she exclaimed, "how they burn the eyes." There was a strange anxiety about

her as she made these exclamations and walked quickly up and down her room; but when she went down stairs again she was more cheerful than usual, and even encouraged him to talk of future plans and arrangements.

When under the influence of her society Maurice believed all that he desired to persuade himself. There was something so tender and unobtrusive in her manner, she was so indispensable to him in various ways, he was so accustomed to the perfume of sympathy and of affection with which she surrounded him, that it would have been difficult for him to call what he felt for her by another name than love, or to give that name to the tormenting and wayward emotions which he experienced in Gertrude's presence. He would certainly have been very unhappy that day if Mary had refused to become his wife. He was satisfied with this consciousness, and did not trouble himself to reflect what his feelings would have been if, at the moment she had

accepted him, he was suddenly to have heard that Gertrude was about to marry, or that he was never to see her again. He asked himself no such probing questions either then or the next day on his way to Audley Park, but only mentally protested, as if to silence some troublesome self-suggestions, that he loved Mary firmly and truly, and that he looked to her for his future happiness,—that in sorrow or in joy, in health or in sickness, she would be to him, a shield, a comfort, a friend and a support,—that together they had begun life, and together they would pass through it, and together end it. What injury was it to her if, as artists place before them beautiful pictures to inspire their conceptions, as others listen to the most exciting music they can procure, or revel in the most romantic scenery they can find, and thus influence their imaginations and kindle their enthusiasm?—why should not Lady-Bird be his picture to gaze upon—the muse from which he should draw

his inspirations—the "dame de ses pensées," in the domain of art and of romance? It was his scruples that made him untrue to Mary—Mary his gentle sister in his childhood — now his betrothed, soon to be his wife. That was an earnest tie, a serious affection, beyond the nonsense of romance, the trifling of imagination. Did he, could he ever have thought of Lady-Bird as his wife? O no, she was not made for the common-place cares and duties of life; and Shakespeare's often repeated lines about "a bright particular star" came into his head as he was riding up the avenue.

About ten days had elapsed since Gertrude's first appearance in the drawing-room of Audley Park. During that interval the various ingredients of which its society was composed had been shaken together, and the process of assimilation had begun to take place. People had found out whom they liked, or disliked; who amused and who bored them; who made useful butts; who talked and who listened well; who was

always in a good humour, and who could not endure a joke; at what hour the library and the newspapers were unoccupied; when the Miss Apleys got somebody to play and sing, and talked all the time themselves, or Mr. Egerton and Mark Apley argued about Protection and Free-trade, or General Burnwood gave, "in a few words," the history of his campaigns. Some friendships were dawning, some flirtations budding, some aversions growing up,—silent ones which were the deepest, busy ones which were tiresome, quarrelsome ones which were amusing. Lady Clara was the perfection of an hostess; she paid enough attention to her guests to make them feel quite at home, and not too much to infringe on the charm of complete independence. She left well alone; never insisted on those who seemed happy in one way that they should amuse themselves in another, but if the most insignificant person in the society looked bored or neglected, she found them some occupation or

amusement. She adapted herself in turn to every one; not so much out of amiability, though she was amiable, but from a wish to see none but happy faces about her, and a dislike to sad ones. "Life," she said one day, "was too short for gloom." "True," Adrien answered. They agreed, but did not sympathise.

Lady Roslyn showed her Mrs. Hemans' beautiful poem of the Revellers, and said,

"You too, Clara, would banish all but the gay in heart from your festive hall."

"No," she said, "but I would try to force happiness upon them, and only allow them that shade of melancholy—not without something of enjoyment in it—which makes us enter into the feelings of poetry, and the charm of emotion. I would not banish *her*, for instance," pointing to Gertrude, "though in Mrs. Hemans' words, 'Her eyes' quick flash through their troubled shroud' does not always indicate a heart at ease; but I try to teach her not to look at things too

seriously, not to '*prendre la vie au tragique*,' and I hope I shall succeed."

Mrs. Crofton, who had been listening, smiled and said, "Example can do much, my dear Lady Clara, but Nature is stronger still, and I do not expect that you will succeed in teaching the soul of fire that shines out of those dark eyes to glide along life's stream in the rose-leaf fashion that becomes you so well."

Mrs. Crofton and Lady Clara did not suit. They were a little too alike, and a great deal too unlike. Both lived in and for society; both were irreproachable in their moral characters; but Mrs. Crofton was as plain as Lady Clara was beautiful, and so she had to work harder in her vocation, though she succeeded nearly as well. She was not as eloquent, as graceful, or as amiable; but she was sharper, cleverer, and droller. No one was ever tired of her, and some fastidious people did think Lady Clara was a little too pictorial in her language, and high-flown

in her ideas. She was too much engrossed in her own impressions to watch the effect she made on others; but Mrs. Crofton had a lynx eye which always detected the fluctuating symptoms of interest and *ennui* in those she spoke to. In everything she said there was more power and less charm than in the other, as was once said by a witty Frenchman of two ladies, "*Elle était le mâle de l'espèce, dont l'autre était la femelle.*"

Mr. Latimer was very happy at Audley Park, for he had one ruling passion—the investigation of characters, and there was a fine field for it in the present party. He wrote to a friend:

"It is the most amusing thing in the world to live in this menagerie,—this 'happy family,' in which I feel myself like the owl with whom nobody meddles, and who sleeps with his eyes open. There is our hostess, a lovely bird with the most stainless plumage and the sweetest voice, warbling mellifluously on her golden perch, but keeping at a respectful distance from

that clever little mocking-bird, Mrs. Crofton, whose sharp beak pecks rather harder than is always agreeable. There is that stately Bird-of-Paradise, Lady Roslyn, and a family of canary-birds, the Miss Apleys, pleasant enough if they did not chirp so incessantly. Then they have got another young creature whom I hardly know how to describe. It is half foreign and half English, a young eaglet perhaps, born in the Pyrenees, but bred in an old house in this old-fashioned county. Such eyes it has, I have no doubt they could stare at the sun if they tried. You know I am not often in the humour in which it would be safe for a child to play with me, but this young eaglet is not afraid of my snarling. Then we have all sorts of other creatures besides, gentlemanlike young birds like Egerton, cock-sparrow geniuses, and would-be statesmen like Marlow, good humoured honest geese like Apley, and a very tall French bird whom I cannot make head or tail of; besides

many others, for the cage can hardly hold us all. We have not fought much yet. There is only a little beating of wings and hissing now and then. The cock-sparrow has a violent dislike to the tall French bird, but they have not come to blows yet. The canary-birds look with a jaundiced eye at the eaglet, perhaps because they think it will take their goose for a swan. But I think it would come to my perch sooner,—and I almost wish it would. It goes by the name of Lady-Bird. By the way, don't you remember a certain Henry Lifford to whom Lady Clara was engaged some twenty-two years ago when just emerging from the school-room. This is his daughter by a Spanish wife. I hope I shall not make a fool of myself about her."

Gertrude might have made fools of almost all the men who saw her, had she chosen it; and sometimes a wicked wish crossed her mind, that she had known something of society before Adrien had taken from her all desire for the

admiration of others. She tried to shake off the impression he had made upon her, but the effort proved utterly vain; a look, a word, or a smile from him were more to her than the homage or adoration of the whole world besides. His unconscious power over her was unbounded. She did not conceive the possibility of differing with him in opinion, of ever acting again in any way that she might have heard him casually condemn. His slightest word was law, his books her daily meditation, his presence or his absence the regulating cause of her cheerfulness or depression. He was on very friendly terms with her, but nothing more. There was great kindness, but no devotion in his manner, and she never wished to see him at her feet: could she ever inspire him with an interest in her fate, which would justify to herself her ever-increasing regard for him—it seemed that *that* would be the highest bliss earth could offer. When they talked together, she was most innocently

hypocritical; for she so identified herself with his thoughts and his feelings that they seemed naturally to become hers, and his convictions and opinions to transfer themselves into her mind by an unconscious process of assimilation. She talked to him of her childhood, of her home, of her mother, but in a different way from that which was usual to her. This was not dissimulation; it was a change wrought by the influence he exercised over her. Hardness melted in the light of his eyes; levity disappeared before his earnestness, and pride vanished in the presence of his perfect simplicity.

She happened to be alone in the drawing-room when Maurice arrived. The day was cold, and everybody taking exercise, which she could not yet do; and with a book in her hand, and her eyes as often fixed on the fire as on its pages, she had spent the hours since luncheon. She was taking a resolution which cost her a great effort, but in which she was swayed by the one

ruling influence which now governed all her thoughts and actions. She must return to Lifford Grange the next day. It could not be right to stay away from her mother any longer; and if she could drive in the pony-chaise at Audley Park, she was well enough, it was clear, to go home in a carriage. She was not without hope that Lady Clara would invite, and her mother allow her to come back to the Paradise she was about to leave; but she must go and see her mother. Adrien had said something the day before—had asked a casual question—which had fixed her wavering thoughts on the subject: but it was an immense effort to go without being *sure* of coming back—*sure* of finding him there again. For the first time she thought of the future as connected with him,—recollected that though he had relations and interests in England and in Ireland, his country was France, and the chances of life might never bring them together again. "Was this possible?" she asked herself.

"Possible to embark one's all of happiness in a bark that casually floats alongside of ours on the stream of life, and then see it drift away in another direction, without the power of remonstrance or complaint." It seemed like signing her own death-warrant to propose to go away. "But would I not die if *he* thought it right?" she mentally exclaimed,—smiled at her own extravagance, and then sighed; for her conscience protested against the rank idolatry of her heart.

At that moment the door opened, and Maurice Redmond was ushered in. He started when he saw her, but quickly recovering himself he came up to her, and was received most kindly. She was very glad to see him, and they spent some time together before any one came in. "How strange it seems, Maurice, to meet *here*," she said. "Hitherto when we have conversed, it has always been either in the open air, or on the downs or the woods where we used to play in former times, or in Mrs. Redmond's cottage, or mamma's dark room. It seems

to me a whole year since my accident. Don't you think there are weeks in which one lives a life?"

"There are moments," he answered, "in which I suppose the happiness or the misery of a whole life can be concentrated."

"Yes," she thoughtfully answered, "I can imagine that it might be so. What has been the happiest moment of your life, Maurice?"

She was thinking very little of the person she addressed. She had forgotten that it had ever crossed her mind that he admired her even in the distant respectful manner which it had once amused her to observe. It was absently she had asked that question, as she might have inquired what was the most beautiful view he had ever seen, and she did not remark that his face flushed as he answered, "The one when I nearly fainted at the Woodlands' breakfast." She smiled and said, "You like extremes, I see. The pleasure of success, preceded by an instant's suffering to make it keener, is your favourite idea of

happiness. Well, again I say it may be so, but I don't quite like the receipt. I feel with regard to happiness as children do about a promised toy. 'Give it me *now*.'—How is Mary?"

"Well, quite well," he answered in a tone of dejection; but rousing himself, added, "you know she is so unselfish that she would never tell us if she was not so; that is, as long as she could exert herself as usual."

"She *is* good," Gertrude exclaimed.

"O she is good," he retorted, "good beyond what any one can know or imagine. There are depths of tenderness and of patience in her heart which cannot be fathomed. Even I—who have known her from childhood, and revered her almost as a saint—I am sometimes astonished at her goodness."

"Do you think her as good as one person whom you used to talk to me about—as M. d'Arberg?"

"Yes, I believe so. They are both as near

perfection as I can fancy human beings can be, but Mary has none of the stimulants and rewards which a man's career holds out to virtue. She has no earthly reward."

"Except your affection," Gertrude said, for the first time alluding in speaking to him to the attachment existing between them.

"Ay, I love her," he answered, in a tone of unaccountable emotion and irritation; "God help her, I love her very much."

This sentence seemed strange to Gertrude, and she looked at him inquiringly. He did not notice it, but said—"And you have made acquaintance with Adrien d'Arberg. Had I said too much about him, Lady-Bird,—Miss Lifford, I mean?"

"Never mind, Maurice, everybody here calls me so, and you who gave me the name have a better right than any one to do so."

"O Lady-Bird, thank you," he exclaimed, and seizing her hand, kissed it. "Forgive me; in Italy the very beggars kiss the hand that relieves

them. It is only in England that it is thought presumptuous." She felt his manner odd, and abruptly changed the subject. "I am going back to Lifford Grange to-morrow." "To-morrow! for how long?" "O probably for good and all."

At that moment Mr. Latimer came into the room, nodded to Maurice, and sat down between him and Gertrude, opposite to the fire. "Well, Lady-Bird, you have not been out to-day. What have you been doing with yourself? What are your studies? I should like to know how you spend your time when we are all out of the way. You are one of the few women I have ever met with who seems to like to be alone. You think a great deal?"

She put her fingers to her temples, and said, "It is a mill always at work, but it grinds more chaff than corn."

"I believe it would grind anything you chose to put into it. What has it been busy upon to-day?"

"A point of duty, Mr. Latimer."

"O what a dry bone."

"But with marrow in it, too."

"Who threw it in—yourself or somebody else?"

"Conscience picked it up, threw it in——"

"And it has been ground into nothing."

"No, into something,—and something disagreeable, too."

"What is that?"

"The unpleasant circumstance for myself that I am going away to-morrow."

"O stuff and nonsense; you can't go away."

"I wish I could not; but I can, and shall."

"But you will come back here soon?"

"I don't know: one never knows anything in this world, I find. It is all a living '*au jour la journée.*'"

"O but we won't live without seeing you again. We shall all die."

"I will come at all events to *your* funeral, Mr. Latimer."

"And not to Mark Apley's? Poor fellow! he will die first. *I* shall make a struggle, and pine

away by degrees. But what do you do with yourself in that enchanted abode where nobody penetrates? Has anybody ever got in? Have you, Mr. Redmond?"

"O yes, he has," she answered quickly, "often enough. He is 'mon pays,' as the French peasants say."

"They tell me you read immensely."

"How do *they* know anything about it?"

"Here is Lady Clara, and the about-to-be-annihilated Mark. She says she must go away to-morrow."

"So she told me this morning, but I would not believe her. Besides, she ought not to go before the doctor has given his permission."

"I *must*, dear Lady Clara. I have told mamma to send the carriage for me to-morrow."

"Then you must come back as soon as you can, dear child. We cannot do without you."

"So I told her. She will find us lying about like dead flies, if she stays away too long.

Perhaps Sir William Marlow may survive, and wander about the house like the last man."

Mark's usually radiant face was overcast. He was provoked at Mr. Latimer's manner to Gertrude. He felt he had not made any way with her since she had been at Audley Park; he was not quick enough to discover where was the danger he had to fear, and was jealous of the sort of easy footing on which Mr. Latimer was with her, although he was quite old enough to be her father. Maurice was disappointed at her departure, and yet relieved in one sense by the reflection that she was to be replaced in the solitary position where none approached her. He felt frightened at his own agitation when any other man spoke to her; Mr. Latimer's manner, his jokes about Mark, were intolerable to him. If he felt that already, what would it be to live in the same house with her, in the midst of such a society. He should never be able to control his nervous irritation.

It was better she should go. He would have wished to hurry her away. Once within those old walls of Lifford Grange, he could think of her, dream of her, get a glimpse of her now and then, and no one else would gaze on her beauty,—no one else would call her Lady-Bird, or talk in joke of dying for her. What business had they to joke with such a thought? Poor Maurice, it was no laughing matter to him. While he was dressing for dinner, he embodied these thoughts in verse, according to his usual practice, and set them to an impassioned German air.

"Return, return where careless eyes may never rest on thee,
Where none, not even once by chance, may see thy face but me.
Go back to those old yew-trees' shade, where often from afar
I've watched thee as the learned watch in the deep sky a star.
Go back where birds and whisp'ring winds alone will haunt thine ears;
Go back to those deserted walks, the haunts of former years.
The jests, the smiles of thoughtless men, were never meant for one
Who in those silent solemn halls has lived and bloomed alone:—
Let them not praise thee, hold thy hand, and call thee by a name
Which time has stamped upon my brain in characters of flame.
Go, for the sake of pity, go. Thy every word and look,
Here, amidst those who laugh or sigh, my spirit cannot brook."

There were sincere and insincere regrets uttered for Gertrude's departure, and sincere and

insincere wishes for her return. She did not care much for any of them. Lady Clara, whom she was really fond of, she knew was sorry to lose her. Though worldly in some respects, or rather of the world, there was an openness in her clear eyes and smooth brow which was unmistakeable. The truth was in her, and her smile was a pledge. Adrian had not approached her that day; and it was rather late in the evening before he did so. He had been engaged in a long conversation with Mrs. Crofton and Sir William Marlow. The latter had treated him "*Du haut de sa petite grandeur*" at first; but finding what an adversary he had to deal with, had become eager and put forth all the strength of his understanding, and a close encounter had taken place between them on some of the leading questions of the day. Mrs. Crofton, with that admirable art of listening which she possessed to an eminent degree, had stimulated the sharp encounter, and given an amusing turn to it, when Sir

William was growing bitter. Nearly opposite to them sat Gertrude, with one of the Miss Apleys, and several men around them. Maurice was sitting on a chair a little behind her, and she now and then turned round to speak to him.

"I wonder," he said, in a low voice, "if they would think M. d'Arberg quite sane here, if they knew some of the things he does. To me, who know how a great deal of his time is employed and the use he makes of his fortune, it seems so odd to see him in this sort of society making himself agreeable like any ordinary man of the world."

"He is very rich, is not he?"

"Very rich; I believe his mother was an heiress, his father married her when he was an *émigré*. His good works are prodigious, also; but they are done so secretly that few people know anything of them. I am convinced he will end by being a priest." Gertrude turned pale; Maurice saw it and a jealous pang shot through his heart. Thank Heaven, she was going the next day, and

d'Arberg would not, probably, stay long in England. They might never meet again. Why had he not dreaded their becoming acquainted? Why, fool that he was, had he talked to her so much about him? He went on in an odd abrupt manner to say that he must have hurt his fortune by his extravagant charities, that this was probably the reason why he had never married——

"O, no," she said in a quiet manner, "Mr. Audley, who knows him well, says he has large property both in France and in Ireland."

"You have ascertained that he is rich?" he answered in a tone of ill-disguised agitation.

"I have heard it," she said, and then became absent, for the hand of the French clock was travelling fast, and her impatience was becoming almost intolerable. At last the conversation at the opposite table came to an end, and Adrien, as if he had perceived her for the first time that evening, came and sat in the chair opposite to her. Miss Apley was talking eagerly to some

one on the other side of the couch. Maurice had seized a newspaper, and seemed engrossed with it, but was still near enough to hear every word that passed. "I hear you are going home to-morrow," Adrien said, and looked at her with an expression of interest. "Yes," she answered, without raising her eyes from the nosegay she held in her hand, "life cannot be spent amongst flowers : not mine at least."

"You have enjoyed yourself here ?"

"Almost too much. I wish I had not been thrown on this bed of roses, for I am afraid it has unfitted me for another couch."

"Well, it certainly is not a very bracing atmosphere that we live in here. It is floating down the stream, instead of pulling against it."

"And yet," she said, "what fault can be found with such an existence as Lady Clara's ? How innocent it is ! how affectionate she is ! Loving and beloved, giving pleasure and receiving it. I think it is a delightful sight to see her, so

beautiful herself, in the midst of beauty of every kind. By changing a single word, one could apply to her that pretty French line,

"Et rose elle a vécu, comme vivent les roses."

"True," he answered, with one of his slow smiles, "but was she sent into the world to live the life of a rose, or to bear her part in the great battle-field of life? Her existence always seems to me too much like Eve's in Paradise—Eve *before* not *after* the Fall."

Gertrude pulled off all the pink petals of one of the flowers in her hand and showed him the green calyx which formed a sort of cross. "Ay!" he exclaimed, "it will be found in the end, but ought it not to have been taken up sooner?"

"I should like the battle-field of life," she said, "but to sit still is what I dread."

"We must each of us fight at our post," he answered. "The order of the day is all that concerns us. Do you go early to-morrow?"

"Not very early," she replied, with a faltering voice.

"I wanted to ask you if on Sunday I might hear mass at the chapel at Lifford Grange,—it is nearer than Stonehouseleigh, and I should be glad to see Father Lifford at the same time." Her eyes flashed with a joy that she could not disguise, and she assented briefly, but in a manner that showed the delight she felt.

"Mamma will see you, perhaps, if she is pretty well."

"Would she? I should be so glad to know her."

"She never receives strangers, but——"

"But you think she would see me?"

"I have read to her your books; and you have been so kind to me."

"Kind!" he said with a smile.

"Yes; you carried me here the day of my accident. I am sure she will wish to thank you. Can you speak Spanish?"

"Yes."

"That will do, it is all right,"—and with a movement of irresistible delight she threw up her nosegay into the air, and caught it back again as it fell. He looked a little thoughtful, and did not talk to her any more that evening, but sat on in the same place. Maurice had been asked to sing a new romance which Mrs. Crofton had just received from Paris, the words by Victor Hugo; it was called the "Fou de Tolède." He complied: when he came to the following stanza his eyes fixed themselves on Gertrude:—

Un jour Sabine a tout donné—
Sa beauté de Colombe
Et son amour,
Pour l'anneau d'or du Comte de Saldagne
Pour un bijou—
Le vent qui vient à travers la montagne
Me rendra fou.

She did not observe his emotion, but the music of this song—which was wild like a dream of passion—seemed to suit her thoughts also.

CHAPTER V.

"Not chance of birth or place has made us friends,
Being —— of different tongues and nations,
But the endeavour for the self-same ends,
With the same hopes, and fears, and aspirations."

SHAKSPEARE.

In her mother's arms—at her mother's feet—Gertrude spent the next few days. That dark room had grown very dear to her. Her feelings were now more in unison with its aspect. The picture of the Duke of Gandia seemed to look approvingly upon her, as by every little exertion in her power she endeavoured to contribute to her mother's comfort. She told her again and again all the particulars of her stay at Audley Park, amused her with descriptions of the people she

had seen, made her smile sometimes and sigh at others, and understood her smiles but not her sighs. Then she talked to her of Adrien, gave a minute account of his looks, of his manner, repeated every word he had said to her, and announced that he would come to Lifford Grange on the following Sunday.

"You must tell Father Lifford, love. I wonder what your father would feel about it?"

"About what, mamma? About M. d'Arberg's coming to church? You know the chapel is open to every one on Sunday."

"Yes, dearest, but if he comes I think you must ask him to have some luncheon."

"Yes, to be sure," Gertrude said, with her brightest smile, "we must not let him starve, and then you must see him."

"O no, my dearest child, I cannot do that."

"Oh, you must, dearest mamma, it will do you a world of good. How I wish I had taken to managing you long ago. You would be so much

better by this time. I am beginning to manage Father Lifford too. By going a little lame I make him do whatever I like now."

"O but Gertrude, that is very naughty."

"No, no, I don't *pretend* to limp, I only show it off. Oh, we could be so happy here if——" Here she stopped, and a dark cloud passed over her face. In a moment she said, "Lady Clara would come and see you if you liked, mamma."

Mrs. Lifford became agitated, "My child, don't let her come. I could not bear it. I am very very grateful to her for her kindness to you, but indeed I cannot see her. I can see nobody. I am not fit for it."

"Not Lady Clara then, not anybody but M. d'Arberg. He will talk Spanish to you, and you will understand each other so well. Dearest, when I talk to him, it gives me such a wish to be good like him."

Mrs. Lifford looked tenderly at her child and said, "Geltrudina, don't give away that little heart

of thine to a Frenchman." She put her hand on her heart with a smile and said to herself, "I have none left to give away. But he is just as much English as French, or Spanish, or anything else, mamma. He is only like himself."

"Do you think he likes you, Gertrude?"

"He does not dislike me, and sometimes I have thought he appeared a little interested about me. But I am no more worthy of him—than Muff," she said, hiding her face with the little dog's flossy head.

"And then, dearest, you should not think of anything of the sort without knowing more about him."

"I do know all about him; I know that he is the best, the cleverest, the noblest of human beings."

"That may be, dear child. Father Lifford says he is very good; but that is not all that your father would think of."

"But, dearest mamma, M. d'Arberg is not thinking of me in the way you mean; other people paid me attentions at Audley Park. He did not. Maurice Redmond says he will be a priest; so you need have no apprehensions on that subject. If he ever should think of me, I have no fear that his family could be objected to. Mr. Audley said it was very ancient, and he is very rich and everything people care about—but he will never dream of marrying me. To be *his* wife would be too great a blessing."

"O Gertrude, Gertrude."

"You will see him on Sunday, mamma; don't think me too foolish till then. Now I shall go down stairs, and play at chess with Father Lifford. It always puts him in a good humour to beat me, and I want him to be in a very good humour just now."

In spite of her remaining lameness, she walked briskly towards the drawing-room. Her manner was altogether changed—its restless listlessness

had disappeared, and her mother was confirmed in the belief that a little change was a good thing for her. She did not yet understand the great change that had almost transformed her into another creature,—the awakening of that deep power of loving which had hitherto lain in her heart "like an unopened flower."

Adrien d'Arberg had been much attached in his early youth to a cousin of his who had died of consumption at the age of eighteen. Her virtues, her ardent piety, and her saintly death had made an impression upon him which nothing had effaced, and her memory had been associated with every interest and exertion of his life. She was a German,—one of those fair, pale girls whose eyes have a natural sentimentality bordering on melancholy. Her temper was serene and serious. There had been something at once romantic and religious in her affection for him. She had had a presentiment of her early death, and had never looked forward to earthly

happiness. Whenever he talked of the future and of their marriage, she shook her head without sadness, but with a profound conviction that she should not live to be his wife. There was something holy in her face; she was like one of Francia's or Perugino's saints, or like the picture which old chroniclers draw of "the dear St. Elizabeth of Hungary."

A very short time before her death she called him to her, and told him that this might be the last time she should see him, and that she wished to take leave of him then. She enjoined him to do in the world all the good she would have wished to do, and add daily to the treasure they had begun to lay up together in heaven. "She had made her meditation that morning," she said, "on the history of Martha and Mary, and felt as if he would say that she left him to do all the serving alone; but you will not grudge me, Adrien," she added, "that better part which I indeed have not chosen, but which has been

chosen for me." She gave him much advice,—amongst other things asked him to write the long work which he had since accomplished. She had a brother whom she dearly loved, and who had lost his faith. His conversion had been the object of her prayers and of her hopes, and now of her request to Adrien. She told him that she had never prayed for health or for any temporal blessing, but for one thing alone, and that she had even offered up her life to obtain it, that was, that he might lead a perfect life on earth, and do much for God and for the Church. "I know not," she added, "if He has accepted the sacrifice; it is delightful to me to hope it, and do you, Adrien, always act as if it were so accepted. In every temptation—not to sin only, but to faltering in the upward path—think of my early death, and remember that you have double work to do."

Still deeper thoughts and tenderer words she spoke, too solemn to be here repeated, and hitherto he had carried them in his heart, and

they had borne fruit in his life. She remained his beau idéal of woman, and it was with almost a religious worship that he honoured her memory. He had not thought of love, or of marriage since. Sometimes he had felt yearnings for the religious life, but had not yet found in himself the vocation to it. He had not lived much in society, and no woman but Ida had ever made any impression upon him. Once, in compliance with the wishes of his family, he had tried to like a young person whom they recommended him to marry. They thought she resembled his early love, and fancied she would captivate him, but she had only Ida's features without her soul, and he shrunk from the likeness as from a deception and a snare. On the night that in the course of a stroll through the park at Audley Place he had found Gertrude insensible and carried her home in his strong arms, he had only just seen that she was beautiful, or would be so when animation returned; when he heard from Lady Clara her name, and

her family and home were described to him, he felt interested about her.

There were several reasons for his being so, and though it was as yet but a transient feeling, it was more than he had felt for any woman, except Ida. He remembered how, in Italy, Maurice Redmond used to talk to him about her, and his having once shown him a very odd clever letter she had written to him. When he began talking to her, he was a little startled sometimes, but on the whole attracted. As it was said before, from the first moment of their acquaintance he had so much unconscious influence over her, that her somewhat strange opinions and the peculiarities of her impetuous and yet reserved character were so much softened as only to make her original and amusing. She was as quick as lightning, understood in an instant anything he said to her, and astonished him by the vivacity of her intelligence. Perhaps he thought her rather more *genuine* than she was. Perhaps there was

a little more of self-knowledge than appeared on the surface of her captivating *laisser-aller*, but her feelings were genuine even if there was a little art sometimes in her way of conducting herself.

It is difficult to have strong volitions, to be excessively clever, to have great powers of self-command, and yet to be open as the day. Shallow waters are easily transparent—but it is rare to find a very deep and very transparent stream. His own character was such, but in both cases the exception is rare. Lady Clara had often spoken to him of Mr. Lifford, and that man's destiny had always been to him a subject of regret. It was positive pain to a nature like his to see blessings wasted, intellect thrown away, means of usefulness disregarded, and by one who could have done so much for all the objects he had most at heart. When he looked at the beautiful animated girl who seemed so ready to adopt all high views and

aims, and to sympathise so warmly in everything great, useful, and noble, he wondered if she could not rouse her father from the torpid indifference in which he was sunk, and stimulate him to adopt another course; and this idea had induced him also to become well acquainted with her, and to endeavour to inspire her with such an ambition. By degrees he perceived or guessed what was the case:—that she had no belief in her father's affection, and that if there had not been bitter passages in her life, at least there were sore corners in her heart. Those who have felt themselves how suffering can be turned, I had almost said into happiness and I will not unsay it, but at all events into a blessing, have a sort of yearning desire to make others and especially young people understand it. Bitterness is the worst sort of suffering, but perhaps when the right remedy is applied it is the most certainly to be cured. And by a few unpretending words, some instances quoted here and

there from real life, he conveyed to her his own receipt for happiness; but in mixing up the draught he unconsciously put in an ingredient he had not intended. It was an intoxicating addition, and might nullify what in appearance it seemed to second.

As he was waiting in the drawing-room, on the Sunday morning after her departure, for the post-chaise that was to take him to Lifford Grange, he took up accidentally his own book which was lying on the table, and opened on the page where, in faint pencil-marks, she had drawn a key; and he read the Italian lines underneath it. "True," he said to himself, "that is the key to what seems at times such a problem to one's self—one's strength, and one's weakness." As he drove through the sombre avenue of Lifford Grange, and caught sight of the melancholy old mansion at the end of it, which, with the sullen-looking view beyond, formed a striking contrast with the scenery between it and Audley

Park, he thought what a strange flower had blossomed in that dull spot. As the post-chaise stopped, a servant came up to the door and showed him the way to the chapel, which was at the end of the wing which contained Mrs. Lifford's apartments. It was very small, but well arranged, and the candles on the altar were lighting at that moment. Gertrude was kneeling by the side of her mother's arm-chair, who, when she was well enough to leave her bed, heard mass from a kind of tribune on one side of the altar. One look she cast at the body of the chapel, and saw, with the emotion which a great joy after a moment's anxiety produces, Adrien kneeling and absorbed in prayer.

There is something more touching in a man's devotion than in a woman's; when it is earnest it is so real, so humble, and so deep. It seemed to her as if the light of heaven played round that noble head bowed down in intense adoration. Though she was looking at him, she knew that he

would not look at her. *His* spirit was soaring far above earthly thoughts, and she was glad of it; she had understood at once in knowing him what theologians mean by perfection—a comparative term after all—but a necessary one to describe the angelic life which some of God's creatures are enabled to live on earth; and a glance from him at that moment would have disappointed her. She turned away, and prayed earnestly herself, nor once looked again from the altar. After mass, she saw her mother comfortably established on her couch, and propped up by pillows.

"Now, mamma, I will bring M. d'Arberg to see you. We will come in by the garden-door in the next room."

"You must let me rest for an hour, dear child, and then you may come."

"Very well, dearest, then I shall take him to see the house, if he wishes it, for Father Lifford will not be in the library for some time, I know.—

Yes," she said to herself, as she went slowly across the hall, "I should like to take him to every part of this old house of mine" (for the first time she complacently called it her house), "so that the perfume of pleasant memories might attach itself to every corner of it."

When she opened the door of the drawing-room —that formal square room with its heavy furniture and cheerless aspect—it seemed too like a dream to see Adrien there. But there he was, and the window where he was standing was the first of the stations which her fancy meant to cherish. "Are you well, Lady-Bird?" he asked her kindly and warmly. "You have not been walking too much in the day, or reading too late at night?"

"I shut up my book every night as the clock strikes twelve," she said. "I am trying to keep rules; it is hard work, but I hope there will be method in my madness at last."

"It is madness to waste health," he said with

a smile, "at least without making a good bargain with it,—getting something more valuable in return."

"And information is not that, I suppose?"

"O no—not for its own sake. What a very peculiar place this is."

"What do you think of it?" she said, throwing open the window out of which they both leant.

"I don't dislike it, but I cannot flatter you either by praising or abusing it. But tell me, is the chapel as old as the house?"

"Not the one that is used now, but the one upstairs under the roof, which is now out of repair. There is near it one of the hiding-places for the priests which were used in the days of persecution."

"Will you show it me, in return for the stories of the catacombs which I told you the other day?"

"Yes, I will!" she eagerly exclaimed; and leading the way through long passages and winding staircases, continued, "I had no notion till I met the other day with a little book called

'Records of Missionary Priests,' of the heroic lives and deaths of these men, of whom some may have taken refuge in the very place I am going to show you. These accounts are quite sublime, although—or rather perhapsbecause—they are so simply given. But, M. d'Arberg, I cannot endure their loyalty to Queen Elizabeth: it may have been fine, but it provokes me to death."

"You are given to rebellion. I have perceived that before."

"But you are not surely for passive obedience?"

"You must not make me talk politics *here*. I am afraid of the ghosts of your ancestors. But I do admire from my heart the absence of party-spirit in men who died for their faith, with less of earthly stimulus and sympathy than any other martyrs were ever cheered and supported by before. It was done in the discharge of an ordinary duty, all in their day's work; and their

dying prayers for the Queen and the country appear less like great efforts of Christian virtue, than an absence of bitterness more surprising still. They were strangers and pilgrims ; and to be thrust aside from the world, and hurried on to eternity, was an injury which hardly excited their resentment."

"But they gave up the out-posts too readily. They stipulated for nothing but the very citadel, and defended it only by dying."

"True," he answered, "it was an error, perhaps, but a noble and not an unchristian one. Is this the place?"

"It is," she exclaimed, "and we may well call it holy ground, for martyrs here, in Mrs. Hemans' words,

> 'Uncheer'd by praise
> Have made the offering of their days,
> And silently in fearless faith
> Prepared their noble souls for death.'"

Adrien gazed with emotion into the dark recess, which was usually concealed by a sliding

panel, which gave no outward sign of the existence of a hiding-place within. After an instant he turned to her and said, "I had often heard of these places of refuge, but had never seen one before. Your old house may be gloomy at first sight, but it speaks more to the soul than Audley Park." They went downstairs again, and sat upon the terrace. "Will you sit on this bench while I go and see if mamma is ready to receive you."

"No; but I will walk up and down here till you come back." In five minutes she returned again, and led him through the little library into Mrs. Lifford's room.

It was long since her mother had seen a stranger; and her cheek was flushed, and her voice a little tremulous as she spoke to him in Spanish, which was familiar to him as his own tongue. His manner was gentle to every one, but to that bruised and suffering being (and who could look upon her, and not feel that such she

was) it was gentleness and tenderness itself. That manner, the tones of his voice, the expression in his eyes, were inexpressibly soothing to her. She had not been so addressed for years and years. Father Lifford was very kind, but he was rough and abrupt. Gertrude had latterly been affectionate and attentive, but her high spirits and impetuous nature gave something startling to her very tenderness; while her husband's coldness and her son's formality were in another way depressing. She had been used to something so different in her childhood and early youth. There was a sound in Adrien's voice that reminded her of Assunta, the sister she had lost. She listened to him with a pleasure she could hardly account for, and he at once won her heart. "No wonder," she thought, "that Gertrude had found him charming, that he had made her long to be like him. Who would not admire that face?—who would not be fascinated by that voice, won by that perfect kindness, swayed by those

speaking eyes, subdued by that matchless nobleness of countenance and of manner?" Such were her thoughts as she sat listening to him, and now and then addressing to him a few earnest words. They understood each other so well. He in the busy walks of life—she at her silent watch—had served the same master, and learned the same secrets. In her heart there rose a hope, a wish, at the strength of which she was alarmed; for she thought that she had learnt that great lesson—not to wish anything too intensely. But that he should like Gertrude,—that he should in time wish to marry her,—was a vision of happiness for that beloved child that rose irrepressibly before her. Such a haven of bliss and of safety, such a shelter through the storms of life, such an escape from dangers that would thicken on her path, in or out of her home!

When Adrien asked if he might come and see her again, she pressed his hand, and smiled assent. Never had he felt more sympathy for

any one than for this pale suffering woman. Her eyes haunted him, and as Gertrude led the way back to the library he was silent and thoughtful. He turned to her half absently, and said something in Spanish. "I don't understand Spanish," she said, hastily. "Not your mother's tongue, Lady-Bird! Not that beautiful language which she speaks so eloquently! How is it possible that you have never learnt it." "It does seem strange to me now," she answered, colouring—and a resolution was taken at that moment. Not another day passed without her applying herself with a kind of passionate application to that study.

Father Lifford now joined them. He was not fond of Frenchmen, but he had made up his mind that Adrien was as little of one as possible, and he could not, in spite of himself, help liking him. They walked up and down the avenue discussing English politics, on which they agreed more than about those of the Continent. Gertrude slipped

into her mother's room to hear her say that Adrien was charming; and then from her bedroom window she gazed on the yew-trees, as if they had suddenly been illuminated by the most radiant sunshine. She wished the day not to advance—she dreaded to hear the luncheon-bell ring—every minute seemed a whole day of enjoyment. There was not a gesture of Adrien's that she did not watch; she knew from which tree he had plucked a branch, where he had let it fall from his hand, on what bench he had sat for a moment and traced a pattern on the sand, which of the gamekeeper's dogs he had caressed as it passed him, and where he had shaded his eyes with his hand to gaze on some distant point which Father Lifford was pointing out to him. At last the bell rang, and she went down to the dining-room. That table laid for three, how often she had sat down to it with a heart that felt as hard and dull as a stone! When Father Lifford said grace, she silently returned thanks

that life was no longer what it had been to her,—thanks that a ray had shone upon it, and melted away the ice that had gathered round her heart. She was amused at observing how skilfully Adrien avoided those subjects on which he and Father Lifford would have been likely to disagree, and with what "Christian art" he sought to please the old man whom he respected.

"We are going to vespers at Stonehouseleigh," Father Lifford said to her, as they left the dining-room, "will you have the gamekeeper's pony and ride there?" She had done this once or twice before, and felt very grateful to him for proposing it now. When she was lifted on the saddle, and gathering up the reins slowly moved from the door, Adrien walking by her side and now and then laying his hand on the pony's mane, or brushing away with a branch the flies that were teasing him, she thought of the day when with Edgar she had left that door for another ride, and one which led to consequences

that made it an epoch in her life. "Don't you go and play us tricks again, Miss Gertrude," Father Lifford said to her; "mind your reins. Who knows but this old creature may take it into its head to rush off with you somewhere or other, if you leave it so entirely to its own inventions." She looked back with a smile of such sweetness that her whole countenance seemed changed, and the old man muttered to himself, "I believe the foolish mother was right after all, and that what the child wanted was a little happiness."

"I had forgotten to give you this note from Lady Clara," Adrien suddenly said, and drew it from his pocket. She read it, and turning to him her expressive eyes, she put it into his hands. "Am I to read it?" "Yes," she said, "you see she wants me to go back to Audley Park. I think mamma would let me go, but——" "But don't you wish to go?" She looked at him without answering, as if she were inwardly

deliberating. She wished to guess his thoughts, she would have given anything to abide by his decision. But she did not venture to ask for his opinion. She had not yet any hope that he cared for her. The very kindness of his manner, though she felt happy in it, was discouraging. The love she felt for him—for she could not disguise from herself that she loved him—was at that stage of its progress singularly unmixed with hope or fear. Its existence alone seemed enough for her happiness. With a strange humility she scarcely dared to look for a reciprocal affection from one whom she almost deified by the silent worship of her heart. To be something to him, to have reason to hope she should sometimes see him, that he would not altogether forget her, and that he might some day or other know how transformed she had been in thoughts, in feelings, and in conduct since she had known him, since his mind had spoken to hers, since a spark of that fire

which burnt in his soul had animated hers:—this seemed enough for her; at least she thought so, but it was under a sort of infatuated belief that he would always be what he then was. The least touch of jealousy, the supposition or the report that he was turning his thoughts to marriage, that he was interested in any other woman more than in her, or that he might dedicate himself to the religious life, would all at once have opened her eyes and raised a storm in her soul.

But there is a lethargy as well as a fever in happiness; one often precedes the other, and on this day it seemed that as long as she could see him and hear his voice, the future was nothing, the present all in all. Submission to him seemed her ruling desire. In a nature so rebellious and proud, this was the result of a mastering passion. But with that artless artfulness which characterised her, she did what perhaps served her purpose better than anything else. She answered

after a pause : "I should like to go, but I will ask Father Lifford's advice. He will know what mamma would really wish." Adrien looked at her more than kindly—almost tenderly—and said, with his usual simplicity of manner : "I hope she will really wish you to go." Her heart bounded with delight. How lovely the lane through which they were passing at that moment seemed to her ; — how blue the sky overhead, how sweet the clematis, or the branch of honey-suckle which, here and there, still remained in the hedges ; — how fresh and balmy the air that caressed her cheek.

At one point of the road there was a fine view of distant country, and they stopped an instant to look at it. He said it was like one near his château in Normandy, and, for the first time, he spoke a little about his home. He had not been educated there, and it was more like a home to his brother, who was married, and lived in it

with his wife and children;—every year he spent some time with them.

"And shall you never fix yourself there," she asked, unconsciously blushing as she did so.

"Perhaps," he said, "but I never make projects for the future,—not that I think it wrong, but it does not occur to me to look beyond the work of the moment. I like that line in a little book I saw on Lady Clara's table the other day: 'I do not ask to see the distant scene, one step enough for me.'"

"And I," Gertrude said, "am always, or at least always was thinking of the distant scene, and during many years would have liked to '*sauter à pieds joints*' the steps between me and it."

"But not now?" he said inquiringly.

"Oh, not so much now," she answered hastily. "I am very willing to let time go as slowly as it pleases just at present. But it is apt to hurry when we least wish it, and to creep when we would

hasten it. Like this old pony, who would not go out of a foot's pace last Sunday, when I was late, and to-day seems bent on walking fast, as if on purpose to tire you." After a pause she said, "I am almost surprised that your present existence suits you."

"And how do you know it does?"

"Because I do not understand why you should stay at Audley Park if you did not like it."

"But why should you think I do not. It is very pleasant to leave for a while one's own particular ways and habits, and see people who have not looked upon things through the same glasses as one's self. They may be better or worse spectacles; but a peep through them always shows one something new or useful."

"Ay," she said eagerly, "that is the reason I suppose that some very good people are provoking. I suppose it is those who have never used but one pair of spectacles," and her eyes, perhaps

unconsciously, glanced at those which Father Lifford was at that moment wiping.

Adrien smiled and said, "Oh, but for *use* one pair is enough, if the glasses be good."

"I should have thought that the very thing I like so much at Audley Park would have bored you,—its busy idleness."

"I think idle business worse."

"But you are neither idly busy, nor busily idle."

"I hope not always; but you know the old saying, 'All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy.'"

"Ay, but I think your *play* would be of a different kind. I can understand your liking to travel, or to——"

"Well, I am not sure that I had not rather spend a week amongst new people—if they are at all out of the common way—than see new places, though that is amusing in its way, too."

"But beautiful scenery you delight in, I am sure."

"That," he answered, "is like fine music in a church. When you get it and your mind is in harmony it almost amounts to ecstacy, but there are few places where a similar effect is not within your reach. I doubt whether the Alps or the Italian lakes have awakened higher feelings of enjoyment than the nearest meadow, with buttercups and daisies, near London or Manchester, and I am sure that a flower-pot in a window has given as much pleasure as the parterre at Audley Park."

"Then I suppose," she said in a very low voice, "that you think a person might be happy at Lifford Grange?"

They were just stopping at the gate of the little churchyard. He took the pony's mane in his hand and did not answer for an instant or two, and then said, with a shade of emotion in his voice, "Yes, I think so." She was startled, not by the words, but by something in his manner.

Was it possible that he was not so calmly and so merely kind to her as she had fancied, or was it that he was longing to tell her something of his thoughts on happiness, such as he understood it? She knew that there was often that kind of emotion in his countenance, when the subject nearest to his heart was alluded to, and his eyes—not his lips—bore witness to his deepest feelings. It might have been one or the other of these causes, she knew not which, and now their walk was at an end, and she could not investigate this point any farther. While she knelt at church by his side, she once thought if ever she became his wife, how easy a thing it would be to be good,—how every duty would be a pleasure, and life a foretaste of Heaven; and for the first time she poured forth passionate supplications that this blessing might be vouchsafed to her, but they too much resembled in their spirit the prayer of Rachel, when she exclaimed, "Give me children or else I die!" There is something fearful in such prayers, and

when they are heard, and the hand grasps what it has wildly sought, then is the time to tremble.

When they came out of the chapel, and Father Lifford was still in the sacristy, Gertrude sat down on her old favourite seat near the gate, and Adrien took leave of her; the post-chaise had been sent to meet him there. "Then I shall tell Lady Clara that you will send an answer. I hope it will be to say that you will come, but anyhow I shall see you again before I go to Ireland,—that is, if I may do next Sunday as to-day." She was looking her assent to those last words, when the organist passed them. He hurried by without speaking, but Adrien called out, "Halloa, Maurice, are you here? I might have guessed that nobody but you would have played that voluntary just now in this small place. Are you going back to Audley Park? I can give you a lift." "Thank you," said Maurice, with a singular smile. "You have given me many through life;" and then he muttered to

himself, "and much good they have done me." Then passing his hand over his forehead, he approached Gertrude, who shook hands with him. The coldness of his hands struck her, and the dim look of his eyes.

"I am going to sleep at home to-night," he said, "but to-morrow I return to Lifford Grange —I mean to Audley Park."

"Here is Mary!" Gertrude exclaimed. "M. d'Arberg, you ought to know her, and her mother, Mrs. Redmond." She went up to them, and Adrien followed her. Maurice stood at a little distance whilst they spoke together.

"Yes," he said to himself, "it must be so, and fool that I am to mind it. Did I ever think she could be mine? Would I, if I could, give up Mary? Would I be false to the dearest and holiest affections of my childhood and my youth? Did I not snatch her hand last night, and imprint a thousand kisses upon it? Did I not again speak of our marriage? What a brute I

am not to feel always as I did then! Is my hand such a rich gift that I should give it her without my heart? But my heart is hers. Yes, all that deserves to be called heart! O, Lady-Bird, Lady-Bird! I could almost curse you for standing between me and duty, and happiness and Heaven also. For but now, in church, to see her kneeling by d'Arberg's side drove devotion away, and awoke the worst feelings in my breast. Curse *her!* Do men curse what they adore? I don't know; all I know is, that if she ever speaks to me again with that smile of hers,—if she expects me to talk to her of Mary as if she were not Mary's worst enemy, I may tell her something of my sufferings, and if that is to insult her, let her complain to d'Arberg, and make him turn my enemy too. Fool—idiot—that I was to be always talking to her about him! Could I suppose she would see him, and not love him? Oh, that he may make her suffer what I suffer!"

As he mentally expressed this wish, his eyes accidentally fixed themselves on the cross, near which he was standing, and he was struck to the heart with that silent lesson. He went into the church, and burying his face in his hands, remained there a while. Perhaps, during those few moments of silence and of meditation, he had a glimpse into his own real feelings; he saw for an instant the utter selfishness, the heartless ingratitude of his conduct; a transient repentance passed over the surface of his mind, and when Mary softly went up to him and whispered: "Mother is waiting," he raised his head, and his eyes were full of tears. She saw that he had been weeping, and he was surprised at her suddenly stopping and wringing her hands, as if she could hardly struggle any longer with some intense anxiety. "Mary?" he said, with a kind of inquiring expostulation. "I cannot endure *that*," she said hurriedly, "*anything* but that, when I know——" she stopped and her manner

changed. "Come, make haste, dear boy—we shall be late for tea, and I can endure anything but *that*," she repeated gaily, putting her arm in his, and holding out the other to her mother. They went home together, and he appeared calmer and happier that evening than he had done for a long time.

CHAPTER VI.

"He that but fears the thing he would not know
Hath by instinct knowledge from other's eyes
That what he feared is chanced."

SHAKESPEARE.

"The love that follows us sometimes is our trouble,
Which still we praise as love."

Ibid.

"Happy and worthy of esteem are those
Whose words are bonds, whose oaths are oracles,
Whose love sincere, whose thoughts immaculate;
Whose tears pure, messengers sent from the heart,
Whose heart as far from fraud as Heaven from earth."

Ibid.

In the course of the next week, Gertrude returned to Audley Park. Her mother had readily yielded her assent to the request contained in Lady Clara's note, and although Father Lifford had growled a little about it, he did not on the whole object. He said that he supposed foolish

people must please themselves, which they well knew was his way of withdrawing from active opposition. It was therefore with a light heart and a radiant countenance that Gertrude set out for Audley Park, looked again upon its brightness, and entered the drawing-room which had been the scene of so much enjoyment, and where she was now most affectionately received.

Lady Clara kissed her, Lady Roslyn smiled, and Mr. Latimer exclaimed in the words of Maurice's song:

> "Come, Lady-Bird, come rest you here,
> O do not fly away."

"We caught her the first time," Lady Clara said; "now she has returned of her own accord."

"D'Arberg," said Mr. Latimer, "could not tell us whether you were coming or not. We all longed to fly to Lifford Grange yesterday in that yellow post-chaise, which bore him off at an early hour. You cannot think how we have missed you. Lady Clara has been quite depressed, Lady Roslyn

cross, Mrs. Crofton melancholy, poor Mark on the point of hanging himself, and ——"

"You, Mr. Latimer?"

"O I,—I sent for arsenic yesterday, and had you not returned to-day there would have been a coroner's inquest to-morrow. I can't eat at dinner, the Miss Apleys talk to me so much."

"That is a hint."

"No, Lady-Bird, *your* warblings help digestion. By the way, Lady Clara, I hope the magnetiser is coming here again. She ought to know him."

"He said he would dine here on Wednesday."

"We had great fun the other night. He sent Miss Apley fast asleep, and put Fanny, on the contrary, in such a state of excitement that she talked the most charming nonsense. He is to tell us a great deal about clairvoyance the next time he comes."

"I have often heard Mesmerism spoken of,"

Gertrude said, "but have never seen it practised."

"O then, Mr. Edwards shall devote himself to you on Wednesday."

"What nonsense d'Arberg talked about it. Not safe to have anything to do with it! I should have thought him a more sensible man. I really think he believes in witchcraft."

"O no, he does not."

"I beg your pardon—he said he could not see how one could explain away what was said in the Bible about it."

"And do you?" Gertrude asked.

"I don't know, I never tried."

"Then you disbelieve without examining," Lady Clara said; "that is hardly philosophical. M. d'Arberg was not at all dogmatical about it."

"You always stand up for him, Lady Clara."

"But I do not set down any one else—not even you, which I own would be difficult." He

laughed and said: "And I own that you are the best natured person in the world;—I never heard you run down any one."

"It is so fatiguing," she said with a pretty little yawn (if such a thing can be pretty). "I have not Mrs. Crofton's energy."

"Malicious humility!" he exclaimed,—"Admirable laziness!—the merit of virtue and the charm of vice. I like to see you idly reclining in your arm-chair, letting the stitches drop from your work, with the same charming indolence with which you spare the reputations of your neighbours. And have you missed *us*, Lady-Bird?" he continued, "have you in the shades of Lifford Grange given one thought to those you left behind? I had some thoughts of disguising myself as a sailor, or a tramper, and laying wait for you in some of those dark thickets near the Leigh; but there is a story in the neighbourhood that your father keeps bulls in his park, and I was afraid of being tossed in your presence,—not

by conflicting feelings alone, but by the horns of one of those domestic favourites." She laughed and denied the report, and soon after went to dress.

She found herself sitting at dinner that day between Sir William Marlow, and Mr. Egerton, Lady Clara's brother. The former did not like her at all. In the first place, he had rather an instinctive dislike of clever people; though very clever himself in some ways, he was slow at entering into anything like humour; and was provoked to death that Gertrude's pointless remarks, as he considered them, made people laugh, and turned away their attention from himself. Her other neighbour had not yet made much acquaintance with her, but this time they got on very well. It would have been difficult not to like him, he was so pleasing, intelligent, and agreeable. That day, in the course of conversation they happened to talk of emigration; and amongst other things he informed her that

Adrien was deeply interested in the subject, and had organised the plan of a settlement in America, to which he had sent a great number of the poor Irish in London, and which promised to succeed very well.

"I admire him so much," he said, "and could like him better than almost anybody. But I can never get on quite satisfactorily with him, and I think he has some very overstrained notions. I like people to be as happy as possible, and I have almost as much horror of their tormenting themselves as of their tormenting others."

"But you do not think him a self-tormentor, do you? He seems to me a particularly happy person."

"But I do not like his way of being happy. Perhaps because I could not find pleasure in it myself. I think him too indifferent to some things, and too much engrossed by others. He is not practical enough."

"That is a word I do not quite understand. Do you mean that he does not himself act up to his theories?"

"No; but that his theories are not generally reducible to practice, and are therefore unsuited to the world we live in."

"But is not the very condition of the world a struggle? Virtue will never altogether prevail in it, and yet you would not on that account cease from the contest which it carries on against vice?"

"I would act as well as I could myself, but not aim at a visionary perfection."

"No, not at a visionary one; but would you not, or at least can you not understand that a person should aim at the highest perfection possible?"

"I think that in aiming too high, people often fall lower than they would otherwise have done."

"Do you think *he* does?"

"No; I said before that I admire him very much, but I fancy he could be much more useful

in his generation if he were more like other people."

"But he neither lays down the law, nor dictates to others; nor is there any assumption of superiority in his manner. I thought I heard you say the other day that his manner was singularly unpretending."

"So it is, and I know nobody who, in proportion to his talents, has so humble an opinion of himself; but what I mean is, that one is always conscious that he measures everything by a standard not adapted to the world in its present state, and thus his efforts overshoot the mark, and so he misses his aim."

"But perhaps you do not quite know what his aim is?"

Mr. Egerton smiled, and Sir William Marlow said, "I always regret to see so remarkable an intellect hemmed in by such narrow boundaries."

"Are you sure that what you take for boundaries are not roads," she said, "leading to regions

you have never explored?" He looked at her in a manner that seemed to say he had explored everything. "Besides," she continued, "a fortress has boundaries, a fruitful garden has walls; it is deserts and swamps that have no defined limits."

"I prefer the Alps," he ejaculated, "to a French garden!" and then turned away with a lofty contempt—himself a little Alp in his own esteem.

"I think d'Arberg has bit you with some of his notions," Mr. Egerton said good-humouredly.

"Perhaps," she answered, and thought of Wilberforce's answer to a lady who told him that Whitfield was mad:—"In that case," he said, "I only wish he may bite us all,"—and then went on to reflect on the extraordinary manner in which persons who view certain subjects through different mediums are impressed in a totally opposite way by the actions and the conduct of others. The very same line of

conduct which excites admiration in one case, inspiring only astonishment, if not aversion in another. Perhaps a short time ago the want of sympathy between herself and her two neighbours would not have struck her in the same degree, and the absence of worldliness, which she so well appreciated in d'Arberg, in Mary Grey for instance might have appeared to her unreasonable; but she did not analyse her own sentiments narrowly, and was well satisfied with the consciousness that she alone out of that numerous society understood the principles as well as shared the feelings of Adrien.

That day and the next, she had but little conversation with him, but she thought he watched her, and on one or two occasions she asked his advice about little things that she was in doubt whether to do or not; there was not the least coquetry in this. She showed him, as plainly as a woman's dignity would permit, that she had but one wish, and that was not so much to

captivate him, as to make herself what he would approve. It would have been impossible for any man not to be touched by this tacit homage. This singleness of purpose and simplicity of action did not naturally belong to her character, but to the intensity of the passion which had taken possession of her heart. She was like Juliet in her love, and the contrast between her utter artlessness with respect to it and her general subtlety of intellect and reserve of character was singular and attractive. He began to ask himself if he loved her?—if he ought to marry?—if she were in reality all she seemed to him to be?—and though he talked to her less than during her first visit to Audley Park, his manner began to show an interest which he struggled not to mark too plainly. Gertrude felt it, and with a sort of instinct seemed anxious not to hurry into premature developement, or draw the attention of others to that delicate blossom of happiness which she watched day by day

unfolding, and on which she fearfully staked every hope for her life, for her mind—I had almost said for her soul, whose new-born virtues were only the reflection of his. She had not gone with him to the source whence he drank, she had only caught the drops as they fell from his cup: he did not see this and, in his admiration of the fruit, he saw not or could not see that the roots had not struck deep into the soil. Her rare intelligence and noble sentiments answered to his aspirations, and he began to think her beauty was the least of her merits, and to find a fresh stimulus in her society towards everything great and good. It was a beautiful thing, the love of those two beings, both so handsome and so highly-gifted, and looking formed—

"He for God only; she for God in him."

Others began to take notice of this growing attachment. Mark was disappointed, but—amiable as he always was—only congratulated himself on not having proposed to Gertrude, and consoled

himself with the reflection that she was, perhaps, too clever for the ordinary purposes of life, and that

"There were maidens in [England] more lovely by far"

that would gladly wed the heir to so many acres, and the future possessor of Woodlands Hall. Maurice was not the last to become conscious of the interest with which Adrien had inspired her whom he watched with unremitting though hopeless anxiety; but his calm and self-collected manner of addressing her, the caution with which he avoided any appearance of exclusive devotion to one whom he had not yet resolved to marry, were so different from what Maurice's own conduct would have been in his position, that it kept up in him the hope that d'Arberg had no such intentions, and that in her undisguised admiration for him there was more enthusiasm for his character and talents than affection for his person. And yet, when he saw her eyes turned upon him with that bewitching expression

which he had once described as so fearfully attractive to him, the sudden pain that shot through his heart was almost greater than he could bear. He often made resolutions to depart the next day, but when the morrow came he found some excuse for remaining, and indulging the fatal pleasure of seeing her, embittered as it was by the torments of jealousy.

One day she was sitting in the conservatory drawing an American flower, and intently busy upon it, when he came in with a letter in his hand, and sat down at a little distance from her. She made some trifling remark about the weather, without raising her head, and after an instant's silence he began,

"I wish to ask your advice, Lady-Bird: I have had a letter from Mary, which disturbs me much, and I think you, better than anybody would understand my feelings and counsel me how to act." Gertrude was struck by the hollow nervous tone of his voice, and said kindly—"I

will do my best, my dear Maurice, but how should I know how to advise others, I who am hardly wise enough to guide myself?" "First read that letter," he said. She took it, and it was as follows: —

"DEAREST MAURICE—I have been often wishing to say what I now write, but lately courage has failed me to do so, and during the short moments we have occasionally spent together, you have looked so ill and unhappy that I did not know how to begin talking of anything that might distress you. But now my mind is made up, and writing will be easier than speaking. I think you must guess what I am about to say—you must give up the idea of marrying me. It has all been a mistake from the beginning. We have loved each other dearly—how dearly God only knows, and I love you, if possible, more than ever. But I feel now that it does not answer for two persons who have been brought up

together from infancy and lived like brother and sister to fancy, when grown up, that they love each other in a different way. I believe it is the mistake we made upon this point that has caused your misery. I saw this a good while ago, but I had many reasons for not saying so, some selfish ones doubtless, but also others for your sake. I hoped to save you from giving yourself up to a feeling that will make you miserable if you indulge it. It is so dreadful to love and not to be loved. It is so bad for a man to spend his time in sighs and tears; it does not signify so much for a woman; and if you could have loved me—I mean if I could have kept you from loving that other one I was speaking of, it would have been for your happiness. With that hope I stood between you and her till my heart was ready to break, but I can see that your suffering is greater than ever, though you struggle to hide it. This is worse than anything else. If the conscience is at rest the heart can bear its burden, however heavy it

may be. But if not, strength and patience fail. Now, I will make your conscience easy—I release you from your engagement to me; your love shall be as free as air, but, if it be still possible, abstain from loving her. If that is beyond your power, then love her silently, hopelessly, but without remorse, that is, till she marries another. I can fancy that you will be much happier, at least for a while after getting this letter. I am, I assure you, after writing it. Ever, dearest Maurice, your affectionate

"MARY."

Gertrude felt considerably embarrassed and annoyed as she read this letter. She had almost forgotten till then that at one moment she had amused herself with the idea that Maurice admired her, and even now—probably because she did not wish it—she would not admit to herself that Mary alluded to her. If it were so he would be acting most strangely in asking her advice, and she determined not to allow him to suppose that

she thought that possible. Her manner was cold, however, as she returned the letter to him, and said: "It is a very touching letter. I am sorry for her, and still more for you, that she had occasion to write it."

"What can I do?" he said, with his eyes fixed on the ground. "I love Mary with all the strengh of my will. I would die for her, but ought I to deceive her—if even I could—and when she has read my heart, try to persuade her she is wrong?"

"Is she *right*, then?" Gertrude asked still in the same cold manner.

"There is a passion in my heart," he said between his teeth, "that is killing me by inches, that leaves me no repose either by day or by night, that is merciless like revenge and tenacious as life, that robs me of Mary and gives me nothing but despair instead. Is a man guilty for suffering? Would he choose to be wretched? Is he to be broken on the wheel, and then

reproached for his agonies?" His voice quivered, and she looked up. He could not meet her eyes, but hid his face in his hands. He felt as if she would never speak to him again if he gave her too clear an insight into his heart. With the courage of despair he looked at her, and murmured: "In Italy I loved her!"

"In Italy!" she exclaimed, and then thought of the verses that she had once imagined must have been addressed to herself, and now felt greatly relieved that it was otherwise. "But, Maurice, then why renew your engagement with Mary when you returned to England, if you loved another?"

"I did not know my own feelings then. Mary is right; I have struggled with my conscience till I am almost worn out, and her letter has aggravated instead of relieving my doubts. Tell me how to act—your words shall rule my destiny."

"But I do not quite understand how the case stands," she said. "This Italian whom you love——"

"Not an Italian," he abruptly interrupted.

"Well, but her whom you loved in Italy—in what position of life is she?"

"Far, far above me."

"Too much so for the possibility of a marriage between you?"

"Who can say what is possible or impossible, in that respect?"

"True," she answered thoughtfully, "but have you any reason to think that she likes you?"

"No—only the belief that there is a love so ardent and so patient as to win back love at last."

"And when you are with Mary, the image of this person haunts you, and stands like a cloud between you and her, turning what should be happiness into grief?"

"Like the form of an angel it stands between us, but like the angel that stood at the gate of Paradise with a flaming sword in his hand."

"Could you not by a strong resolution tear this

passion from your heart? Could you not drive it away by an act of your will? and is not your affection for Mary—your affianced wife—strong enough to banish that dangerous vision, till, with time, in the sunshine of home and the atmosphere of duty, it shall no longer haunt you, and shall become not a dream but the mere shadow of a dream. Count the cost of such a sacrifice, and throw into the scale its reward. Have you strength for this?"

"I have strength to shut up in my heart the secret of my misery, to hide it from every eye but Mary's, which has read into its inmost recess, to look upon the face that has been 'the bane of my life, the ruin of my glory,' and not by a glance or a sigh to betray what I suffer. All this I can do, for I have done it already; and I can stand at the altar by Mary's side and pledge my faith to her, and never, so help me God, injure or desert her, but I dare not say—I dare not hope—that in my home and in my walks, by

our bed and at our table that same vision will not stand, then no more as a stern angel shutting up the path to happiness, but as a fiend that will tempt to sin and to despair. Can you understand such a love or such madness as this? One only favour I implore,—that you will direct my course. Do not refuse it to one whose wretchedness deserves pity at your hands?"

"It is a dreadful thing, Maurice, to love as you love, and to love hopelessly. Heaven help all those who may ever love thus! I believe Mary is right; even more right than she knows. You must not marry her. You must not place the sacred barrier of duty between yourself and the passion which, tremendous as it is, is not yet guilty. That barrier must not be rashly exposed to so powerful a torrent. Better that it should sever you from her now, than sweep you both into an abyss hereafter. I ask myself what I should do in your place. Is the object of

your love worthy of such a passion? Do you respect her, Maurice, as much as you adore her?"

"I do!" he fervently exclaimed, putting his hand to his heart, as if to still its beating.

"Then," she continued with excitement,—"then continue to love her, as Mary bids you, without remorse and without fear. Practise every virtue for the love of her, exert every talent you possess for her sake, and bide your time with as much courage as you can find in yourself. Nothing is hopeless, nothing is impossible, as you said just now. There is a strange power in a noble affection, there is a mighty strength in an unselfish devotion. Never put a voluntary obstacle between yourself and her you love; and, as I said before, Heaven help all who want help and strength!—and who do not, Maurice?"

He stood silent an instant, looking very pale and nervous, then suddenly threw himself at her

feet, kissed the hem of her dress with passionate fervour, and rushed out of the conservatory. He as he stood alone under a tree in the shrubbery where he had taken refuge in the height of his emotion, she at the place where he had left her, were both asking themselves a similar question: —had they understood or misunderstood one another? "Had she believed his evasive statement?" he said to himself, "and really thought he loved a stranger?" Did she not rather read at once the secret of his heart, and had not those exciting words she had addressed to him been the only encouragement she could venture to give to his almost explicit avowal of passionate affection? And Gertrude who, strange as it may appear, had been deceived at first by his subterfuge, could she doubt, after the strange revelation of that scene, that she was herself the object of that wild adoration which had so long been struggled with and never subdued? And if so, what encouragement her words must have seemed to give

him, and yet how could she recur to the subject and retract her advice? This harassed her a little, but at the bottom of her heart she was touched at having inspired such a feeling, and thought kindly of Maurice as of one who loved not wisely but too well. She was sorry for Mary also, but it was not perhaps in her nature to sympathise with the trials of a character so different from her own. She pitied him much—the most of the two. "Adrien," she said to herself, "would never love her in that way, he never would adore her." But one kind glance of his eye, one of those calm earnest words of his, which implied an interest in her fate, were more precious to her than the homage and devotion of all the world besides. And that he loved her she could no longer doubt; and that evening few of the people at Audley Park doubted it either.

It might have been better for Maurice had he been there also, and seen what must have opened his eyes to the miserable delusion which

he was madly cherishing since he had parted from Gertrude; but he left Audley Park immediately afterwards, and carried away with him a dangerous hope, which—traversed by many a doubt, shaken by ever-renewed misgivings—was to be nursed in solitude and cherished into life. His interview with Mary on the afternoon of that day was strictly characteristic of both: he was much affected, and ill with excitement and agitation; he spoke of his affection for her, of all she had been to him, of his misery at being obliged by his conscience to acquiesce in the resolution she had formed, until he would have seemed to others, and indeed felt himself to be the greater sufferer of the two in the parting of that day. In truth he could not but be aware of all he was relinquishing for the sake of a passionate dream, in all human probability never to be fulfilled; and when on his way to London, with his burning head in his hands, he analysed his feelings with an indignant impatience at his

own weakness, he was in reality more to be pitied than she who—with

> "Her gentle dreamings gone for ever,
> Her innocent hopes and wishes gone,—all gone;
> A rainbow imaged on a crystal river,
> Was not more frail—it shines—and now *has shone*"—

turned to her household duties, and all the gentle charities of life, without one murmur or one bitter thought. The load she had to bear in those first days of sorrow was doubtless heavy, but it had none of those sharp edges that run into the heart, and fester there.

Mr. Edwards, the amateur magnetiser, who had been at Audley Park the week before, came there again on the evening after Maurice's departure. He was introduced to Gertrude, and sat by her at dinner. He was an agreeable man, and she was much interested by all he told her about Mesmerism—that mysterious subject which can no longer be treated with ridicule, but is still as far as ever from any satisfactory solution; which baffles so many theories, opens a door as it

were into another kind of existence; shows glimpses of a mode of being, an agency of the senses, and a whole order of natural laws or supernatural effects which are well calculated to confound man's reason, to humble his presumption, to alarm his scruples, and to suggest the exclamation of Hamlet, "There are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in our philosophy." Mr. Edwards was, like most other people, much charmed with Gertrude; and perhaps Adrien, for the first time, felt how much he cared for her by his involuntary annoyance at the interest with which she listened to him. He had a strong instinctive dislike to Mesmerism, and avoided as much as possible talking on the subject; but could not conquer his misgivings, his repugnance to its use, his horror of its abuse,—and struggled with himself not to dislike Mr. Edwards, who certainly did not practise it with any idea that it was wrong.

When the men came out of the dining-room

Mr. Edwards was surrounded by the women, who eagerly listened to some of his accounts, and were very anxious to know which of them he thought most likely to be susceptible of magnetic influence. He said that Gertrude was the one he fancied he could most easily mesmerise, and he asked her if she would let him try. Fanny and Harriet Apley pressed her to do so; both said it was very curious and very pleasant, that they had submitted to the experiment the week before; that they were ready to do so again; and Lady Clara exclaimed, "I am sure you will fail. Gertrude will set that firm will of hers, which I often envy, against your mesmeric influence, and baffle all your efforts." "Do sit down in that arm-chair, Miss Lifford," Mr. Edwards said, "and let me try."

Half reluctant and half persuaded, she was just complying, when Adrien entered the room. He came up instantly to her side, and said in an authoritative manner, "You must not do that,

Miss Lifford." She started up immediately, and stood behind Lady Clara's chair, who was surprised at Adrien's unusual impetuosity. Mr. Edwards seemed annoyed, and turning to Mrs. Crofton, asked her in a low voice if it was Miss Lifford's brother who had thus peremptorily interrupted the essay? This question made Gertrude colour; and Adrien, who was generally so calm, appeared a little disturbed, and went to join a group of men in the next room. As there was some embarrassment in consequence of this abrupt little incident, Lady Clara said, "Come, Mr. Edwards, try if you can succeed in sending me to sleep better than last week. You know I consider myself proof against your passes." He placed himself before her, and began to make the usual gestures; after a few minutes she closed her eyes, and pretended to fall asleep; then suddenly starting up with a gay laugh, shook her head triumphantly. "Come, Lady-Bird," she exclaimed, "you would not go through the ordeal,

and do not merit the same honours as I do. Let us go to the music-room."

She turned round as she said this, and saw Gertrude standing immovable near the chimney —her countenance fixed, and her eyes with that vacant expression which indicates a state of natural or mesmeric somnambulism. "You have mesmerised *her!*" she exclaimed, with an uneasy feeling, for she had a sort of instinctive dread of Adrien's displeasure; and felt at once that Gertrude was dearer to him than she would have supposed a few moments before. "Undo what you have done," she hastily said; "it makes me nervous to see her in that state." Mr. Edwards attempted it, but, as it seemed, in vain, and he grew anxious himself. "I did not direct the magnetic influence directly towards her," he hurriedly exclaimed, "and I do not know how to deal with her present state. Perhaps I can make her follow me;" and he walked a few steps backwards. They anxiously watched his movements

and hers. She mechanically advanced, and followed him with that painful and apparently irresistible sort of movement in which the will seems unconcerned, and the soul absent. At that moment Adrien returned towards the door of the room, having felt an unaccountable uneasiness while he stayed away. He turned pale, and his eyes flashed fire when he saw what was going on. Lady Clara, who was already very nervous, actually trembled when he said to her in a voice of inexpressible indignation,

"What have you been doing with her?"

"It was all involuntary," she said, "on her part and ours."

"It was, was it?" he exclaimed with a mixture of anxiety, of anger, and of agitation, which he could hardly control. "Mr. Edwards," he said, commanding himself with a violent effort to speak calmly, "what are you doing now? What *can* you do?"

"I can draw her on, you see—I could lead her

wherever I choose ;" and as he moved more rapidly she precipitately followed.

"Gertrude, Gertrude!" Adrien exclaimed in a voice of such excessive vehemence that it startled the society in the next room.

Whether she was then partly awaking from the trance, or whether his voice had power to reach her even through that sleep of the soul, so it was that at its sound she turned towards him with an uncertain but different kind of step; he met her, drew her arm in his; she clung to it instinctively, and laid her face on his shoulder. He felt an inexpressible mixture of emotion, of uneasiness, and of tenderness, saw how she was unconsciously betraying her feelings—and in that instant his mind was made up. He looked proudly and fondly upon her, and made a sign to Lady Clara to join them. They left the room together, and still supporting her he led her to her room; there before leaving her, and in Lady Clara's presence, he respectfully and tenderly kissed her

hand, and then left her to the care of others. She slept a few hours, and in the morning had only a dreamlike remembrance of that scene. Lady Clara went to her early to see how she was, and explained to her what had happened. Gertrude asked if she was mistaken in fancying that Adrien had objected to her being mesmerised?

"Certainly he did, Lady-Bird, and you were as docile as possible," Lady Clara answered with a smile, "and I was kind enough to assure him in the midst of our agitation that you had not disobeyed his command. Perhaps it was out of gratitude for that submission that he kissed your hand most reverently when he consigned you to my care last night."

Gertrude coloured and said, "That, too, I remember, but exactly like a dream, and only fancied that I had had an uneasy restless night. Dearest Lady Clara, I hope I did not do anything odd when I was in that strange state."

"No, dear child, I do not think you did

any thing *odd*," she answered, with a kind of smile that did not satisfy Gertrude, and the tears came into her eyes.

"Tears, my Lady-Bird! What vexes you, dear Gertrude?"

"Did I say, or do, or——"

"Well, my Lady-Bird, I will tell you the truth. You showed, perhaps, a little that you cared for Adrien d'Arberg, but I think you need not torment yourself about that, for he showed quite as plainly how much he cared for you."

The embarrassment, the nervousness, and the joy of that moment quite overcame Gertrude; she turned abruptly away and burst into tears. Lady Clara sat down by her, and held her hand while her head was still averted. "I should be too glad to think that you liked one another. There would be such happiness in store for you both."

"It is impossible!" Gertrude exclaimed. "How foolish I have been to let you see my weakness."

"I love you all the better for it, Lady-Bird. I always told you that Adrien d'Arberg was one of my heroes, and if you had been insensible to the interest that such a man has shown you, I really think I should have loved you no more." She kissed her affectionately, and later came to fetch her down to breakfast.

Gertrude felt keenly annoyed at the looks of curiosity that were, or that she fancied were directed upon her; but Mr. Latimer relieved her embarrassment, by beginning at once to joke about the alarm they had all experienced at her trance, and asked if the enchanter had not begged her pardon yet? Mr. Edwards, upon this, approached, and sitting down at her other side, expressed his regret at what had occurred, and she gradually recovered her self-possession, though not quite her usual spirits. After breakfast, Adrien spoke to her some time; and he, too, asked her to forgive him for his interference the night before."

"It was more than I could endure," he said, "to see you thus playing with edged tools. If you had held a glass of poison in your hand, I should have hardly felt more compelled to snatch it from you."

"I feel too nervous to speak much about it," she said; "but I hope you know that it was not wilfully that I disregarded your warning. By the way," she added with a smile, "our acquaintance began with a warning."

"It is not, perhaps, the last I shall give you, Lady-Bird, if you receive them so well."

She felt that there was more in those words than met the ear. She ceased to care for what others had thought or seen,—he was not displeased with her; that was enough. All that day and the next, his manner to her was too devoted to leave any doubt in her mind, or in that of others, that he liked her; but there was in it at the same time a reserve, a diffidence, that banished all idea that he had drawn encouragement

from the involuntary expression of her feelings which he and others had witnessed.

A few days later the carriage was sent to fetch her home. A letter from her father had arrived that morning, stating that Edgar had met with a serious, though not alarming accident.

His horse had stumbled, and fallen with him, as he was making an excursion in the neighbourhood of Seville. Though he was doing well, the process of recovery would be likely to prove tedious, and as he was himself obliged to return to England for unavoidable business before his son could travel, he earnestly requested Father Lifford to set off immediately for Spain, to take charge of him during his absence, and at the same time to superintend those affairs which he had put in train, but which required the presence of some member of the family to carry them on. This letter had much agitated Mrs. Lifford; her anxiety about her son overcame her regret at the Father's departure; but the absence of such a friend in

her state of health, and under all the circumstances, was trying in the extreme, and she felt alarmed at the idea that her husband and her daughter would be thrown together on their own resources, without the safeguard of his rough but genuine kindness. She felt very miserable, but never doubted that he must go, and she sent for Gertrude to come and take leave of him. Some time ago it would have been little sorrow to her to part with him; but during the last year she had learned to appreciate his excellence; and her affection for him now was as great as her respect. Like her mother, she trembled at the idea of finding herself alone with her father, and she had hardly been aware how much she had looked to Father Lifford's guidance and support, in the future which was vaguely sketched out in her imagination. He had written her a short note, and she sat with it in her hand, absorbed in these thoughts, when Lady Roslyn, who was the only person in the drawing-room with her, asked

her kindly if she had received bad news. She roused herself, and answered "That her brother had met with an accident in Spain, but not a dangerous one, and that, in consequence, her uncle Lifford was about to leave England to join him, and that she must instantly go home to wish him good-bye."

"But you will come back?"

"No," Gertrude answered decidedly, "no, not at present, and a long 'at present' it must be; I cannot leave my mother during Father Lifford's absence. Do you know where Lady Clara is?"

"Look for her in the morning-room. She was there just now."

Lady Roslyn knew that Lady Clara was walking in the garden gathering some roses, and that Adrien was writing a letter in the room she had pointed out, and it amused her to bring about an interview which she fancied might be a decisive one. More than any one else she had watched the course of that "true love," and it pleased her

fancy just then to remove a pebble from its course. When Adrien raised his head from his writing, and saw Gertrude looking into the room, he started up and went to her. "Come in here a moment, will you?" he said to her with some emotion in his voice. She did so, and gave him Father Lifford's note. He read it twice over, and then said: "I am very glad that your father is coming back so soon."

"Are you?" she answered in a dejected manner. "You are not?" he said in a tone of inquiry. She made no answer at first, but fixed her eyes on the ground. In an instant she murmured in a low voice: "I am very sorry to part with Father Lifford." "Partings are sad things," he said, and seemed to read again the note he held, as if to gain time and prevent her moving. "Gertrude!" he began at last, and sat down by her side while she trembled visibly, "Gertrude, as soon as your father returns, I shall ask to see him, and then my fate will be in his hands and

in yours." She turned as pale as death. There was at once too much joy and too much fear in her heart. It made her shudder to hear of her fate left in her father's hands,—but she did not venture to express this feeling, and made no answer. He became uneasy at her paleness and her silence.

"Gertrude," he exclaimed, "have I been wrong? Have I hoped too much?"

She raised her eyes slowly to his. Those eyes which spoke more than the most eloquent tongue.

"How could you," she faintly said, "be wrong? Oh Adrien d'Arberg, do you indeed love me?"

"Dearly—tenderly—devotedly," he murmured, and pressed her hand to his lips.

"Then," she exclaimed, with a mixture of excitement and of emotion, "then life has no greater happiness to give. Adrien, I do not deserve to be your wife. I wish I might die now. Is it not enough for me to have heard you say what you did just now? I *have* been happy.

Adrien,—my soul is satisfied,—I dare not hope much for the future."

"Is this misgiving, dearest, a nervous fancy, or do you foresee obstacles to my wishes?"

"No, no,—why should there be obstacles? There ought not to be."

"I think that in a worldly point of view they are not likely to arise. That with regard to what you and I should neither think of nor care about, I may be able to satisfy your father. Gertrude, dearest Gertrude, you do not look happy. Tell me what you feel, and what you fear."

"I don't know what I feel; I don't know what I fear, except that I feel that I love you, and that I fear to part with you—more than I ought to do or at least to *say*," she added, with a tone of such inexpressible tenderness, tinged with that nervous anxiety which she could not repress, that Adrien was deeply affected. She saw it and exclaimed, "There are tears in your eyes, Adrien! Are you sorry for me that I love you so much? Do

you pity me in your heart? Well you may, if this is only to be a dream of happiness. If you were not what you are, I should be ashamed of having been so easily won; but I am not ashamed,—I am proud of loving you, proud that your eyes are looking kindly upon me, proud of being something to you, who are everything to me. Heaven forgive me if I love you too much!"

Adrien seized her hands and pressed them fervently to his lips. She did not draw them away, but turned her eyes towards the sky, and for an instant scarcely seemed to hear him, while he spoke to her of his love in words which nevertheless vibrated in her heart, but which she listened to in silence, as if "the harps of the skies had rung, and the airs of Heaven played round his tongue." Never had he thought her so beautiful, never had he felt so strong, so absorbing, so painful an interest in any human being. Perhaps in that instant a doubt, faint as the

shadow of a cloud on a lake, passed through his mind,—a doubt of her being the woman whom he had once pictured to himself as the ideal of her sex, as the model of a wife; and the remembrance of Ida's calm and serene face rose for an instant before him. But it was not disenchantment, or coldness, or regret that he felt; on the contrary, having loved her enough to assume the responsibility of her destiny, touched to the heart by her tenderness, transported by her beauty, he looked upon her as from that hour his own, his treasure, his precious and fearful charge.

The very strangeness of her character endeared her to him; and there was something of respect as well as of gentleness in his mode of addressing her. He instinctively felt that in such a nature there were great lurking virtues, and deep unknown dangers; whether he had done well and wisely for his own happiness in winning that heart of fire, and in gaining such mastery over that wayward spirit, he did not ask himself.

His own happiness was always the last of his thoughts; a new duty was in his life and a new object in his hopes.

"I must go," she said, "and vanquish this foolish feeling of dread for the future."

"You must indeed," he said, "you must *trust* my Gertrude; you must learn the full meaning of that beautiful English word."

"I trust you," she said. "If you deceived me I should never trust anything again on earth or in ———" she stopped short, and did not end her sentence.

"May I," he asked, "spend another Sunday at Lifford Grange and see your mother once more? After that I would go to Ireland, and return by the time your father arrived."

"Yes, oh yes, another Sunday. Another little life of eight hours. Now I must go; I see Lady Clara is in the garden."

When Lady Clara met her she was struck by her paleness and nervousness, but which the note

she showed her sufficiently accounted for, and at that moment she did not suspect any other cause of that emotion; but after she was gone Adrien told her what had passed between them, and that he intended to propose for her when Mr. Lifford returned to England. She took the greatest interest in the subject, and made him promise to write to her to Paris, where she was going to spend the winter, to acquaint her with the result. "Not that I feel any doubt about it," she said; "a name and a fortune, such as yours, are not likely to be refused by the most fanciful father in the world. But I shall be curious to hear how you are received, when you 'beard the lion in his den, the Lifford in his hall.' I am quite jealous of your having seen Lady-Bird's mother, though now I have no right to be so. Is she like her?"

"Fancy Lady-Bird—as I fervently hope you may never see her—with all the colour washed out of her cheeks, the fire extinguished in her eyes, but not the tenderness and the beauty; like the

shadow of herself; like the rose after, not a shower but a storm, its bloom and its life almost fled—all but its sweetness: so she seemed to me."

"How I should like to see her! I spoke to Lady-Bird about it, but she was not encouraging."

"Dear Lady Clara, there are many drooping flowers in the world that you can revive by your presence, but this one is trembling on its stem, and even a breath might be fatal."

"But I would breathe so gently?"

"Do not try experiments, especially where you know not how sore memory may be."

"I think I might do good."

He smiled and said, "Our old dispute, more anxious to do good than afraid of doing harm."

"Yes, I adhere to my opinion.—By the way *have* I spoiled Lady-Bird as you predicted? Is she not more charming than ever?"

"Quite charming enough, Heaven knows! What is there about that girl that enchants one so much? I feel it too much to define it."

"O she is Lady-Bird, that is all I know,—she is the most high bred of untamed creatures,—the most gently wild, the most femininely bold, the most innocently mischievous of human beings. What a bird to have caught M. d'Arberg! What a prize to have found under a tree in the park——"

At that moment, Mrs. Crofton and Mr. Latimer joined them, and scolding in his usual manner, he exclaimed, "Why have you let Lady-Bird go? I can't do without her. What do you mean by letting her go?"

"It is like the story of the House that Jack built," Lady Clara answered. "She must go to her mother, whose uncle is going to Spain, whose nephew has broken his leg, whose father is coming home——"

"What, what's all that? Who has broken his leg?"

"Lady-Bird's brother, the heir of all the Liffords."

"Confound the boy! he is *always* breaking his leg."

Lady Clara and Adrien laughed, but Mr. Latimer was really cross, and walked away repeating: "It is quite true—she is always going away; they never keep a pleasant person here two days together. Those Miss Apleys, I dare say, will stay us all out." Mrs. Crofton smiled as she looked at him with her spying-glass, and cried,

> "O blest with temper whose unclouded ray
> Still makes to-morrow cheerful as to-day."

CHAPTER VII.

"Ours was love indeed,
No childish day-dream, but a life intense
Within our hearts; we spoke not of our love,
But in our mutual silence it was felt,—
In the intense absorbing happiness
Of mutual long, long looks, as if our souls
Held sweet communion through our passionate eyes."

"And is he gone? On sudden solitude
How oft that fearful question will intrude!
'Twas but an instant passed! and here he stood,
And now!—Without the portal's porch she rushed;
And then her tears at length in freedom gushed,
Big, bright, and fast, unknown to her they fell,
But still her lips refused to say 'Farewell.'
For in that word, that fatal word, howe'er
We promise, hope, believe, there breathes despair."

BYRON.

GERTRUDE arrived in time to take leave of Father Lifford, and had a long conversation with him before he went. In the evening she took her work, and sat down by the sofa where her

mother was dozing; it had been a great emotion to her to part with her best and only friend, and as she slept Gertrude could see by her swollen eyelids that she had been weeping. She longed for her to wake, for she had that to tell her that would make her weep again, perhaps, but from a different feeling. Her own heart was fluttering with happiness; the sort of nervous misgiving which had troubled her joy, at the moment of the realisation of her hopes, had passed away. Her confidence in the future was now as great as her diffidence had been. She thought of herself as Adrien's wife. She wrote on a paper, in her work-box, the signature that would be one day hers, "Gertrude d'Arberg," and then tore up the paper hastily, as if she had been doing something wrong. Instead of going on with the lily she was embroidering, she worked Adrien's name on her canvass, and then unpicked it. She pictured to herself his chateau in Brittany; her arrival in the "plaisant pays de France;" the share she

would take in all his labours of love and of genius. There were no heights of virtue, no intellectual improvement which her imagination did not aim at and compass in anticipation.

Her mother murmured in her sleep, and then awoke with a frightened look. "Gertrude, is it you, my child? I have had a painful dream, and am glad to be awake. It was only a dream. How pleasant it is to find thee there by my side. Hast thou been there long?"

"For an hour, I think, dearest, but it has seemed like a minute. My waking dreams have been sweeter than your sleeping ones. Shall I tell you, mamma, what they have been about?"

"Yes—put thyself here, close to me, with thy face near to mine, that I may look at thee while thou speakest. What hast thou been dreaming of?"

"Happiness—happiness!—immense, deep, and wide as the mind can reach to, and the heart contain. He loves me, madre mia,—he loves

me! Is not that the greatest bliss that earth can give?"

Mrs. Lifford clasped her hands, and pressed them on her eyes. Gertrude saw the quivering of her mother's mouth, and threw herself into her arms. She felt her heart throb against her own; and then throwing back her head, and seating herself on the edge of the couch, she said, "Now don't weep, mamma, but smile and wish me joy."

"I am glad he loves thee—glad of that, anyhow, and I hope, O fervently I hope, that thy father will let thee marry him."

A resolute and singular expression passed over Gertrude's countenance as she said, "On that point my mind is made up. I am almost of age, and my father's will shall not stand between me and virtue, happiness, and peace of mind. Adrien possesses every one of the worldly advantages which my father cares about, and which I only value, as belonging to him, who ennobles everything that even remotely appertains

to him. Should my father, without the shadow of a reason or excuse, refuse his consent, nothing on earth will ever persuade me that conscience requires the moral suicide which would be imposed upon me. I would as soon throw myself into the river at his will, as give him up to whom my soul is bound by ties which never can be severed. But it is impossible that he can refuse his consent, unless he hates me with an unnatural hatred, and that I will not and cannot believe, till I see it."

"Be calm, Gertrude. Be calm, I implore thee."

"I am perfectly calm, dearest, because my mind is made up. I am my father's daughter in one respect, and have a will that may break but which will not bend."

"But he may break it," Mrs. Lifford murmured in a tone of anguish. "He may break both will and heart."

"No, both are beyond his reach. There are

no lettres-de-cachet in this age and country, thank Heaven! Mamma, do not look so frightened. I am calm and happy. The future is bright, plain, and clear before me; like to the sky at this moment. See, the clouds have rolled away, and in front of us there is nothing but the pure soft blue expanse, with the first stars glimmering here and there in their beauty,—

'The pale stars watching to behold the might of earthly love,'

as one of my favourite poems has it."

"Did you speak about this to Father Lifford, Gertrude?"

"I did, mamma; we talked about it a long time. He would not commit himself, or seem to approve of it till he knew whether my father would consent, but I could see that he wished that it should be so,—I am sure he does. How could it be otherwise? He is good, and he admires goodness. He is kind, and he has seen me suffer. He knows me better than any one

else in the world, and he must feel that everything is at stake for me at this crisis in my life. Happiness and virtue on the one side—on the other, nothing short of despair."

"Gertrude, Gertrude, did he not reason with thee?"

"Yes; and I reasoned with him. He said it would be my duty to submit to my father, whatever his will might be in this matter; and I then asked him solemnly, not as my uncle—not as Mr. Lifford—but as a priest, and in confession, whether it would be a sin, in a case like this, where not a word could be said against him I love, even by worldly wisdom, when nothing but arbitrary caprice could withhold consent,—whether it would be a sin, after patient entreaties and humble remonstrances had been tried, and tried in vain, to act as the law would permit, and marry without that consent? He said it would be undutiful; but then I pressed him again to say, if no length of time, if no circumstances of character, no

peculiarities of position would ever give a sanction to such a course? He said that would be a question for consideration when the time arrived,—I saw he could not pronounce against it,—I saw that in his mind there was a doubt, and that was enough for me. I feel strong against the future,—strong in my confidence,—strong in my resolution. The waves of life may toss me yet to and fro, but my anchor is cast, and my helm is pointed."

"Gertrude, dearest, my feeble reasonings I will not urge upon thee. Indeed I know not what I could, or ought to say. Pray for thee I will ardently, unceasingly. Thou hast compared thyself to a ship, dear child. Shall I tell thee what I think? Thou art going too fast before the wind. The sails of thy bark are too boldly unfurled."

"My anchor is cast, I cannot drift away."

"O Gertrude, my child! Chains have snapped ere now. Trust in none but God."

"I trust in Adrien, as I trust in God."

"That is what I fear. Thou hast made him an idol."

"And a noble worship it is."

"Tremble, Gertrude!—tremble at what thou sayest, or I must tremble for thee, and for him thou so much lovest."

"Yes, mother mine," Gertrude exclaimed, falling on her knees, and throwing her arms around her neck. "Yes, I tremble for myself, but I will hide me in thy bosom; on that breast which has suffered so much, which has endured so nobly, I will lay my throbbing head. Plead for me, mother, with Him whom thou hast loved and served from thy youth up. Call down His blessing on thy wayward child. Ask for her all she dares not ask for herself. I once read of a sinful woman who, when frightened by a thunder-storm, made an innocent child lie over her, to shield her from the lightning.* So mother mine, I would place you and your sufferings and your patience

* Madame de Montespan.

between me and the punishment that my undisciplined heart deserves. There is but one that it fears, to lose Adrien; and that would indeed be greater than it could bear."

The following Sunday was the happiest day that Gertrude had yet known. Adrien's presence imparted to her a sense of security in her present happiness, and of calm anticipation of the future which she had not yet experienced. He had a long interview with her mother, in which he unfolded to her his feelings, his hopes, and his projects. As much as was possible he imparted to her the conditions of fortune and of family which he would have to submit to her husband; and looked in her eyes for the approval he solicited. She held out her hand to him, and in a few words of heartfelt emotion told him that to confide Gertrude to his love and care, to see her his wife, would be the dearest of her wishes, the greatest source of joy to her during the time she might yet live, and at the moment of death.

"Yes," she said, still holding his hand, "you must think of my words, if I should die without seeing you again. You must remember that a mother has trusted you, more than she ought perhaps, but not more than you deserve. I have let you come here to-day, God only knows if I have acted rightly; but I know you, and if I have done imprudently you will not make me repent of it. Never at any time, never under any circumstances, will you belie what I now read in your eyes, what the pressure of your hand confirms; her happiness, but above all her virtue, her honour, will be safe in your keeping. Even to your own loss, to your own bitter grief if needs be, you will never tempt her to offend her God, or to swerve from duty. She loves you too much perhaps for her own peace of mind; but it must be safe to love you, such an affection will not mislead her. You understand all I would but cannot say. My tongue falters, but your tears reply."

"I carried her, once in my arms," he answered, "pale and motionless as death, and looked upon her with respect and admiration. That day I began to love her, and I have loved her more and more ever since. To protect and to cherish her through life and till death is my hope and my prayer. If her father refuse to give her to me, I will wait, and watch, and pray for her at a distance; and if ever I tempt her to aught approaching to a sin, may the blessing you now give me turn into the curse I shall merit."

She pressed his hand, and drawing from her finger a small ring which bore the image of a cross, she put it upon his, and once more fervently blessed him.

"You will plead for me with your husband the next time I come?"

Tears came into her eyes. "I will pray to God," she answered; "*He* will hear me." Adrien sighed deeply. Mr. Lifford's character was

rising before him every moment more clearly. In his wife's meekness, in his daughter's impetuosity, in his uncle's silence, it stood revealed. No one had said he was hard, but all shrunk from his name.

Adrien and Gertrude, on that October afternoon, sat together in that solemn garden by the deep still stream, opposite to the chapel where they had knelt together, and to the room where her mother had blessed him. The silence of Nature in its decaying beauty, the withered leaves falling near them, or trembling on the boughs, would have beseemed a scene of sorrow more than one of such intense happiness. It was a strange visitant in the old silent garden, that joy which filled their hearts, and which beamed in their eyes. The stone bench on which they sat, the straight alley through which they walked, the cold statues near which they stood, seemed to wonder at the sight. There was a pale, sickly-looking rose-tree near the bench where they

rested; he gathered some of the flowers, and said,

"This is the same species which grows in brilliant masses in the court of our Norman château."

"Ay," she said, "flowers and people are modified when transplanted."

"You would like that old place, I think, though it is very unlike Audley Park——"

"And Lifford Grange?"

"And Lifford Grange also. Picture to yourself four grey turrets overgrown with ivy; a portal covered with wallflowers and blue larkspurs, a paved court with a well, and a seat which the moss has invaded; the rose-trees I was speaking of clustering up to the windows, and a flight of stone steps outside the wall on one side. But you must not judge it hastily."

"Do I ever judge thus, M. d'Arberg? One rash judgment I made near the grotto of Woodlands, but I have not repented of it."

"Well, only be as indulgent to the old castle as to its owner, and I shall be satisfied; live in it, and by degrees I think you will love it. Its picturesque exterior, its wild flowers in every crevice, its magnificent view over oceans of corn-fields, and forests of fruit-trees, its sunny little terrace where lizards run in and out of the low grey wall, and the Norman church, half way between it and the village,—my brother, and his wife, and the old curé, who always used at every visit to exhort me to marry, how happy they will be when I take home to them my English bride. The children, too, I sent them a message in my last letter to Henri. I reminded them of a hunt we had last year for their favourite Lady-Birds, and said that if they were good I would try to bring them an English 'oiseau du bon Dieu,' more beautiful than the little living toys they were so fond of then. Gertrude, my own Gertrude, am I wrong to talk with such confidence of the future—to draw such pictures of happiness, till that happiness is actually mine?

If your father were not to consent to our marriage how I should reproach myself for having dared to speak to you of my love as I have done, at the selfish joy it has been to hear from your lips that you love me. Gertrude, I sometimes reproach myself very much for having——"

"Made me happy," she said with one of her own smiles. "Adrien, I am afraid you are too good."

"If you have no other fear than *that*, petit oiseau du bon Dieu ——"

"It is a great fear," she answered seriously, "but not my only one. I think it is very likely my father will refuse his consent to our marriage."

"Gertrude, you speak with a strange calmness. You do not really mean that you expect this? on what grounds do you suppose that he will object to it?—have you any reason to imagine that he has other views for you?"

"No, not the slightest; but it has ever been his practice to oppose my wishes on every subject,

and why should he act differently on this occasion? O Adrien, you do not know my father."

A cloud passed over d'Arberg's face, and he sighed deeply. She waited anxiously for the next words he would utter.

"If indeed he does not love you," he exclaimed, "which I can hardly conceive, will he not the less object to your marrying a foreigner? If he does not value the treasure he possesses, will he refuse to bestow it upon me? But you are right, we cannot foresee the nature of the obstacles he may oppose to our wishes and our prayers. We cannot reckon upon the future,—I have been too sanguine. O Gertrude, how could I bear to lose you now?"

"O yes you would bear it," she exclaimed, "you are not weak against suffering. You walk the earth with a charmed life, and despair never showed its wild visage in your path."

There was a mixture of tenderness and of

irritation in her manner that he scarcely understood. She dared not speak the words that were trembling on her lips, and break through the barrier that he seemed to regard as sacred. If he had guessed her thoughts he might have soothed her feelings, not by tempting her to defy her father's authority, but by assurances of his unalterable fidelity to her, as long as she remained unshackled by other ties; but the necessity of such protestations did not occur to him, and perhaps he felt also some scruples, all the stronger since his conversation with her mother, in binding her more stringently to himself, before her father's will was ascertained. He knew she loved him, but not how fearfully strong was the passion which was lying in her heart, smoothed at present into repose by hope and by his presence. It was not feebly that he loved her, it was not coldly that he contemplated the probability of losing her. She had become to him inexpressibly dear, and to have given her up would almost have broken his heart,

but he thought more of her than of himself; his own happiness was a secondary consideration: but it was that very unselfishness, that very unconsciousness of the unbounded affection he had inspired, that made him abstain from speaking the words which she was passionately anxious to hear; and deep and fervent as was his love, there was that in him which kept down with a strong hand the vehemence of the flame. His heart might break, but the breaker would be one whom he loved more than the object of an earthly passion, and at whose hands he would accept the keenest blow life could inflict.

It was but a transient cloud, however, that passed over that day's joy. Again they returned to their projects. He could not believe in tyranny or unkindness—she could not now believe in existence without him, and again they talked together of the future. Normandy would be their holiday; every year they would go there; but his large estate in one of the most distressed

parts of Ireland, which he had inherited from his mother, would be their post and their work, their interest and their duty. Together they would toil—together one day reap on earth or in Heaven. Then he would take her to Paris—that city of great crimes and great virtues—that strange battle-field of life with its armies in presence; the worst of Satan's crew, and God's elect soldiers. They talked of various parts of the world which thence they might visit together. He spoke of Italy, also, but with less enthusiasm than Maurice had done. Rome he deeply loved; but the luxurious charms of the Mediterranean shores, the enervating nature of its brilliant climate, the versatile character of its people, was not to him as attractive as it had been to the young artist's somewhat congenial disposition.

They wandered together through every alley of the garden, and into the park till late that afternoon. Adrien liked the old Grange. He had been there but twice, and had been very happy in

its quiet and solemn rooms, its stately formal gardens. He had gathered there the flower which had charmed his fancy. He had found there the woman who had touched his heart. It had, also, a *prestige* in his eyes from its historical associations, and Gertrude had never told him how she hated it; indeed, she did not feel to hate it then; perhaps one day she might have loved it. The hours went by, and Adrien was to go. They stood together on the stone steps of the entrance-door. "In about six weeks," he said, "I shall return from Ireland, and your father will be at home. Then, dearest Lady-Bird, I shall be here again. I shall see you; for whatever be his decision he cannot refuse me the permission to see you once more. It may be a most painful hour for us both, but meet again we must, so this is no farewell. I go with a heart full of hope in the future, full of trust in you. I might have written this very day to your father, and awaited his answer at a distance; but I think

my words may plead more effectually than a letter. The chief objection he would make to our marriage would probably be the country of my birth; and when he hears me speak your language that prejudice might vanish; and then again, should he refuse his consent, he might forbid my coming here, but if I am here he cannot deny me that parting interview which would be necessary to my peace and to yours."

"You are right, you are quite right," she hurriedly exclaimed; "remember, Adrien, these *must* not be the last words that we speak to each other. There is that in my heart which must not be trifled with."—— She put her hand on her forehead, and pressed her temples tightly. He looked at her anxiously, kissed her hand, and went away.

For a fortnight Gertrude saw no one but her mother, whose strength was every day diminishing. She began to feel very uneasy about her, and nursed her now with devoted tenderness.

The doctor and Mr. Erving, the priest of Stonehouseleigh, who often visited them, did not reassure her. There was no immediate danger, but her state was very precarious, they said, and all agitation must be carefully avoided. Mary Grey about that time came one day to see her. This painfully recalled to her mind what she had almost forgotten,—the conversation, or rather the scene with Maurice in the conservatory at Audley Park. She looked half-anxiously, half-curiously at Mary to see if she could read in her face any expression indicating a knowledge of what had passed; but could not satisfy herself on that point. Mary looked pale and thin, but not unhappy. Gertrude inquired after Maurice, and she answered quietly that he was better in health, and had a professional engagement in London that kept him there almost entirely, and answered very well.

"He is anxious that my mother and I should establish ourselves in town, and at his age it

is such an object that he should have a home, that we are thinking of doing so."

"What, leave the cottage and Stonehouse-leigh!"

Mary's lip quivered, but she said cheerfully, "Yes, it will be an effort; but as my mother is willing to make it for her son, it is clearly right I should not object."

She did not usually call Maurice her mother's son; and Gertrude understood that her doing so now was meant to convey to her that this change of plans had nothing to do with any project of marriage. The recollection of her own last interview with him made her shy with Mary: she could not but feel that kind and friendly as her manner was she must consider her as a person who had done her an injury, however involuntary that injury might have been; and her conscience did not altogether acquit her in that respect, when it brought to her recollection the many occasions in which she might have

checked, instead of encouraged, the kind of romantic homage which, since his return from Italy, he had been in the habit of paying her. This consciousness gave an appearance of constraint to her manner, and she was more grave and silent than usual.

"Is it soon that you will move?" she asked.

"The time is not yet fixed," Mary replied, "but it will not be for some weeks at all events: not till the lease of the cottage is up."

"I am sure this is a great trial to you."

"A *great* trial, dear Miss Lifford! No, indeed; if any, a very little one. I should be more sorry to think that Maurice wanted us, and that we could not be with him. When he marries, we may, perhaps, return to Stonehouseleigh."

She had said this last phrase with a steady voice, but she could not help the colour rising a little in her cheek. She was afraid that Gertrude would ask for an explanation. But the latter only kissed her, and said, "Mary, would that I

were as good as you. The next time I sit near the wishing-well, *that* shall be my wish."

"A niggardly one, indeed. But tell me, dear Miss Lifford, is it true that your faithful Jane leaves you. I was so sorry to hear it, for a friend of that kind who has been with you so many years, and is so very much attached to you, must be a loss."

"It is indeed a great loss; but she is going to be married, and must settle in London with her husband. Her parents will live near them also, and I hope she will be comfortable; but I shall miss her sadly. She is one of the few persons in the world who cares for me, and I think everybody is leaving me. Father Lifford is gone, and mamma——" She turned away for an instant, and then said quickly: "But I will not talk sadly. There may be great happiness in store for us all. I think I am growing very sensible, Mary. I dare say you think it is high time I should. So do I."

"Now, you are Lady-Bird again," Mary said, with a smile; "I hardly know you again when you have not your old frowns nor your old smiles."

"I have learnt and unlearnt a great deal lately —'*mais chassez le naturel il revient au galop*,' and the sight of your dear little demure face provokes me, I believe, to talk nonsense again."

They conversed together for some time in that strain, and then parted as good friends as they had ever been in their lives.

CHAPTER VIII.

" All day within the dreamy house
The doors upon their hinges creaked,
The blue fly sung i' the pane ; the mouse
Behind the mouldering wainscot shrieked,
Or from the crevice peer'd about.
Old faces glimmer'd through the doors,
Old footsteps trod the upper floors,
Old voices called her from without.
She only said ' My life is dreary ;
He cometh not,' she said ;
She said, ' I am aweary, aweary,
I would that I were dead.' "

TENNYSON.

AT the end of about three weeks, Gertrude's father returned. She could not see him again without emotion; not, alas! that she felt the least affection for him, but that she connected his arrival with so much that was important to her, that the first sight of his face was a kind of signal to her of the consequences that were to follow, and

her heart beat when she went to meet him on the stairs. He received her as graciously as he ever did, and that is not saying much. There was neither pleasure nor displeasure in his face. "How do you do, Gertrude; is your mother pretty well to-day?" was his salutation. And when they met at dinner, the conversation between them was as civil and as proper as possible. He looked at her once or twice more attentively than usual. It did not seem to escape him that she was more beautiful than ever; that since she had been at Audley Park, she dressed more becomingly than she used to do, and that her manner, while it was as graceful as usual, had more *aplomb*.

A day or two after his arrival, he made her for the first time a present. It was a diamond necklace in a case, on which the arms of the family were engraved. She thanked him, but neither did his manner of giving it, or the nature of the gift afford her any particular pleasure. Her mother was so feeble now that she did not

venture to speak to her often of the subject nearest to her heart, for she perceived that it always called up a flush in her cheek, and a look of too much excitement in her eyes. Mrs. Lifford was agitated by the doubt whether she would be furthering or hindering the object of her most intense wishes by mentioning it to her husband. Her natural timidity inclined her to silence; but her anxiety about Gertrude made the suspense painfully trying. The time of Adrien's return was approaching. Twice she had forced herself to speak of his visits to Lifford Grange, and to say that she had seen him. The first time she did so her husband made no comment on the subject; but on the next occasion, he observed in a sneering tone, "I thought you were never well enough to receive strangers. I am glad you are so much stronger; or, perhaps your curiosity to see this French author was irresistible!"

"He is a man of very good family," the poor woman murmured faintly, with her fearfully bright

eyes fixed on his countenance, or rather face; for countenance he had none, except when unusually excited.

"Indeed!" he ejaculated, lifting up his eyebrows, in a manner that implied neither assent nor dissent.

"Yes," she persisted, "your uncle says the d'Arbergs were a very old German family. His father was naturalised in France."

He got up and walked to the window. She felt that the opportunity of speaking was lost, and yet how difficult again to recur to the subject. Then, she also feared that if he were averse to Adrien's proposals he would refuse to see him when he came, and she could not believe that even Mr. Lifford could be wholly insensible to the influence of his manner, and of his words. Once she said something vague about Gertrude's future destiny. He briefly answered, "When the time comes for a decision, I shall inform you of my views upon that point." Gertrude, meanwhile,

passed the days by her mother's bed, for she seldom left it now; and during those silent hours of watching, one only thought incessantly occupied her. She looked alternately from that dying form to the Duke of Gandia's picture. It was so strikingly like Adrien, that she forgot it was not really his portrait. Those two images filled her mind; they were connected together in her heart; fear and hope, the past and the future, were blended in those long meditations. Day followed day, Mrs. Lifford spoke less, but looked with more intense affection at her child. Six weeks had elapsed, and there was in her face each time that Gertrude entered her room a mute inquiry, to which no answer was returned but a forced and painful smile, and nothing changed around them.

It was getting late in November; no one had been at Lifford Grange,—not a single letter had been received by Gertrude or her mother, except one or two from Father Lifford and from Edgar. They were still detained in Spain by protracted

business, but Edgar was quite recovered. Once Gertrude had heard the sound of wheels in the avenue. Her mother was asleep with her hand locked in hers, after a night and day of suffering and unrest. It was towards dusk; she did not venture to disturb her, though every nerve was trembling with excitement, and she feared that the beating of her heart must awaken her, so loud did it appear to herself. After a little less than an hour the same sound was heard, and Mrs. Lifford moved, and murmured something in her sleep. Gertrude disengaged her hand, and walked softly to the window. She drew the curtain, and looked out. It was a cold clear night. The moon was shining amongst the trees; she saw a carriage passing. A faint feeling came over her, and yet she could almost have smiled at her own folly. Solitary as was the life at Lifford Grange, it was not, however, such a very unusual event that a carriage should come to its door. The doctor, the priest, the clergyman, the agent,

occasionally drove up to it. At dinner, she asked her father if Dr. Redington had called upon him that afternoon.

"Why?" he asked, "has he not been to your mother to-day?"

"Yes, this morning, but as I heard a carriage in the park two hours ago, I thought he might have come a second time."

"Not that I know of," was the answer.

Jane was gone, and she had a foreign maid who had only been with her a few days; it was of no use to ask her. Late that evening, as she was going to bed, she met on the stairs an old butler who had been a long time in the family.

With a trembling voice she inquired who had come to the house in a carriage, that afternoon. "I don't know, Miss," was his answer, "I took up a card to Mr. Lifford, and I showed the gentleman up, but I did not see the name." Gertrude turned very pale, and leant against the banister.

"Did he stay long, Marston?" she asked in a faint voice.

"Some time, Miss."

With cheeks that burned like hot coals with shame and pride, she asked, "Was this gentleman tall and dark?"

The old man looked at her with surprise. "I did not observe particularly, but I think the gentleman was tall."

She darted away, and went into the library—her old haunt. She put her candlestick on the chimney-piece, and walked up and down the room with hurried steps. She could not rest; she could not enter her mother's room,—she could not breathe in this state of suspense. It was like a nightmare. She heard her father's voice on the stairs giving some orders to the servants, and then the noise of the door of his study, as he closed it. With a feverish courage she snatched her candle, and went down stairs; she paused a minute before

the door, and then with a desperate effort knocked.

Her father was standing with his back to the fire, and his eyes fixed on the ground. He said "Come in," but gave a start when he saw his daughter standing before him, and looked at her with astonishment. "Forgive me," she said, "for interrupting you; and still more, forgive me for asking what it concerns my peace to know. It must seem very strange to you; but by my mother's sick bed I must be calm, and therefore forgive me if I ask who called upon you to-day?" She joined together her hands, and clasped them tightly—her eyes were fixed on the ground. She did not see that her father's face flushed in that moment. He took a card from the chimney, and threw it on the table before her. She saw a name that was not Adrien's, and all her courage vanished. She knew not exactly what she had hoped or feared. She felt at once relieved and

disappointed and unable to utter another word, but murmured something unintelligible, and left the room.

The next day came, and the next, each like the last, except that both the mother's and the daughter's cheeks grew paler, though with a different paleness; that the mother's mute inquiries were accompanied with dejection, and the daughter's smiles—when she smiled—were painful to behold. Another month passed by, and Adrien had neither come nor written. That he was ill was possible; that he was *dead* was possible, too, Gertrude felt with a pang of terror,—for how would the news reach her in that living tomb where she was languishing? She sent for Mary, and asked her, in the course of conversation, if she had heard anything from Maurice of M. d'Arberg. She had not; and there the question dropped.

"Maurice," she said a moment after,—"Maurice would have been sure to tell you if anything had happened to M. d'Arberg."

Mary started. "Happened to him? Have you heard that anything has?"

Gertrude forced a smile, and said, "I dreamt the other day that he was dead. For the curiosity of the thing, write and ask Maurice if he knows anything of him."

Mary did so. The answer did not come quickly; such answers never do: but several days after, she showed Gertrude the letter she had received. It contained these words: "I have not heard from M. d'Arberg for some time; but he is certainly not dead, for a letter I had from Paris a week ago speaks of his being there, and in such a frame of mind that I have little doubt my old prophecy will come true, and that he will end by becoming a priest." Gertrude's heart died within her; but her spirits soon rose with indignation. "God will not accept a traitor's devotion," she inwardly exclaimed, "nor the Church receive the vows of a heartless deceiver." But with that burst of passion, her fears

subsided. It could not be; she had wronged him by the doubt. Forsake her without a word!—it was impossible!—it was monstrous! She went home; and when her mother took her hand and pressed it to her lips, she whispered, "He is at Paris; affairs may have obliged him to go there from Ireland. It is strange; but hope is strong in my heart. *Madre mia*, did you not say after seeing him, 'I would trust him, on the faith of his eyes, not with my life only, but with the child of my soul?'"

"Yes," murmured the mother, "I *have* trusted him, God knows! But too much, perhaps. Gertrude, I am very ill. I have not been much to thee, my child; but yet, what wilt thou do without me?"

"Fear not for me, my mother. There is in a deep love a strange independence. Paradise on earth with him, or without him death,—preceded by the more or less long agony, called life."

These were not soothing conversations for a

sick room. To do Gertrude justice, it was seldom that such vehement expressions escaped her in her mother's presence. She generally kept down her feelings with the iron rigidity of her strong will, but these emotions and this continual constraint were wearing her out. If the society at Audley Park could have seen her they would have been astonished at the change; and Mary Grey on Sundays, when she sometimes had a glimpse of her, was startled at her appearance.

END OF VOL. II.

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